

# **Narco-terrorism in Mexico**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis we analyze the concept of "narcoterrorism" and its implications in the policies implemented to counter it in Mexico. In the first part of this text, we analyze the definitions in the literature and discuss whether the concept is useful to study the phenomenon; for this discussion, we use Giovanni Sartori's precepts on concept formation. In the second part, we first analyze the controversial use of the concept in light of discussions among politicians and policy implementers in Mexico and the United States; then we look at some of the tools already in place in the United States to prosecute Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs); then compare some of the tools already in place in the United States to prosecute Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs); and, finally, we give an overview of the logic of violence in Mexico to show that it is different from terrorism. The conclusion we reach is that 'narcoterrorism' is a neologism that does not describe the reality it is intended to encompass and is therefore not a useful concept to help formulate public policy.

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I will be brief.

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## Introduction

On April 15, 2021, Texas Governor Greg Abbott requested in a letter to President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris that his administration name Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist groups that pose a threat to the national security of the United States.<sup>1</sup> While the governor did not use the term ‘narco-terrorism,’ his request is reminiscent of other politicians’ attempts to link organized crime groups in Mexico to terrorism. Former President Trump proposed the same thing when an armed group ambushed a family of Mexican Americans in late 2019.<sup>2</sup> Another notable case was the statements made by different public officials and institutions during the administration of President George Bush. For example, the then-Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano warned that there was evidence of collaboration between Al Qaeda cells and cartels, such as Los Zetas, on the other side of the border.<sup>3</sup>

The common denominator in these cases is organized crime groups perpetrating callous crimes, reminiscent of the escalation of violence between the Colombian state and Pablo Escobar’s Medellín cartel during the 1980s. Armed groups associated with Escobar’s cartel resorted to tactics commonly linked to terrorism, such as explosives and kidnapping.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, the neologism has also been used to refer to guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and terrorist organizations that finance their insurgent or political activities through the production, sale, territorial control of plantations, or smuggling of drugs. Among

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<sup>1</sup> Calicchio, “Texas Gov. Abbott Calls on Biden, Harris to Apply ‘Terrorist’ Label to Mexican Cartels.”

<sup>2</sup> “Trump to Designate Mexican Drug Cartels as Terrorists.”

<sup>3</sup> Swanson, “Napolitano Warns of Threat from Homegrown Radicalization, Terrorism.”

<sup>4</sup> Escalante Gonzalbo, “Narco-terrorismo: la fábrica de la opinión pública,” 59.

these were the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army<sup>5</sup> (FARC-EP by its acronym in Spanish) and the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis analyses this concept and its implications for the policies implemented to counter it in Mexico. In the first part of this text, we will analyze the existing definitions in the literature to question the usefulness of the concept in the academic discussion. In the second part, we first analyze the controversial use of the concept in light of discussions among politicians and policy implementers in Mexico and the United States; then we analyze some of the likely consequences of designating the 'cartels' as Foreign Terrorist Organizations; and, finally, we give an overview of the logic of violence in Mexico to show that it is different from terrorism. The general research question that will guide this discussion can be written in the following wording: is the concept of 'narcoterrorism' useful for understanding the phenomenon it is intended to encompass? The short answer is that it is not a useful concept because it is vague, ambiguous and closely related to other concepts in its semantic field.

As a starting point, we will use Giovanni Sartori's precepts on concept formation. Our purpose in this text is not to formulate a definitive concept but to evaluate existing ones. As a second general objective, we aim to bridge the gap between conceptual discussions and policy implementation. To this end, we will use the case of Mexico to show that depending on the classification used by security institutions, states will respond differently to the threat. To say the obvious, concepts matter for public policy. To this end, we will draw on primary sources such as legislation and news reports.

It is pertinent to consider the limits of the task we propose. This enterprise lies within the strand of political science that studies political violence. It also intersects with terrorism

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<sup>5</sup> Andreas, "Drugs and War: What Is the Relationship?," 67–68.

<sup>6</sup> Escalante Gonzalbo, "Narco-terrorismo: la fábrica de la opinión pública," 60.

and public policy studies, both of which tend to be interdisciplinary. If successful, this work will contribute to conceptual acuity at the intersection of the three sub-disciplines aforementioned. Concepts are helpful insofar as they allow us to focus our efforts to understand a phenomenon on a few variables among the myriad factors that can affect it.<sup>7</sup> Analyzing how concepts are reflected in the implementation of public policies is an example of their use as a tool and not only as a construct.

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<sup>7</sup> Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," 1052.



## Chapter 1 — Concept Analysis of Narcoterrorism

### *Sartori's guidelines for concept analysis*

Concepts matter to us because they are the building blocks<sup>8</sup> that allow us to start thinking about a problem and then explain our results to others.<sup>9</sup> In Sartori's words, the words we formulate as concepts are the "units of thinking."<sup>10</sup> In the discipline of political science, concepts are part of the early stages of research. Roughly speaking, after generating our theoretical statements, we must specify the meaning of the keywords within our hypotheses and the characteristics of these terms. Once we have defined our concepts, we can contrast them with the real world and, in this way, test our initial hypotheses.<sup>11</sup> However, it is essential to identify precisely what we are going to study before operationalizing, classifying, and quantifying; or, in Sartori's words, before focusing on the questions of "how much," we must work on the question of "what is."<sup>12</sup> In general, concept specification has four purposes: to explain the meaning of a theoretical term, to distinguish one concept from others, to help the researcher deal with the differences between evidence and theory, and to be the basis for operationalization.<sup>13</sup>

One of the social scientists who reiterated the relevance of having clear and distinguishable concepts was Giovanni Sartori; to advance the discussion, Sartori drew on other sub-disciplines such as logic and semiotics. From his studies in these areas, he understood that words condition the conception and perception of things; or, in other words, that understanding a phenomenon or event begins with the naming of what we mean.<sup>14</sup> To

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<sup>8</sup> Wonka, "Concept Specification in Political Science Research," 49.

<sup>9</sup> Wonka, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 98.

<sup>11</sup> Wonka, "Concept Specification in Political Science Research," 42; Adcock and Collier, "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research," 530.

<sup>12</sup> Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," 1038.

<sup>13</sup> Wonka, "Concept Specification in Political Science Research," 49.

<sup>14</sup> Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 98.

visualize and dissect the elements that social scientists must keep in mind to conceptualize correctly, Sartori made a list of rules. While these guidelines are non-exhaustive and based on his own experience as a political scientist, they are still taught, used, and quoted by those who do comparative politics. In what follows, we summarize these guidelines,<sup>15</sup> which will form the basis of our analysis of the concept of narco-terrorism:

1. *Of any empirical concept always, and separately, check (1) whether it is ambiguous, that is, how the meaning relates to the term; and (2) whether it is vague, that is, how the meaning relates to the referent.*

Sartori took up the triangle of terms (words), meanings (intension or connotation), and referents (objects) to explain that conceptualizing requires us to concentrate on three tasks: choosing a simple term, defining it in such a way that its meaning is unambiguous, and linking it clearly to identifiable referents. Ideally, the meaning should be clear or unambiguous, while the referents should be adequate or not vague.<sup>16</sup> In assessing ambiguity, we examine how the meaning of the concept relates to the term itself. For example, in the case of "revolution," we need to determine whether the term has multiple interpretations. Some might define revolution as a type of political violence, while others might emphasize the process of political change.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, in assessing vagueness, we focus on how the meaning of the concept relates to its referent or what it represents in reality. In the case of "revolution," we need to examine how the concept manifests itself in different contexts and how its criteria or indicators are applied. Some authors consider as revolution only major historical events, others include minor coups d'état.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In appendix I we reproduce all of Sartori's rules since in the following explanation we have omitted those guidelines that he formulated in two different ways. Sartori, 102–27.

<sup>16</sup> Sartori, 102–3.

<sup>17</sup> Kotowski, "Revolution," 206–7.

<sup>18</sup> Kotowski, 218–20.

2. *Always check whether the key terms are used univocally and consistently in the declared meaning.*

The ambiguity of a concept can result from the confusion of meaning by using the same word with different meanings (homonyms) or using different words with the same meaning (synonyms). This is a problem when it occurs within the same discipline or area of knowledge and can occur in two ways, individually or collectively. Individual ambiguity occurs when a single author is inconsistent with the terms he or she uses. The remedy proposed by Sartori is to check that: each term in the definition is correctly defined, the meaning is clear, and that throughout the text, the concept is used consistently.

3. *Awaiting contrary proof, no word should be used as a synonym for another word.*

Collective ambiguity occurs when different authors define the same word in different ways (i.e., create homonyms) or when colleagues in the same discipline arbitrarily use synonyms. For Sartori, homonyms are of no great consequence, after all, we always use the same word with different meanings, and these guidelines can be used to unify meaning within the discipline; what is problematic is that synonyms affect the semantic field of the discipline.<sup>19</sup> In short, this rule warns us to be careful not to waste terms unless justified. Synonyms can be accepted if and only if their core meaning and value are identical; for example, “political class” and “political elite” are not synonyms because while the former term is neutral, the latter is either positive or negative depending on the context.<sup>20</sup> Another way to conceptualize is to resort to existing terms or define them from scratch; what matters is that they are unambiguous and clearly related to a phenomenon or event.<sup>21</sup> Neovalents, old terms with a new meaning, have the connatural problem of ambiguity.

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<sup>19</sup> Sartori, “Guidelines for Concept Analysis,” 114.

<sup>20</sup> Sartori, 115.

<sup>21</sup> Wonka, “Concept Specification in Political Science Research,” 43.

