

Title: A War With No Front: Arms Trafficking in North America During the Twenty-First Century

Author: Victoria Aguilar, B.A. Candidate in English & Political Science, California State University, Stanislaus

Introduction:

The underground economy of trading weaponry such as firearms is a significant topic in the realm of comparative politics[1] because numerous states[2] are fighting against the same war on illegal arms; hence, arms trafficking is a focal point to compare and contrast different countries. In particular, Mexico, the United States of America, and Canada are the major states in North America that combat and shape gun smugglers' operations. Accordingly, researchers have documented the causes and effects of gun control policies in the aforementioned countries as they influence the illegal and international buying and selling of arms. How have the governments of Mexico, the United States, and Canada been responding to the trafficking of arms during the twenty-first century?

[1] A subfield in political science that compares and contrasts different states (including their societies, economies, and/or governments) with one another.

[2] A country, as referred to in political science.

Research Question:

To what extent do Mexico, the United States, and Canada's gun control policies affect one another while combating the illegal trade of arms during the twenty-first century?

The gun control legislation and political systems of Mexico, the USA, and Canada are the active determinants of how arms traffickers may operate and traverse the cost and risks presented by gun market regulations.

Research has not referred to data focused on the recent couple of years, nor has research explored the newer developments in gun policy. Thus, the objective of my research question is to examine the current state of affairs in the arms trafficking realm of North America.

Background and Literature Review:

Naím reports that in 2001, the USA had "blocked a legally binding global treaty to control small arms in part because it worried about restrictions on its own citizens' rights to own guns" (2003). Indeed, Burton and Kamal document that for the past two decades—the twenty-first century so far—federal gun control regulations have not meaningfully changed in the United States (2018). Although the USA's response to arms trafficking has placed utmost importance on its domestic desire to be liberal on guns, the effects of the state's domestic decisions go beyond its borders. In particular, Mexico and Canada are especially challenged by the USA's solidly liberal position on firearms. Research shows that Mexico and Canada are both negatively affected by the United States in which their criminals and criminal organizations are greatly armed by the close-by

illegal gun trade created in the US (Cook et al., 2009). In fact, “Nearly 70 percent of the 99,691 guns seized from violent crimes committed in Mexico and submitted for tracing to the [US] Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) between 2007 and 2011” had originated in the US (Eby, 2014).

Figure 1: Numbers of Firearms Seized in Mexico and Submitted for Tracing, by U.S. and Non-U.S. Origin, 2009 to 2014; from United States Government and Accountability Office. (2016).

Methods:

Materials

I will be analyzing government documents, which include the press releases of politicians or legislators, the reports that are published by government departments and/or agencies, and laws. I will also moderately reference news articles that are especially pertinent to provide background and context. The databases that I will be using include Westlaw, ProQuest, and SAGE Premier as well as the National Archives and the Library of Congress.

Procedure

Since my research question obliges me to report the connections between Mexico, the USA, and Canada on the basis of gun control policies concerning international arms trafficking, I will first explore the aforementioned databases to discover the pertinent gun laws introduced in the past five years—where the journal articles in my literature review had not yet surveyed. Upon locating the major policies, I will describe how they have been created as a response to previous policies put forth by the neighboring countries to reveal the links between the countries; to be specific, I will demonstrate the formations of policies as reactions to policies by referring to the context of the particular legislation and quoting the public statements of the relevant lawmakers.

Design

My research design will be policy network analysis in which I will demonstrate the networks between the policy actors in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Using policy network analysis’s emphasis on connections, my study shall analyze government documents and other primary sources to observe and chronicle the interactions between Mexico, the USA, and Canada, and conclude by inferring potential trends such as the general positions of policy actors on one another and/or which policy actor(s) is dominant in shaping the illegal gun trade.

Expected Results:

I expect that my study’s findings will follow in the footsteps of previous research in which the USA’s weak gun laws coupled with Mexico and Canada’s strong gun laws will have continued to cause arms traffickers to simply obtain guns from the US rather than from Mexico, Canada, or

any other country in the world (Burton & Kamal, 2018; Cook et al., 2009; Eby, 2014). Hence, I expect to find that the United States is the dominant policy actor in the gun control policy network of North America during the twenty-first century thus far. I also expect to find that there are disproportionate demands on Mexico and Canada's border security and agencies, as well as further consequences of violence and other illegalities in Mexico and Canada.

Significance:

The significance of my study is that it will demonstrate how one country's gun policies influence another country's gun policies. Consequently, these gun policies shape international underground gun markets overall.

My proposed audience to report my results to are scholars of comparative politics and international relations as well as laypeople who are interested in North American gun policy in the current century.

References:

1. Burton, C. & Kamal, R. (2018). Policy gridlock versus policy shift in gun politics: A comparative veto player analysis of gun control policies in the United States and Canada. *World Affairs*, 181(4), 317–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820018814356>
2. Cook, P., Cukier, W., & Krause, K. (2009). The illicit firearms trade in North America. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 9(3), 265–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895809336377>
3. Eby, J. (2014). Fast and furious, or slow and steady? The flow of guns from the United States to Mexico. *UCLA Law Review*, 61(4), 1082.
4. Naím, M. (2003). The five wars of globalization. *Foreign Policy*, 134, 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3183519>
5. United States Government and Accountability Office. (2016). Firearms trafficking: U.S. efforts to combat firearms trafficking to Mexico have improved, but some collaboration challenges remain, GAO, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/674570.pdf>

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Dr. Erin Hughes for being my faculty mentor, as well as for providing me with helpful resources, advice, and words of encouragement.

I would also like to thank Dr. Suditi Gupta for providing me with guides and instruction throughout the preliminary research process.

Contact: Victoria Aguilar - Email: vaguilar11@csustan.edu