4. *In reconstructing a concept, first collect a representative set of definitions; second, extract their characteristics; and third, construct matrixes that organise such characteristics meaningfully.*

In order to know which characteristics form the concept, it is helpful to distinguish two tasks, reconstructing a concept and creating a new one. In the former, we focus on studying the historical and present usage of the concept in question in the literature; Sartori proposed the three steps explained in this rule, collecting definitions, extracting attributes, and organizing them. The second task to be performed would be to form a concept that, if successful, will help to expose a phenomenon more clearly. In this process the reconstruction helps the formation of concepts, since it organizes the similar and different characteristics present in the existing definitions. In the following, we will analyze different definitions of narcoterrorism; however, we will not propose a better definition.

5. *With respect to the extension of a concept, always assess (1) its degree of boundlessness, and (2) its degree of denotative discrimination vis-a-vis its membership.*

Perhaps one of Sartori's most useful proposals for establishing clear concepts is the dyad of intension (or connotation) and extension (or denotation). While connotation refers to "the characteristics and/or properties associated with, or included in, a given word, term or concept,"<sup>22</sup> denotation is the set of objects for which the term is used.<sup>23</sup> The question of denotativeness is then, "which objects or entities are included and which are excluded?"<sup>24</sup> and can be analyzed from three perspectives: 1) Boundary indefiniteness, i.e., the problem resulting from the lack of attributes, 2) Membership indefiniteness, when the concept lacks a sufficiently precise definition and thus the ability to discriminate membership, and 3) Cut off

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<sup>22</sup> Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 103.

<sup>23</sup> Sartori, 136.

<sup>24</sup> Sartori, 116.

indefiniteness, i.e., the lack of boundaries to discriminate or include extreme cases, especially when operationalizing.

Again it is useful to refer to Kotowski's discussion of the concept of Revolution. As Kotowski points out, depending on the definition, more or less objects of study are excluded. For example, Tilly's definition is so broad that it can include large events such as the French Revolution or small coups such as the Burmese Revolution of 1954. James C. Davies' definition of revolution, on the other hand, refers only to major events.<sup>25</sup>

6. *The boundlessness of a concept is remedied by increasing the number of its properties; and its discriminating adequacy is improved as additional properties are entered.*

A simple way to imagine the complementary notions of intension and extension is with the ladder of abstraction also devised by Sartori. This ladder shows the hierarchy of related terms as we add or subtract features so that the more specific concepts are sub-varieties of the more general category.<sup>26</sup> Roughly speaking, Sartori argues that terms can be classified into three levels according to the relationship between their connotation and denotation: genus, i.e., classification with universal categories; species, or mid-range classifications; and sub-species, or categories of specifics useful for research in a specific context.<sup>27</sup> Returning to the example of revolution, Kotowski orders his classification of the definitions of the concept from the least bounded (Tilly's definition which only includes change of government) to the most bounded (Skocpol's definition includes violence, popular involvement, change of governing body, minor or major political structural change, changes in systems of stratification).<sup>28</sup>

7. *The connotation and the denotation of a concept are inversely related.*

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<sup>25</sup> Kotowski, "Revolution," 219.

<sup>26</sup> Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," 1043; Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 118.

<sup>27</sup> Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," 1043–44.

<sup>28</sup> Kotowski, "Revolution," 217.

As we move down the ladder of abstraction, we add properties to the concept and vice versa; as we move up the ladder, we diminish them.<sup>29</sup> As we add attributes to a definition, we increase the intension and, at the same time, reduce the number of objects to which it can be linked. Returning to the example of the previous point, the less bounded definition is associated with a greater number of cases; while Skocpol's narrower definition deals with fewer cases.

8. *In selecting the term that designates the concept, always relate to and control with the semantic field to which the term belongs—that is, the set of associated, neighbouring words.*

Concepts allow the accumulation of knowledge and give stability to disciplines, so it is vital to choose an appropriate term; in Sartori's terms, we must be careful since the 'semantic projection' will affect our conception and perception of phenomena. A semantic field is a set of terms where elements interact with each other so that changes in a word affect the rest. That is why Sartori named this the semantic field rule. For example, on the concept of "revolution" Kotowski identifies three connotations: (1) revolution as violent outbreak, (2) revolution as progressive historical transformation, and (3) revolution as illegal and violent political change. He also points out that classifying the different conceptions of "revolution" into any of these meanings does not alter the semantic field of any of them.<sup>30</sup>

9. *If the term that designates the concept unsettles the semantic field (to which the term belongs), then justify your selection by showing that (1) no field meaning is lost, and (2) ambiguity is not increased by being transferred into the rest of the field set.*

The above implies that the defense of the term we choose for our concept must show that there are benefits for the whole semantic field in choosing it. Sartori proposes the substitution test to check that we have chosen the term correctly. The test consists of

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<sup>29</sup> Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 118; Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," 1044.

<sup>30</sup> Kotowski, "Revolution," 220–31.

substituting word A for word B in the definition of the concept in question. If the substitution of A for B fulfills both requirements, does not change the meaning, and makes the concept clearer, then we have made the wrong choice.

10. *Make sure that the definiens of a concept is adequate and monious: adequate in that it contains enough characteristics to identify the referents and their boundaries; parsimonious in that no accompanying property is included among the necessary, defining properties.*

The core of conceptualization is to distinguish between necessary properties and contingent or accidental characteristics. The central question is then to decide which attributes belong to the defining properties and which to the contingent properties. The former are those characteristics that delimit the extension of the concept, not necessarily the most notable or common ones but those that encompass the whole set of things or phenomena that the term in question denominates. Sartori was more concerned with extension than with intension insofar as the former is closely related to empirical research and the operationalization of our concepts. In the same vein, one of the main objectives of this text will be to assess whether existing concepts have “seized the object.”<sup>31</sup>

Finally, to conclude this section, it is pertinent to recall that other authors have made contributions since Sartori proposed these guidelines. Among them, John Gerring stands out, who argues that concept formation is a complex, open, and constantly evolving process that is difficult to schematize with invariable rules. In other words, he considers that, although Sartori’s guidelines help evaluate concepts, they must be weighed up casuistically according to the definition in question, in the manner of tradeoffs.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sartori, “Guidelines for Concept Analysis,” 105.

<sup>32</sup> Gerring, “What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences,” 368, 388–91. Gerring proposes eight criteria which, although convincing, are reminiscent of Sartori’s rules. They can be found in the Appendix II.

Gerring reiterates that the criteria should be interpreted as a matter of degree,<sup>33</sup> i.e., they will be met with varying degrees of success depending on the needs of the concept. Perhaps one of the advantages of Gerring's proposal is the explicit flexibility in the tradeoffs of the eight criteria. Nevertheless, the relationship between the criteria and the rules is clear, to mention a couple; the tenth rule includes parsimony, and rules 5 and 6 cover coherence, external differentiation, and depth. Finally, it is worth remembering that Sartori did not intend to impose these rules as immovable, but as open to change: not to apply rules if they are not necessary for a term, to implement additional criteria if required, or even to create other methods.<sup>34</sup> Sartori's guidelines will guide this text as they are still appropriate.

### ***Narcoterrorism***

As mentioned above, at least two significant problems with the concept that concerns us: on the one hand, there are major disagreements between the characteristics attributed to it; on the other hand, the phenomena to which the term refers vary. In Sartori's terms, there is a problem with the connotation and the boundaries. It is necessary to show how this term has been delimited in the literature for at least two reasons. Understandably, the different conceptualizations we produce impact analysts' hypotheses and theories. Also, the scope conditions of a theory depend on the concepts that underlie the explanation.

### **Dimensions**

To systematically analyze the formation of the concept of narcoterrorism, it is useful to begin by identifying the main dimensions that are used in the various existing definitions. It is important to keep in mind that both the dimensions and the conceptualizations are necessarily idealizations or pure concepts intended to encompass a series of cases; naturally, the precise explanation of a specific case will require nuances or added characteristics to the

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<sup>33</sup> Gerring, 368–74.

<sup>34</sup> Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 127.



concept. Of course, this classification corresponds to our criteria and is debatable. However, we believe we have identified and synthesized the elements that make up the definitions of narcoterrorism that can be found in the third appendix.

We identified at least four dimensions: actors, interactions among actors, actions and goals. Each dimension has specific categories that we summarize in Table 1. We do not deny that other authors may arrive at a different organization of this table. The four dimensions we propose arose from the very same challenge of organizing the different definitions we collected from the literature. Perhaps by choosing different definitions we could change our minds about the dimensions. The subdivisions of the dimensions we propose are taken directly from the definitions or, in some cases, were paraphrased in order to capture an idea; for example, the subsections of the "interactions" dimension were phrased that way so that they could capture the idea that some "actors" ally themselves with another group that exercises violence or, alternatively, that the same group may traffic some type of drug and use violence. Now, in the interest of parsimony, perhaps we could simplify some subsections; for example, drug and arms trafficking could be unified under one general heading called "trafficking". Nevertheless, we tried to be as comprehensive as possible to show the variety of definitions of narcoterrorism.

The first dimension, actors, requires no further explanation: some identifiable group exercises some kind of violence, either as an instrument to an end or as an end in itself in the case of those who 'offer' their services as practitioners of violence. The actors in the definitions vary, so we have classified them into five types: organized crime groups, drug producers or traffickers, sovereign states, terrorist groups or insurgent groups. Two problems are evident. First, this is not a literature review that exhausts all the definitions of narcoterrorism that exist, so other actors could be added to Table 1 and the frequency with which actors are mentioned would change. Moreover, the terms used in the definitions to refer

to the actors are themselves problematic. For example, the term "cartel" to refer to organized crime groups specialized in drug trafficking is ambiguous. As Escalante points out, its original meaning is meaningless in the context of the illicit economy: there is no evidence that organized crime groups agree to set a price or the quantity to be produced so that they can maximize their profits as a group. In other words, drug 'cartels' are far from being the efficiency-driven, large-scale enterprises that control the market;<sup>35</sup> in practice these organizations are more like a network of players, business arrangements, families, groups with different specialties (some produce, others transport, others shoot, and so on).<sup>36</sup>

The second dimension indicates whether the authors consider narcoterrorism to consist of 1) the phenomenon in which groups with the capacity and willingness to engage in particularly vicious violence ally with groups specialized in the production, distribution and/or sale of narcotics; or 2) whether groups that had either of the two 'specialties', drug trafficking or terrorism, engage in the other activity. That is, in the first classification, for example, an insurgent group may ally with a narcotics producer because it is mutually convenient; while in the second category, an insurgent group would venture into the cultivation of some narcotic or, vice versa, a cartel that controls the distribution of some drug would begin to use tactics characteristic of terrorism.

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<sup>35</sup> Gonzalbo, *El crimen como realidad y representación*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> Escalante Gonzalbo, "Crimen organizado."

Table 1. Dimensions of narcoterrorism

	Thamm	Martin	Simon	Campbell	Ehrenfeld	Schweitzer	Wardlaw	Shafritz	Napoleoni	Combs	Sawant	Petrakis
<b>Actors</b>	?				V	V	V	Λ	V	Λ	V	V
Criminal organizations	Y	N	N	Y1-3	N	N	Y	N	Y2	N	Y	N
Drug traffickers or producers	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y1,2	Y1,2	Y	N	Y3
States	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y2
Terrorist	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y1	N	Y	N	Y
Insurgents	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y1
<b>Interactions</b>											V	
Alliance between drug traffickers and a group that can exercise violence	?	N	N	N	N	Y	?	Y1	Y2	Y	Y	Y2
Involvement of a group which can exercise violence in drug trafficking or vice-versa	?	Y	Y	Y1-3	Y	N	?	Y2	Y1	N	Y	Y1,3
<b>Actions</b>		Λ	Λ				Λ				Λ	V
Terrorist tactics	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y2	Y1	Y	Y	Y3
Organized violence	N	Y	N	Y1,2	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Drug trafficking	N	Y	Y	Y3	Y	N	Y	Y1,2	N	Y	Y	Y1,2
Arm trafficking	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y2
<b>Goals</b>				V		Λ		Λ	Λ	V	V	V
Profit/Protecting the enterprise	N	Y	Y	Y3	N	N	N	Y2	Y1	Y	Y	Y3
Destabilization of the government	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y2	Y1,2	Y	Y	Y2
Political/social control	N	N	N	Y1	N	Y	N	N	Y1,2	Y	Y	Y1
The goal varies	?	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N

Notes 1. Y = Yes, N = No, ? = Uncertain. If the author uses different variants in his definition, we use numbers accompanying the "Y". The numbers of the variants are given in order of appearance, i.e. if the author talks about aspects a), b), and c) of narcoterrorism, then we assign the number "1" to strand "a". If a single number "i" accompanies the letter, this refers to the "i" strand of the concept within the definition. On the other hand, if the numbers are of the type "Yi-j", this indicates that the subcategory corresponding to that cell applies to strands i to j within the definition. Finally, if the numbers are of the type "Yi, j", this suggests that the corresponding cell refers only to strand "i" and "j" within the author's definition. In some definitions, the elements included in a category can be grouped in conjunction or disjunction. To indicate this, we use the corresponding logical symbols for and (Λ)/or (V). For example, if a definition states that the targets of a terrorist group can be any of the list, we use the "or" operator

When describing the first phenomenon, the authors use terms such as "alliance", "link", "involvement", "combination", sponsorships, or charges for services; while when referring to the second phenomenon, the authors speak of "uses" (of violence, terror, terrorist tactics, drug-related income, drug trafficking), acts, "practices" or "strategy". Among the authors who classify narcoterrorism as a phenomenon of alliance between professionals of violence and groups dedicated to activities related to the drug market is Schweitzer, who identifies among the referents such dissimilar groups as the Russian mafia, Hizballah and the Colombian cartels. In the second group, who consider that narcoterrorists are involved in both the drug and violence markets, are Martin, Simon and Campbell and Hansen. These authors agree that the cartels are narcoterrorists, but Simon includes other organizations such as PLOs. In sum, there is no clear pattern in this dimension either.

The third dimension encompasses the actions taken by the actors according to the definitions. A common element among the conceptualizations considers the use of violence. First, actors may develop the capacity to exercise extreme violence in the manner of terrorists; for example, by using bombs or kidnapping/assassinating politicians, businessmen or other relevant figures in the specific context. The second form of using violence that we find in the definitions is more ambiguous and, therefore, covers a larger list of actions. We name it simply as organized violence, for lack of a better term, to distinguish it from the violence typically associated with the tactics of terrorist groups. The adjective "organized" refers to the fact that the actions involve planning at some point: whether in the logistics of obtaining the weaponry, in training and creating discipline among those carrying out the violent acts, or in executing the attack. This ambiguity allows us to encompass the violence that can be exercised by the dissimilar actors listed above.

The other actions we identified are trafficking, either drugs or arms. Again, this is a simplification, since the definitions selected mention different stages within the chain of

production-distribution-sale of these markets that can be carried out by different actors: for example, drug trafficking involves, at the very least, cultivation or production in a laboratory, purchase between intermediaries and producers, transport, distribution and sale. This is shown in the definitions both when they refer to the actors or actions; for example, among the actors they mention dealers, traffickers, "drug lords" (whatever that means), or coca growers.

Finally, the last dimension common to the different conceptualizations is the objectives of the actors in question. We divide them into four categories. Understandably, one goal of the actors mentioned is profit. Some authors describe this goal as protecting the business by referring to the use of violence. Secondly, a recurrently mentioned goal is the destabilization of governments. For example, this goal may be pursued by governments that sponsor terrorist activities to increase their influence on other sovereign states; likewise, some organized crime groups pursue this goal because of the advantages to their business of weakening the strength and presence of the state. On the other hand, in the literature we find that one of the goals of actors classified as narcoterrorists may be to impose political and/or social order. A couple of examples of this objective are the search for discipline among the farmers who provide the raw materials in the production chain or, on the other hand, the control of a territory and its resources. Finally, in some definitions, some authors point out that what is relevant to narcoterrorism are the means and actors and not the ends, since these vary and are innumerable, so they simply argue that the ends vary and list some examples. Thus, under the heading of objectives we add a row indicating that the ends are diverse.

### ***The concept against the guidelines***

Before proceeding to analyze in the light of Sartori's guidelines the definitions of narcoterrorism that we have summarized in Table 1, we would like to make a brief parenthesis to expose what would be a good definition, and incidentally a bad definition, according to the Italian political scientist's standards. A good concept, in short and according

to what we have reviewed so far,<sup>37</sup> (1) uses a simple term (2) has an unambiguous meaning, and (3) points to clear and comparable referents. In sum, we have a good concept when it expresses a clear meaning and helps to grasp the object. Only good concepts can establish boundaries that separate the object we want to explain from other objects that may resemble but are not the same.

Unlike good concepts, which are characterized by a simple term, an unambiguous meaning and identifiable referents, a concept is said to be bad when (1) it uses a confusing term, (2) its meaning with respect to the word is ambiguous, which makes definition difficult, and (3) its meaning with respect to the referents is vague, which makes its operationalization and the classification of the units to be analyzed impossible. To give a couple of examples of a useful and a deficient concept, we can return to Kotowski's analysis. In his table summarizing the connotation of the definitions he analyzes he puts Tilly's and Skocpol's definitions at the extremes. Tilly's definition is:

"A revolutionary outcome is the displacement of one set of powerholders by another [...] Provisionally, let us take power over government as our reference point. A revolutionary outcome is the displacement of one set of members of the polity by another set."<sup>38</sup>

This definition is at the lower end of the connotation as it includes few attributes. To paraphrase Kotowski, not all authors would make such an inclusive concept.<sup>39</sup> If we evaluate Tilly's definition with Sartori's triangle (term, meaning and referent) we can say that the term is inadequate for the phenomenon it intends to describe; the meaning is vague and subject to different interpretations and its referents are broad. In contrast, we can cite Skocpol's definition, who included the most attributes:

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<sup>37</sup> In this general explanation of what is a 'good' and a 'bad' concept we follow Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 102–6.

<sup>38</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 193. As cited in Kotowski, "Revolution," 233.

<sup>39</sup> Kotowski, "Revolution," 229.

"Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation. [...] Political revolutions transform state structures but not social structures, and they are not necessarily accomplished through class conflict."<sup>40</sup>

While this definition is long and full of exceptions (for example, the clarification that not every revolution is achieved through class conflict), it is not ambiguous because it includes all the necessary attributes listed by Kotowski (violence, popular involvement, change of governing body, minor or major political structural change, changes in systems of stratification). Moreover, it is not vague because by including this series of attributes it shortens the list of cases to which the definition can be applied. Kotowski had it right to include in his text the historical events that count as revolutions according to the definitions he cites. It is no coincidence that the list of revolutions mentioned by Tilly is the longest and Skocpol's the shortest. However, we must emphasize that this reasoning does not imply that more attributes in a definition is better, as we saw parsimony is valued in the formation of concepts.

### **Vagueness**

As summarized in Table 1, the authors have major disagreements. In some works, the authors refer to two or even three types of narcoterrorism; for example, Petrakis' definition is:

"...the involvement of terrorist organizations and insurgent groups in the trafficking of narcotics (...) there are three main variants of narcoterrorism. These include: 1. Insurgents using the drug trade to support their political objectives; 2. States sponsoring 'drugs for arms' and narcotics operations to further their influence to create instability; and 3. Dope dealers utilizing terrorist tactics like bombings, assassinations and kidnappings to enhance their profits."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4. As cited in Kotowski, "Revolution," 233.

<sup>41</sup> Petrakis, "Organised Crime and the Financing of Terrorist and Guerrilla Movements," 119–20.

As we see in this example, the author refers to three different actors using similar, but not identical actions to achieve different ends. Some definitions include all the actors listed, others only one type of actor. Similarly, some conceptualizations exclude actions and only concern themselves with objectives and actors; and vice versa, some consider actions and actors, but not objectives. As some of the authors whose work we analyzed admit, the term is vague; that is, the relationship between the meaning of the term and its referent is not clear. Moreover, some authors such as Wardlaw<sup>42</sup> and Escalante<sup>43</sup> argue that the concept has been used in a way that suits the needs of the countries' security institutions.

### **Ambiguity**

Similarly, another problem with the definitions discussed is that the associations are not univocal. If we use the concept of narcoterrorism to refer both to insurgents who finance their activities with drug profits, states that seek to destabilize another state, and to drug traffickers who protect their business, it is understandable that confusion arises as to what we mean when we talk about narcoterrorism. Under Sartori's guidelines, this is ambiguity induced by the use of homonyms. It could be argued that the meaning of the term can be clear if the text is clear and the authors guide the reader through the exposition. However, in some texts the authors interchange some key words that complicate the explanation. Again taking Petrakis' definition as an example, he begins by suggesting that narcoterrorism is the alliance between insurgents and terrorist organizations and then points out that there are three types of narcoterrorism that do not include terrorists. The danger of using terms that are close but not strictly equivalent synonyms is that they potentially clutter the semantic field to which they belong. In addition, the use of homonyms makes the accumulation of knowledge and

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<sup>42</sup> Wardlaw, "Linkages Between the Illegal Drugs Traffic and Terrorism," 5–6.

<sup>43</sup> Escalante Gonzalbo, "Narco-terrorismo: la fábrica de la opinión pública," 57, 70-74.



comparisons between cases impossible, since, as we can see, authors can refer to different phenomena with the same term.

**Semantic field**

Sartori reminds us that one of the challenges in choosing a term to designate a concept is to control the semantic field; that is, to consider that a word is related to others and its definition or redefinition will affect the rest. In the case of narcoterrorism there are two explicit references in the same word that are inserted in the semantic field of political violence. Kalyvas' typology can guide us, in the following table we reproduce his proposal.

*Table 2. Perpetrators and Targets of Political Violence according to Kalyvas' typology<sup>44</sup>*

		<i>Target</i>	
		<i>State</i>	<i>Non-State</i>
<i>Perpetrator</i>	State	Interstate war	State repression Genocide Ethnic cleansing
	Non-State	Organized crime/Cartels Mass protest/Rebellion Military coup Political assassination Civil war Terrorism	Intercommunal violence Political assassination

In this scheme Kalyvas argues that while organized crime's main objective is profit, there are three reasons to consider it a form of political violence: violence can reach the ruthlessness of war; for some authors, state formation is linked to criminal activities; and cartels often use tactics similar to other types of violence such as the recruitment of civilians

<sup>44</sup> Kalyvas et al., “The Landscape of Political Violence,” 4.

characteristic of civil wars.<sup>45</sup> For its part, in this typology, terrorism is characterized by the use of violence as a means to intimidate a broad audience by non-state actors.<sup>46</sup>

Before relating this typology to the neologism 'narcoterrorism', it is useful to summarize Kalyvas's observations:<sup>47</sup> the cell to which each type of violence corresponds is the one that is closest to the actor who carries it out; the fact that a state actor carries out some violent action does not imply that the violence is perpetrated by the state; the classification of actors depends on their initial actions, not the results of these; the violence carried out by the perpetrators may be a response to violence previously committed by their target; the civilian population may suffer the violence even if it is not the primary target of the violence; and political assassinations occupy two cells.

With this in mind we can ask the relevant questions. First, is narcoterrorism a subtype of terrorism or a new form of political violence distinct from what Kalyvas classified as cartels? As we have seen so far, there is no consensus on the definitions chosen. In the first sense, some authors such as Simon, Schweitzer, Enrenfeld, and Thamm explicitly state that narcoterrorism is a subtype of terrorism. The first two authors argue in their respective definitions that this terrorism is motivated primarily by financial gain; for his part, Thamm argues that the purpose is to gain an advantage and Ehrenfeld simply argues that it is the phenomenon that occurs when terrorists employ drug trafficking as a means to their ends. Other authors, such as Shafritz, Petrakis and Napoleoni do not explicitly state that it is a subtype of terrorism, but point out that the actors involved employ terrorist tactics (which reminds us of the distinction between actor and action sense terrorism made by Sánchez Cuenca and De la Calle and summarized by Kalyvas<sup>48</sup>).

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<sup>45</sup> Kalyvas et al., 11.

<sup>46</sup> Kalyvas et al., 14.

<sup>47</sup> Kalyvas et al., 4–5.

<sup>48</sup> Kalyvas et al., 14.

However, the definitions of other authors force us to question whether narcoterrorism is a different phenomenon from cartel-related violence or organized crime. In the definitions of Martin and, again, Napoleoni,<sup>49</sup> the instrumental role of violence to protect the business of drug traffickers stands out. For Kalyvas this violence is not political (restricted to governance-related<sup>50</sup>) since cartels that maintain a low profile and are primarily concerned with profit-making do not, in principle, seek to replace the government. However, other definitions include elements that Kalyvas does not consider in his definition, such as narcoterrorism as the struggle for regional political control in Campbell and Hansen's proposal.

Finally, regarding the first question, other definitions further complicate the task of positioning narcoterrorism within a typology of political violence. Some authors such as Combs and Slann, Petrakis, Sawant, and Wardlaw consider that this political violence is different from that exercised by cartels and terrorists, but includes them as actors, as well as others such as insurgents or states. In sum, the concept of narcoterrorism is difficult to classify. If it is a subtype of terrorism, there is no major problem with its position among the corresponding typologies. On the other hand, if it is a type of political violence, there are at least two options.

In some definitions it is, as we identified above in the second group of authors, quite close to the concept of cartels according to Kalyvas' perspective; it would then suffice to add elements to that definition for organized crime violence to include what the authors of this group consider narcoterrorism and, consequently, this concept would cease to be useful. However, for the third group of authors, narcoterrorism is a type of political violence that

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<sup>49</sup> Recall that some definitions of narcoterrorism list two or more manifestations of the phenomenon. Again, it is useful to compare our argument with the definitions in Appendix III.

<sup>50</sup> Kalyvas et al., "The Landscape of Political Violence," 3.

does not fit the typology we have used as a basis, nor is it a subtype of terrorism or cartels. So, should we add it as a new type of political violence?

Although the purpose of our text is not to argue against or in favor of the previous question, we offer a couple of ideas that we hope will contribute to the discussion. First, do the words in this semantic field lose meaning when we add the term narcoterrorism? One of the explicit elements in the neologism in question has itself been the subject of long discussions, of course, we are referring to terrorism; we would have to ask ourselves then what we have gained by adding the component of narco-trafficking to this concept. The multiplicity of phenomena and actors that this concept claims to encompass reveals its lack of rigor.

### **Intension**

After we have summarized the specific dimensions and elements found in the definitions, we note that the characteristics required in the subset of definitions chosen are found in the "actors" and "actions" dimensions. That is, all definitions have at least one of the elements in those dimensions. Following the refinement, we see that while in all the definitions analyzed the authors consider some type of violence (whether organized in general terms or through terrorist tactics) not all include one of the two types of trafficking that we identified. However, this does not immediately lead to a minimal definition: we still have five types of actors who can exercise violence.

An intensional minimal definition with these elements would be deficient since it is not sufficiently exclusive; in other words, it does not delimit this type of political violence from others. The natural thing to do when hearing the term is to link it to terrorism and drugs; however, as we see, this is not necessary in the definitions. On the one hand, not all definitions include terrorists and drug traffickers; on the other hand, not all conceptualizations consider the use of terrorist tactics and drug trafficking. For example, some authors such as

Schweitzer<sup>51</sup> consider narcoterrorists to be professionals of violence who charge for their services to those who obtain resources from drug-related activities.

### **Extension**

We have organized the table in such a way that as we read it from left to right, the definitions consider more elements. However, this does not necessarily imply that the definitions on the right exclude more referents because some authors contemplate up to three referents in the same definition (i.e., as the intension increases, the extension decreases). Again, Petrakis' conceptualization is useful to understand this. In Table 3, found in the appendix IV, we summarize the information on the specific referents used by the authors.

The most common subcategory of actors among the definitions selected was drug traffickers or producers, which in the authors' terms includes cartels, drug producers and traffickers, drug lords, and even dealers. Within this subcategory, Mexican and Colombian cartels stand out. Naturally, the second most used subcategory of actors in the definitions was terrorism and the most mentioned organizations are Sendero Luminoso (SL) and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). However, we reiterate, there is no consensus on the actors. Other authors consider that narcoterrorism also includes states such as Cuba and Bulgaria that have participated by action or omission in the transfer of drugs for different objectives and insurgent groups that finance their movement with drug-related activities (e.g., charging for permission to plant in a territory controlled by them, drug production or trafficking, among others) or violence (e.g., extortion, extortion for ransom, etcetera).

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<sup>51</sup> Schweitzer and Dorsch, *Superterrorism. Assassins, Mobsters, and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 166–67.

## Chapter 2 — Are Mexican organized crime groups 'narcos', terrorists or something else? A case study

Some specialists are taking critical positions on concepts that are taken from public discussion without sound judgment and inserted into academic and public policy discussions. Among these efforts is that of Herrera, who has asked, is the violence of recent years in Mexico really a war?<sup>52</sup> Or Oswaldo Zavala's more controversial assertion, "the cartels do not exist".<sup>53</sup> These types of discussions have shed light on the foundations of our understanding of contemporary violence in Mexico and the region.

Meanwhile, in the previous chapter we showed how the term 'narcoterrorism' has been loosely used by academics who have taken up a popular concept in public opinion. Now, we will see how this concept has had repercussions on public policies and governmental decisions. We proceed as follows: first, we justify the usefulness of using a single case study and, subsequently, we argue why the Mexican case is useful for discussing the term. In a second section we summarize *grosso modo* how the concept of narcoterrorism has been employed by politicians in the United States and their Mexican counterparts in the last decades. We then proceed to outline some of the political and public policy implications of the changes in the cartels' designation from Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) to Foreign Terrorists Organizations (FTOs). Finally, we make a very brief effort to show that violence in Mexico follows a particular logic, different from that associated with terrorism.

### ***Usefulness of a single case study***

Case studies allow us to analyze complex social phenomena in-depth.<sup>54</sup> Comparisons through case studies in contrast to large-N comparisons allow for more context and

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<sup>52</sup> Herrera, "Pensar la guerra en México: Una tarea para nuestro tiempo."

<sup>53</sup> Zavala, *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist*.

<sup>54</sup> Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?," 341.

consideration of more aspects of the variables in question<sup>55</sup>, and in contrast to medium-n case studies it is less expensive in time and resources.<sup>56</sup> Sorting the processes of a phenomenon allows us to identify the key elements that connect the outcomes and the independent variables. Identifying the pieces that link outcomes and causes allows us to understand, even if only partially, how they are connected.<sup>57</sup>

A single case study is relevant when the case is emblematic of broader theoretical issues or concepts. This study could also shed light on the role of law, courts, public opinion in shaping social and political change. Such a study would be valuable because it provides insights into broader theoretical concepts that can be applied to other cases. As scholars have noted, case studies can be particularly useful for studying theoretical concepts in depth.<sup>58</sup>

In what follows we will do a descriptive case study that could be considered typical<sup>59</sup> of the phenomenon given that in the context in which we write this text, the term narcoterrorism is widely used to refer to organized crime organizations based primarily in Mexico, but with international networks, that traffic drugs into the United States. While the current debate centers on Mexican cartels, in the recent past the term has been used to refer to criminal organizations in other regions, from Latin America to Asia. Hence, we consider the Mexican case to be typical or close to the central tendency measures. The selection of the case, then, is not fortuitous, but stems from the expectation that the description of the term in the Mexican context will illustrate the conceptual problems previously identified. That is, we hope to take full advantage of a single case<sup>60</sup> to exemplify the problem of a term in vogue in public opinion that is also used by some specialists in the field.

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<sup>55</sup> Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison," 243.

<sup>56</sup> Gerring and Cojocaru, "Selecting Cases for Intensive Analysis," 417.

<sup>57</sup> Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison," 240.

<sup>58</sup> Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research," 229.

<sup>59</sup> Gerring and Cojocaru, "Selecting Cases for Intensive Analysis," 396.

<sup>60</sup> Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research," 230.

## ***Controversy over the use of the term in the United States and Mexico***

In the context of the "war on terror" there was pressure from the U.S. on the Mexican government to strengthen the prevention and prosecution of terrorism. Escalante recounted how these efforts created the public perception that there was an evident nexus between Mexican drug traffickers and Islamic terrorists.<sup>61</sup> In what follows we will recount two other moments in which this association was made. The first began immediately after the period Escalante describes, the Decree 34 legislative process that occurred during 2007 in Mexico. We then summarize the controversy over the designation of cartels as terrorists that has arisen between politicians in Mexico and the United States since the presidency of Donald Trump, amid the growing opioid consumption crisis in North America.

The initiative to reform the laws related to terrorism and its prosecution began at the end of 2003 on behalf of then President Vicente Fox Quezada (President of Mexico from 2000 to 2006); the final decree was not published until the summer of 2007. Of course, the terrorist attacks that were perpetrated during these years in the United States and Spain, among other countries, were used as examples by legislators and the federal executive to highlight the need to typify international terrorism.<sup>62</sup>

Among the legislative changes in Mexico in 2007 were the reforms to the Penal Code, among which was the updating of the crime of terrorism. During the parliamentary debate, some legislators mentioned elements of the definitions that are also discussed in academia. For example, the then senator Pablo Gómez proposed to make a definition based on the

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<sup>61</sup> Escalante Gonzalbo, "Narco-Terrorismo."

<sup>62</sup> Fox Quezada, DECRETO por el que se reforman diversas disposiciones del Código Penal Federal; del Código Federal de Procedimientos Penales; de la Ley Federal contra la Delincuencia Organizada; de la Ley de Instituciones de Crédito; de la Ley de Ahorro y Crédito Popular; de la Ley de los Sistemas de Ahorro para el Retiro; de la Ley de Sociedades de Inversión; de la Ley del Mercado de Valores; de la Ley Federal de Instituciones de Fianzas; de la Ley General de Instituciones y Sociedades Mutualistas de Seguros; y de la Ley General de Organizaciones y Actividades Auxiliares del Crédito., 1, 3, 7, 12, 15.



purposes: "I can use violent means and generate terror in a human group, but for it to be terrorism it has to have the purpose that is indicated here, which is to pressure the authority to resolve certain acts."<sup>63</sup> For the senator, as for some academics,<sup>64</sup> the pragmatic way to classify terrorism is based on the object, not the ideology, acts, methods used, or other criteria.

Furthermore, some senators and deputies recalled how in the twentieth century lax typifications were used by the Mexican government to persecute, harass and repress political dissidents.<sup>65</sup> This argument of the legislators refers us to Table 1 of the first chapter, where it can be seen that among the actors that are usually classified as narcoterrorists are the insurgents and guerrillas. While it is true that some of these groups, such as SL or PLO, have resorted to drug trafficking to finance their insurgent activities, it is credible, as the Mexican legislators argued, that any administration could accuse opposing political groups of being terrorists.

Now, two results of these discussions are of particular interest to us. First, that the definitions of terrorism and international terrorism are similar to those existing in U.S. legislation; and second, that terrorism is among the crimes of organized crime. Beginning with the first result, let us look at how the crime of terrorism is reflected in current legislation:

"Whoever using toxic substances, chemical, biological or similar weapons, radioactive material, nuclear material, nuclear fuel, radioactive mineral, source of radiation or instruments that emit radiation, explosives, or firearms, or by fire, flood or any other violent means, intentionally performs acts against goods or services, whether public or private, or against the physical, emotional integrity, or life of persons, that produce alarm, fear or terror in the population or in a group or sector thereof, in order to threaten the physical, emotional, or life of persons, that produce alarm, fear or terror in the population or in a group or sector thereof, whether public or private, or against the physical, emotional integrity, or life of persons, that produce alarm, fear, or terror in the population or in a group or sector thereof, in order to attempt against national

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibídem*, 140. Our translation from: "Yo puedo usar medios violentos y generar en un grupo humano terror, pero para que sea terrorismo tiene que tener el objeto que está señalado aquí, que es presionar a la autoridad para que resuelva determinados actos."

<sup>64</sup> For instance, see Anthony Richards, "Conceptualizing Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 3 (March 4, 2014): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.872023>.

<sup>65</sup> Vicente Fox Quezada, 95.

security or to pressure the authority or a private individual, or to force the latter to take a determination."<sup>66</sup>

Another concern among legislators who participated in the discussions was the potential consequences of including the crime of 'international terrorism' for local governance. Specifically, some discussants argued that while terrorism is a specter that threatens 'the international community,' we should not "make others' enemies our enemies."<sup>67</sup> In the words of then Congresswoman Alliet Mariana Bautista Bravo:

"[W]e consider that including the figure of international terrorism places our country in a situation of risk and exposes it to the risk that any government may claim the application of this law for the persecution of those they consider terrorists, which is contrary to the principles of self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, peaceful settlement of disputes and the use of force in international relations, legal equality of states, international cooperation for development and the struggle for peace and international security."<sup>68</sup>

Legislator Bautista Bravo, like other speakers during the discussions of this decree, mentioned the principles of self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, and legal equality of states to emphasize the apparent disjunction between international cooperation and national sovereignty. It is worth mentioning that Mexico has signed all international cooperation

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<sup>66</sup> Capítulo VI Terrorismo, sec. Second Book, First Title, Chapter VI, Article 139. Our translation of the following text: "A quien utilizando sustancias tóxicas, armas químicas, biológicas o similares, material radioactivo, material nuclear, combustible nuclear, mineral radioactivo, fuente de radiación o instrumentos que emitan radiaciones, explosivos, o armas de fuego, o por incendio, inundación o por cualquier otro medio violento, intencionalmente realice actos en contra de bienes o servicios, ya sea públicos o privados, o bien, en contra de la integridad física, emocional, o la vida de personas, que produzcan alarma, temor o terror en la población o en un grupo o sector de ella, para atentar contra la seguridad nacional o presionar a la autoridad o a un particular, u obligar a éste para que tome una determinación."

<sup>67</sup> Fox Quezada, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Fox Quezada, 100. The quote is a translation of the following speech: "[C]onsideramos que incluir la figura del terrorismo internacional coloca a nuestro país en una situación de riesgo y lo expone a que cualquier gobierno pueda reclamar la aplicación de esta ley para la persecución de quienes ellos consideren terroristas, lo que contrapone los principios de autodeterminación de los pueblos, de no intervención, de solución pacífica de las controversias y del uso de la fuerza en las relaciones internacionales, de igualdad jurídica de los estados, cooperación internacional para el desarrollo y de la lucha por la paz y la seguridad internacional."

treaties on terrorism and has legislated on it, for which reason some deputies and senators questioned the need to distinguish between international and domestic terrorism.<sup>69</sup>

In general, the typification of international terrorism includes a similar, but less exhaustive, list of coercive means, focused on goods, persons and services of foreign states, agencies and international organizations in Mexican territory.<sup>70</sup> In sum, three elements of the articles referring to terrorism, whether domestic or international, stand out: 1) the wide range of tools (weapons, substances, etc.) that can be used 2) to cause fear, terror or alarm among people 3) with the aim of a) undermining national security, b) pressuring people or authorities, or c) forcing them to take a decision. In brief, the elements of these articles are: means, method and goals. This last element, the goals, refers us back to Table 1 of the text.

Given the international context in which these reforms were made it is not surprising then that these definitions in Mexican law are close to the legal criteria for designating a foreign organization as a terrorist organization in the United States, which are defined in section 212 (a)(3)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) (8 U. S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B)), or terrorism, as defined in section 140(d)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 (22 U.S.C. § 2656f(d)(2)).

In addition, during the debates, the amendment to the second article of the Federal Law against Organized Crime was also discussed to include among the crimes that can be committed by members of "organized crime", domestic and international terrorism, as well as its financing, concealment, threat and recruitment of persons to commit it.<sup>71</sup> National Security in Mexico refers to actions to "maintain the integrity, stability and permanence of the State."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Fox Quezada, 106.

<sup>70</sup> Capítulo VI Terrorismo, sec. Second Book, Second Title, Chapter III, Article 148 Bis.

<sup>71</sup> Fox Quezada, 32.

<sup>72</sup> Ley de Seguridad Nacional [L.S.N.] (National Security Law), as amended, First Title, Article 3.

Threats to National Security include acts of terrorists and 'organized crime.'<sup>73</sup> The latter in itself is not a threat to national security, but hindering any act (operations, intelligence work, investigation, etc.) of the authorities to combat organized crime is. Both drug trafficking (categorized under the broad heading of crimes against health) and terrorism are considered variants of organized crime.<sup>74</sup> In summary, in the midst of an international context in which terrorism was a credible threat and there was speculation about the possible connection between drug traffickers and terrorists, as Escalante relates in his aforementioned work, Mexican legislation was harmonized with international standards and, in particular, with U.S. legislation.

The second period of interest to us is more recent. We identified that since Donald Trump's presidency, the connection between drug trafficking and terrorism has come back into vogue. Examples abound, but they usually coincide with events in which U.S. citizens suffer cartel-related violence. We will briefly review the proposals of different U.S. politicians in recent years:

1. **December 2019:** Senators Tom Cotton, among other representatives, introduced a bill called the Significant Transnational Criminal Organization Designation Act (Dec 11, 2019) which aimed to designate specific Mexican cartels as Transnational Criminal Organizations. The bill sought to provide additional tools to combat the cartels and

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<sup>73</sup> Ley de Seguridad Nacional [L.S.N.] (National Security Law), as amended, First Title, Article 5. Our translation: “Acts tending to consummate espionage, sabotage, terrorism, rebellion, [...] Acts that prevent the authorities from acting against organized crime [...] Acts tending to break the unity of the constituent parts of the Federation [...] Acts tending to hinder or block military or naval operations against organized crime [...] Any act tending to consummate illegal trafficking in nuclear materials, chemical, biological and conventional weapons [...] Any act tending to finance terrorist actions and organizations; XI. Acts tending to hinder or block intelligence or counterintelligence activities; XII. Acts tending to destroy or disable infrastructure of a strategic nature or indispensable for the provision of goods or public services [...]”

<sup>74</sup> Ley Federal contra la Delincuencia Organizada (Federal Law against Organized Crime), as amended, First Title, Article 2.

enhance cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico in addressing the drug trade.

However, the bill did not progress beyond the introduction stage.

2. **November 2019:** In a tweet, President Donald Trump declared his intention to designate Mexican cartels as FTOs. However, no official action was taken to implement this proposal during his presidency as he stated that there was willingness from the Mexican government to work together.<sup>75</sup>
3. **February 2023:** Another notable case was the twenty-one U.S. Attorneys General who signed on to the Virginia prosecutor's letter to President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken calling for the cartels to be designated as terrorist organizations.<sup>76</sup>
4. **March 2023:** The Biden administration, through Secretary of State Antony Blinken, expressed its openness to considering designating Mexican cartels as FTOs.<sup>77</sup>
5. **March 2023:** Former US Attorney General under the Trump administration, William P. Barr advocated the use of the US military to take down Mexican cartels as they are narco-terrorist organizations more akin to ISIS than to mafia.<sup>78</sup>

Below we summarize the central arguments of Barr, the current attorneys and some Republican representatives, particularly Reps. Dan Crenshaw (Republican-Texas) and Michael Waltz (Republican-Florida), who have advocated for the designation. Proponents of the designation of the Mexican cartels as FTOs argue that the Mexican cartels engage in acts of violence and terror, including the murder of civilians and government officials, that are comparable to those of other designated terrorist organizations. Here, then, the concept in question becomes relevant. If we return to Table 1, we see how for some analysts of the

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<sup>75</sup> “Trump Halts Plan to Designate Mexican Drug Cartels as Terrorists.”

<sup>76</sup> Miyares, “Letter to the President and Secretary of State,” February 8, 2023.

<sup>77</sup> *Blinken*.

<sup>78</sup> Barr, “Opinion | The U.S. Must Defeat Mexico’s Drug Cartels.”

phenomenon, terrorist tactics are part of the actions that narco-terrorist organizations can carry out.

On the other hand, those calling for designation argue that this would provide the U.S. government with greater legal and financial tools to combat the activities of these groups. In this they closely follow the State Department's guidelines for designating FTOs.<sup>79</sup> Finally, on the political level they argue that the designation would send a strong message to these groups that their actions will not be tolerated, and, perhaps more tangibly, would provide the U.S. government with greater leverage in its negotiations with the Mexican government to address the issue of drug trafficking and organized crime.

As an example, proponents of this view point out that other countries, such as Colombia, have successfully designated their own drug cartels as FTOs, and that this has helped disrupt the activities of these groups. They also argue that Mexican cartels have expanded their operations into the United States and that the U.S. government has a responsibility to protect its citizens from the activities of these groups.

Of course, there are also those who argue that designating the Mexican cartels as FTOs is not a good strategy. They argue that the Mexican cartels are motivated primarily by profit, rather than ideology, and that they do not represent the same type of threat as other designated terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda or ISIS. This brings us back to the fourth element of Table 1, the purposes of the violence exercised by the organization are in most definitions of narcoterrorism. They also argue that the designation of Mexican cartels as FTOs could lead to unintended consequences, such as increased violence and instability in Mexico, and could damage U.S.-Mexico relations.

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<sup>79</sup> Available for consultation at Bureau of Counterterrorism, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations."

Opponents of this view point to the fact that Mexican cartels are deeply embedded in Mexican society and the Mexican economy, and that a designation as FTOs could lead to increased violence and retaliation by these groups. They also argue that the U.S. government should focus on addressing the root causes of drug trafficking and organized crime, such as poverty, corruption, and weak institutions, rather than relying on a narrow law enforcement approach.

### ***Definitions matter: from concepts to policies***

At this point, some doubts arise, the most evident being: is it necessary to designate cartels as terrorist organizations in order to prosecute, sanction and punish them? Put another way, do the current statuses in U.S. law not provide the necessary tools to do so? We can briefly analyze some of the tools available to the U.S. government to prosecute Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs).

Let's start with the tools to prosecute, punish or sanction FTOs. Among the laws we can find the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) which establishes procedures for the electronic surveillance and collection of foreign intelligence information, including counterterrorism efforts. It allows for the monitoring of communications and activities of suspected terrorists both inside and outside the United States.<sup>80</sup> In second place, there is the U.S. government has the USA Patriot Act that was enacted shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks, and which expanded the government's surveillance powers, enhanced intelligence sharing, and provided law enforcement agencies with broader authority to investigate and prosecute terrorism-related activities.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, we can mention the Executive Orders. The President can issue executive orders that impose sanctions on terrorist organizations, their leaders, and supporters. These orders

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<sup>80</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, «The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA)».

<sup>81</sup> U.S. Senate, The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty.

may include freezing assets, prohibiting financial transactions, and restricting travel. For instance, the Executive Order 13224 signed in September of 2001 by then President Bush,

“provides a means by which to disrupt the financial support network for terrorists and terrorist organizations by authorizing the U.S. government to designate and block the assets of foreign individuals and entities that commit, or pose a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism.”<sup>82</sup>

Now, what tools do U.S. institutions have at their disposal to confront organized crime organizations? To name a couple, in their legal framework the U.S. authorities can rely on the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act since the last century. The RICO Act enables prosecutors to target and dismantle criminal organizations by charging individuals with engaging in a pattern of racketeering activity. It provides for the seizure of assets derived from criminal activities.<sup>83</sup> For instance, cartel members have been extradited for trial under this act.<sup>84</sup> Another U.S. federal law related is the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. The Kingpin Act authorizes the U.S. government to designate some criminal organizations as significant foreign narcotics traffickers. This designation leads to asset freezes and other economic sanctions.<sup>85</sup>

We have already mentioned some of the federal laws that empower the authorities to prevent and prosecute crimes related to terrorism and/or organized crime, it remains to mention some of the institutions empowered to do so. It should be noted that the same institutions are usually in charge of prosecuting terrorist and organized crime organizations related to drug trafficking. Let's look at some examples. Among the institutions that have separate agencies to deal with issues related to terrorism or organized crime are the

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<sup>82</sup> U.S. Department of State, «Executive Order 13224».

<sup>83</sup> 91st United States Congress, An Act relating to the control of organized crime in the United States.

<sup>84</sup> United States Department of Justice, «Sinaloa Cartel Member Extradited to the United States».

<sup>85</sup> 106th United States Congress, An Act to provide for the imposition of economic sanctions on certain foreign persons engaging in, or otherwise involved in, international narcotics trafficking.



Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Within the DOJ, there is the Counterterrorism Section (CTS) within the National Security Division (NSD) is responsible for coordinating and supporting the DOJ's efforts in combating terrorism.<sup>86</sup> On the other side, the Organized Crime and Gang Section within the Criminal Division focuses on combating organized crime domestically and internationally. In second place, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), under the Treasury Department, administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions against designated terrorist organizations, international drug traffickers, among other actors.<sup>87</sup> The OFAC “publishes a list of individuals and companies owned or controlled by, or acting for or on behalf of, targeted countries”.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, the DHS is responsible for securing U.S. borders and combating transnational crime. Agencies like U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the U.S. Coast Guard collaborate to investigate and disrupt criminal organizations. Among the institution's missions, counterterrorism is explicitly mentioned, and in several of its six missions, the prevention and prosecution of trafficking in drugs, weapons and any product that represents a threat to Americans is mentioned.<sup>89</sup>

Although the institutions that prosecute both FTOs and TCOs are often the same, the designation of Mexican drug cartels as FTOs would have significant implications for how the U.S. government pursues, punishes and prosecutes them. Following the arguments made by public authorities seeking to change the cartels' designation in the U.S., the most dramatic change would be the use of military force against the designated cartels. Furthermore, the

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<sup>86</sup> National Security Division, U.S. Department of Justice, «Counterterrorism Section».

<sup>87</sup> Department of Treasury, «Home | Office of Foreign Assets Control».

<sup>88</sup> Office of Foreign Assets Control, «Specially Designated Nationals And Blocked Persons List (SDN) Human Readable Lists».

<sup>89</sup> Department of Homeland Security, «Strategic Planning | Homeland Security».

deploying the military may raise concerns about the potential impact on human rights, could affect diplomatic and trade relations with Mexico, and could even potentially stigmatize certain communities or regions associated with cartel activities.

### ***The logic of contemporary violence in Mexico***

What we are interested in showing in the following paragraphs is, on the one hand, that violence in Mexico is not absolutely irrational and, on the other hand, that it is something different from terrorism. The armed groups that are often hazily confused with "narcos" do not seek to make a revolution, to morally defeat the West, to vindicate a cause they consider just, or to seek independence of their territory from the rest of the country. Nor do they use violence, which can indeed be extremely cruel, primarily to cause terror among the general population. Many localities in Mexico are definitely violent, but we believe that such violence cannot be explained under the logic of terrorism.

In what follows we will summarize recent findings and interpretations of the nature of current violence in Mexico, generally associated in one way or another with organized crime organizations. In this brief exposition we will follow the arguments put forward by researchers who have conducted fieldwork and from this have proposed their reading of the logic of violence in Mexico today. We will mainly follow Le Cour Grandmaison's argument because we consider that it gives a good general overview of the logic of violence in Mexico based on ethnographic work, in addition to the fact that his work dialogues with that of other researchers who inspired this section.<sup>90</sup>

Le Cour argues some suggestive starting points for understanding violence.<sup>91</sup> First, violence, or the threat to use it, is a resource to reach political agreements, not an obstacle that

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<sup>90</sup> Among others, it is worth mentioning Fernando Escalante, Claudio Lomnitz, Natalia Mendoza and other researchers who inspired this section.

<sup>91</sup> In this I follow an article by Le Cour Grandmaison, "Michoacán Es Un Cuarto Oscuro." Another interesting paper is Le Cour Grandmaison, "Los socios turbulentos del Estado: La guerra por la intermediación política en México."

impedes them. Agreements are made between all types of actors, businessmen, politicians, public officials, heads of security institutions and, of course, armed organizations. Second, in line with the above, dichotomous distinctions between armed groups (e.g., legitimate-illegitimate, legal-illegal, etc.) are not relevant for them to be considered as valid interlocutors by public authorities. Third, armed groups may exercise violence in both the public and private spheres; for example, armed groups may use violent practices both to provide public security and for private ends such as controlling territories, controlling legal and illegal trade flows, or assuming political power in a locality. Finally, a key to understanding the violence in Mexico is that the Mexican government at all levels ultimately decides who are the valid interlocutors to negotiate with. One result of this order is that agreements between different groups (e.g., one or more armed groups, state government and federal government) are unstable and temporary.

## Final remark

In the first part of this exercise we showed that the extension/denoting of the concept of narcoterrorism varies among definitions. While some are limited to Mexican cartels, others include in the list of narcoterrorists from political parties to entire countries, passing through terrorist organizations. Narcoterrorism thus has a broad spectrum of referents and the authors have bounded it, as we have seen, each in their own way. As for the intension of the concept, we observed that all the definitions analyzed had at least two attributes: an action, the exercise of violence in particular, and an actor, although there was no consensus on what type of actor. A minimal definition of the concept could then begin with this pair of dimensions that we proposed, describing the type of actor and the actions they perform.

In the second part of the paper, we saw how the cruelty of the violence used by organized crime groups revives from time to time the debate about their classification as terrorist organizations in Mexico and the United States. Then, we listed some of the changes that the designation of cartels as FTOs would have and, finally, we gave an overview of the logic of violence in Mexico. The objective of this sequence of sections was to illustrate that (1) narcoterrorism is a controversial concept even among non-specialists; (2) the potential designation of organized crime groups as terrorist organizations would have not only political but also practical consequences for prosecuting, sanctioning and punishing the actors involved; and, (3) to assert that the concept in question does not fit with the logic of violence in Mexico and, thus, is not a useful concept for understanding the phenomenon and, ultimately, for thinking about public policies as a starting point.

Finally, and as a general observation of this section: we saw that the term narcoterrorism is used discursively to demand stricter measures to prevent, prosecute, punish and sanction drug trafficking and related violence; however, in the implementation of public policies, at least so far, the change in the designation of cartels would be from TCOs to FTOs,

not from TCOs to narcoterrorists. That is, the concept is useful, at least, in public opinion to suggest the nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism, but not to understand, analyze and prosecute.

Now, some of the pending tasks that could arise from the reflections of this work are, first, to propose a minimum definition of narcoterrorism, regardless of its usefulness. Second, precisely, to analyze the appropriateness of the term once it has been properly defined. Thirdly, it is necessary to deepen the section in which we make the bridge between the controversy surrounding the concept and public policies. On this point, surely the experience of those who analyze and implement sanctions would prove valuable, as would the literature on counterterrorism and criminal policy. Judging from the current political landscape between Mexico and the United States, it seems that the concept will continue to be used, so we can affirm that the pending tasks we propose are relevant.

## Appendix I: Sartori's rules<sup>92</sup>

*Rule 1:* Of any empirical concept always, and separately, check (1) whether it is ambiguous, that is, how the meaning relates to the term; and (2) whether it is vague, that is, how the meaning relates to the referent.

*Rule 2a:* Always check (1) whether the key terms (the designator of the concept and the entailed terms) are defined; (2) whether the meaning declared by their definition is unambiguous; and (3) whether the declared meaning remains, throughout the argument, unchanged (i.e., consistent).

*Rule 2b:* Always check whether the key terms are used univocally and consistently in the declared meaning.

*Rule 3a:* Awaiting contrary proof, no word should be used as a synonym for another word.

*Rule 3b:* With respect to stipulating synonymities, the burden of proof is reversed: what requires demonstration is that by attributing different meanings to different words we create a distinction of no consequence.

*Rule 4:* In reconstructing a concept, first collect a representative set of definitions; second, extract their characteristics; and third, construct matrixes that organize such characteristics meaningfully.

*Rule 5:* With respect to the extension of a concept, always assess (1) its degree of boundlessness, and (2) its degree of denotative discrimination vis-a-vis its membership.

*Rule 6:* The boundlessness of a concept is remedied by increasing the number of its properties; and its discriminating adequacy is improved as additional properties are entered.

*Rule 7:* The connotation and the denotation of a concept are inversely related.

*Rule 8:* In selecting the term that designates the concept, always relate to and control with the semantic field to which the term belongs—that is, the set of associated, neighboring words.

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<sup>92</sup> Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis," 102–27.

*Rule 9:* If the term that designates the concept unsettles the semantic field (to which the term belongs), then justify your selection by showing that (1) no field meaning is lost, and (2) ambiguity is not increased by being transferred into the rest of the field set.

*Rule 10:* Make sure that the definiens of a concept is adequate and parsimonious: adequate in that it contains enough characteristics to identify the referents and their boundaries; parsimonious in that no accompanying property is included among the necessary, defining properties.

## Appendix II: Gerring's rules<sup>93</sup>

1. Familiarity: the degree to which a concept is intuitive or the community within the discipline is related. Sometimes terms can be confusing because of their ordinary meanings, and it is necessary to create new ones; this requires justification.
2. Resonance: The potential for a concept to be remembered or 'click' with a specialist audience.
3. Parsimony: How many attributes it has. The rule is simple, keep only the necessary characteristics.
4. Coherence: The extent to which the attributes define the concept (intension/connotation) and the phenomena it covers are related.
5. External Differentiation: Depends on the internal coherence of the concept; it allows to differentiate it from others, i.e., to identify what it is not. Ultimately it helps to avoid concept stretching and to operationalize it properly.
6. Depth: How efficient the concept is in grouping the characteristics shared by the objects. The more characteristics the referents share, the greater the depth of the term.
7. Theoretical Utility: The extent to which the concept helps in the development of theories.
8. Field Utility: How proper the term is within the field and with respect to similar or close concepts.

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<sup>93</sup> Gerring, "What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences," 368–84.



## Appendix III: Narcoterrorism definitions<sup>94</sup>

1. **Combs & Slann:** “Narcoterrorism is the alliance between drug producers and an insurgent group carrying out terrorist acts.[..]While the ultimate ends sought by each group are usually different, the alliance offers them immediate benefits. The members of these alliances—the coca growers, drug traffickers, and terrorist groups—often share common goals. These include, but are not limited to, the destabilization of the government, the creation of discipline (for market purposes) among growers, and liberation from the meddling of the police and military. Mutual needs make the pursuit of these goals beneficial in some respects to all involved.”<sup>95</sup>
2. **Ehrenfeld:** “The use of drug trafficking to advance the objectives of certain governments and terrorist organizations.”<sup>96</sup>
3. **Martin:** “Political violence committed by dissident drug traffickers who are primarily concerned with protecting their criminal enterprise.”<sup>97</sup>
4. **Napoleoni:** “Use of terror tactics by the narco-traffickers and drug lords to protect their illegal businesses. It also describes the alliance between drug lords and armed organisations. Both have interests in destabilising governments and breaking down the established social order.”<sup>98</sup>
5. **Shafritz et al:** “1. A concept that attempts to link international terrorism and international drug trafficking as parallel “industries” which interact synergistically.(...) 2. Acts of terrorism perpetrated by drug kingpins and dealers in order to intimidate and neutralize anti-drug legislation and government and private anti-drug campaigns.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The first twelve definitions were collected first by Schmid, “Links between Terrorism and Drug Trafficking: A Case of ‘Narco-Terrorism’?,” 12–14.

<sup>95</sup> Combs and Slann, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 191.

<sup>96</sup> Ehrenfeld, *Narco Terrorism*, 89: xiii.

<sup>97</sup> Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, 322.

<sup>98</sup> Napoleoni, *Modern Jihad*, 229.

<sup>99</sup> Shafritz, Gibbons, and Scott, *Almanac of Modern Terrorism*, 185.

6. **Petrakis:** "...the involvement of terrorist organisations and insurgent groups in the trafficking of narcotics (...) there are three main variants of narcoterrorism. These include: 1. Insurgents using the drug trade to support their political objectives; 2. States sponsoring 'drugs for arms' and narcotics operations to further their influence to create instability; and 3. Dope dealers utilizing terrorist tactics like bombings, assassinations and kidnappings to enhance their profits."<sup>100</sup>
7. **Sawant:** "Use of organised terror to secure control over a state or states by another state or organised criminal network/s or by insurgents or by a combination of any or all of them to achieve fixed political, economic or social objectives based on organisational and financial empowerment through drug trafficking."<sup>101</sup>
8. **Schweitzer:** Narcoguerrillas/ narcoterrorists are "terrorists who take a slice of the drug profits in return for promoting violent intimidation of government officials and multinational companies."<sup>102</sup>
9. **Simon:** "[A] special brand of terrorism, since although the tactics are similar to traditional terrorism—threats, assassinations, bombings, kidnappings—the motivations and resources are different. There are no ideological or nationalist goals, nor are there ethnic-religious or separatist causes for the violence. Rather, it is the pursuit of money and power that drives the drug lords to attack all who try to stop them. Since they do not have any political constituency to worry about, they see no limits to their violence."<sup>103</sup>
10. **Thamm:** "[T]he combination of criminal professionalism with the readiness of terrorists to use violence, is essentially indifferent in the choice of potential victims. The aim

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<sup>100</sup> Petrakis, "Organised Crime and the Financing of Terrorist and Guerrilla Movements," 119–20.

<sup>101</sup> Sawant, "The Growing Menace of Narcoterrorism in Asia," 347.

<sup>102</sup> Schweitzer and Dorsch, *Superterrorism. Assassins, Mobsters, and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 166–67.

<sup>103</sup> Simon, *The Terrorist Trap*, 331.

of this ‘new form of terrorism’ is, broadly speaking, that of ‘terrorist extortion for the purpose of gaining an advantage’. The principal forms of symbiotic terrorism are ‘cyberterrorism’ and ‘narcoterrorism’.”<sup>104</sup>

**11. US Drug Enforcement Agency:** “a subset of terrorism, in which terrorist groups, or associated individuals, participate directly or indirectly in the cultivation, manufacture, transportation, or distribution of controlled substances and the monies derived from these activities. Further, narco-terrorism may be characterized by the participation of groups or associated individuals in taxing, providing security for, or otherwise aiding or abetting drug trafficking endeavours in an effort to further, or fund, terrorist activities.”<sup>105</sup>

**12. Wardlaw:** “‘Narcoterrorism’ is a catchword of some contemporary currency. It is a word pregnant with implication. In the contexts in which it is used, it often implies a conspiracy with strategic as well as tactical goals. It implies a new kind of threat, different in both type and degree from that posed by either drug trafficking or political terrorism alone. Increasingly, it is viewed as a global phenomenon, which can be conceptualised in the same terms wherever it occurs. ‘Narcoterrorism’ has emerged as a potent weapon in the propaganda war waged by governments against terrorists, insurgents, organised crime, drug traffickers, and even other sovereign states”<sup>106</sup>

**13. Campbell and Hansen:** “(a) narco-terror as a struggle for regional political control; (b) narco-terror as a practice ordered by cartel leaders rather than spontaneous violence of foot soldiers; and (c) narco-terror as an expansion strategy from solely drug trafficking to other kinds of organized crime.”<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Thamm, “The Nexus between Arms Trade, Drugs and Terrorism,” 111.

<sup>105</sup> “Congressional Testimony to the Narco-Terror: The Worldwide Connection Between Drugs and Terror,” 10.

<sup>106</sup> Wardlaw, “Linkages Between the Illegal Drugs Traffic and Terrorism,” 29.

<sup>107</sup> Campbell and Hansen, “Is Narco-Violence in Mexico Terrorism?,” 158.

**14. Jonas Hartelius:** “as part of an illegal complex of drugs, violence and power, where the illegal drug trade and the illegal exercise of power have become aggregated in such a way that they threaten democracy and the rule of law.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Hartelius, “Narcoterrorism,” 3.

## Appendix IV: Referents

Table 3. Referents in the definitions

Author(s)	Term in our classification for table 1	Actors in the definitions	Referents use by the authors
Campbell & Hansen	Criminal organizations	Cartels	Gulf Cartel, Zetas, Sinaloa Cartel, La Familia Michoacana, Juárez Cartel
Combs & Slann	Criminal organizations, Terrorist, and insurgents	Drug producers, insurgent groups, drug traffickers, terrorist groups	Sendero Luminoso (SL), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
Ehrenfeld	States and terrorist	Governments and terrorist organizations	Governments from Cuba, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Peru, Syria, and Bolivia; Colombian and Nicaraguan guerrillas; Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
Martin	Criminal organizations	Drug Traffickers	Mexican and Colombian Cartels
Napoleoni	Criminal organizations	Narco-traffickers, drug lords, armed organizations,	FARC, Movimiento 19 Abril (M19), SL
Petrakis	Criminal organizations, States, Terrorist, Insurgents	Terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, states, dope dealers	
Sawant	Criminal organizations, States, Insurgents	States, organized criminal network, insurgents	
Schweitzer	Terrorist, Insurgents	Terrorist, narcoguerrillas	Medellin and Cali Cartels, SL, Hizballah, Tamil Tigers, Russia mafia groups, FARC, National Liberation Army (ELN)
Shafritz	Criminal organizations, Terrorist	Terrorism, Drug kingpins and dealers	
Simon	Criminal organizations	Drug lords	M19, Medellin Cartel, PLO, Hizballah
Thamm	Terrorist	Terrorist	

Author(s)	Term in our classification for table 1	Actors in the definitions	Referents use by the authors
Wardlaw	Criminal organizations, States, Terrorist, Insurgents	Terrorists, insurgents, organized crime, drug traffickers, states	Bulgaria, Nicaragua, Cuba, FARC, M19, Urban Insurrection Front, SL, Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Burmese Communist Party (BCP), Ka Kwei Yei, Dev-Sol

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