

## Narco-Campaigns Y and Their Impact in the Electoral System and Government Regime: An Analysis of the Mexican Case

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### Abstract

The article conceptualizes and typifies the narco election campaigns in the light of the experience of the Mexican case. Similarly, it is analyzing the harmful effects that such campaigns generated in the electoral system and the system of government. It is concluded that the narco electoral campaigns jeopardize the future of the fledgling Mexican democracy and contribute greatly to the foundation of what could degenerate into a narco-state or state Mafia.

**Keywords** Narco election campaign; Electoral systems; Government systems; Mexico; Democracy; State and narco mafia state

### Introduction

Electoral narco-campaigns in Latin America date from the seventies in the Twentieth Century,<sup>1</sup> when international drug trafficking networks were created in the area and drug dealer groups started influencing the decision of the political power. It was not until the eighties, however, when the region initiated the process of transitioning to democracy, that electoral narco-campaigns became more frequent.

A narco-campaign is an illegal activity whereby a certain political party or coalition and candidates intend to obtain an unlawful advantage<sup>2</sup> to defeat their competitors in an electoral process and thus become elected to a public office.

Electoral narco-campaigns have become increasingly frequent in Latin America in the past few years. A well known example of this type of campaigns is the one led by Pablo Escobar Gaviria in Colombia in the early eighties. Today we find many different examples of electoral narco-campaigns in the region, some of which use more sophisticated, discrete and less visible for voters; other, not so much.

In the case of Mexico, Gooternber (2008) states, for instance, that in the times of the one-party system when Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) prevailed in the domestic politics arena,<sup>3</sup>

partnerships were created between the politicians and drug trafficking groups to allow the transfer of drugs from South America to the United States of America. It was then that drug dealing and electoral narco-campaigns, appeared as a repeated phenomenon in most Latin American countries [1].

According to Edgardo Buscaglia, today in 55 to 65 per cent of electoral campaigns, candidates to government positions at the different levels and instances of government in Mexico are infiltrated by drug dealing organizations, and many of them receive money from organized crime.<sup>4</sup>

The article conceptualizes and typifies the narco-election campaigns in the light of the experience of the Mexican case. Similarly, it analyzes their harmful effects in the electoral system and government regime under democratic systems.

The main purpose of this article is to describe, conceptualize and categorize narco-campaigns, and review their harmful effects and consequences in the electoral system and government regime. This is a descriptive study considered within a qualitative approach and case study.<sup>5</sup>

The paper is organized in five different parts. In the first part a description is made of electoral campaigns, particularly narco-campaigns. In the second part, narco-campaigns are categorized. In the third part, a description is made of the electoral system and government regime prevailing in Mexico. In the fourth part, a description is made of the effects and consequences of narco-

<sup>1</sup> According to Paul Gooternber (2008), the cocaine trafficking phenomenon started in Peru and Bolivia in 1947. When the United States of America made drug trafficking a criminal offense by the end of the Sixties in the context of the so called "Cold War", international drug dealer networks were created (El nacimiento de los Narcos: Los primeros flujos ilícitos de la cocaína en las Américas 1947-1964).

<sup>2</sup> Vote purchase and coercion mainly accomplished through funding and logistic support provided by criminal groups.

<sup>3</sup> PRI was founded as Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) in 1929 and governed Mexico since its foundation up to the year 2000 when the first political alternation occurred and Vicente Fox Quesada from PAN was elected president. In 2012, PRI got back to power by majority in the presidential elections in July that year; PRI also obtained the highest number of seats in the two-chamber Congress.

<sup>4</sup> See MVS News at <http://www.noticiasmvs.com/#!/noticias/mas-del-55--de-campanas-y-candidatos-en-mexico-esta-quin-infiltrados-por-el-narco-buscaglia-358.html>. Date of consultation: April 21st, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Since obtaining information directly and performing field studies is extremely difficult, this research work was based largely on journalistic works.

campaigns in electoral system and government regime. Finally, as a conclusion, some additional comments.

### Electoral Narco-Campaign Concept

First, the term campaign was used in the military arena to refer to a collective or crossed action aimed at attaining a military objective. Then it was used in the political and electoral arenas to refer to persuasion activities aimed at obtaining the votes of citizens. Today electoral campaigns are proselyting efforts oriented not only at obtaining votes, but taking votes from the competitors or adversaries.

Electoral campaigns are intensive processes involving research, communication, proselytism, organization, mobilization, vote attraction and defense engaged by parties, candidates and supporters in search for public representation spaces. Electoral campaigns also include persuasive efforts aimed at voters to prevent a victory of the opposing parties. This means that any campaign includes a vote-attraction front, and an adversary vote repulsion front [2].

In all electoral campaigns parties have to provide powerful and sufficient reasons – besides moving feelings and emotions – for citizens to vote for them; they also should provide enough reason for citizens refrain to vote for the competing parties. These wooing, persuading, revailing and attacking drills require human, material, technological and economic resources.

A narco-campaign is conceptualized as a set of illegal support (namely financial) actions arranged by individuals or organizations linked to drug trafficking to benefit a certain political party and/or candidate to an elected office during the internal<sup>6</sup> or constitutional election. A narco-campaign may also be defined as proselytistic actions to persuade citizens to vote for a political option and/or the intimidation of citizens and/or opposing candidates by individuals or organizations linked to drug trafficking activities. And all this with the main purpose of getting a certain political party and/or candidate to win the election and then have a say in the future development of the political power in a determined geographical location or electoral district.

Any narco-campaign has two fronts: one is to provide support to the parties that advocate or represent the interests of a certain group or coalition of criminal groups; the other is to attack any candidates and parties that may jeopardize the interest and security of the drug lords.

In brief, a narco-campaign is any electoral campaign receiving direct or indirect resources and benefits from individuals or organizations engaged in drug trafficking with the aim of obtaining the highest amount of votes in order to win and thus continue or increase their illegal businesses; receive protection and impunity for the drug traffickers and their families [3].

### Typology of Electoral Narco-campaigns

Electoral narco-campaigns may be categorized in different manners. For instance, based on the degree of discretion of supports and relations, narco-campaigns may be categorized as open or undercover. In open campaigns, drug traffickers openly support the parties or candidates running for an office; or candidates are either drug traffickers themselves or expressly represent the interests of such criminal groups. In undercover campaigns supports and relations are kept under the highest discretion, secrecy and confidentiality both by the drug traffickers and the leaders of the political parties and their candidates.

Based on the territory covered, narco-campaigns may be categorized in municipal, district, state or provincial and national – in accordance to the electoral division applicable: municipality; district, state province or department, and nation or country.

Considering the type or relation established and the degree of involvement of criminal groups in the electoral processes at a determined space and time, narco-campaigns may be classified as first, second or third generation campaigns.

In a first generation narco-campaign, a drug trafficker is nominated candidate to an elected office to obtain or maintain status or impunity; increase power; obtain privileges; or influence decision making in order to protect their interests and businesses. This means that a person engaged in the illegal trafficking of narcotics aims at being elected to a public office for impunity and power.

An example of first generation narco-campaign was the nomination of Pablo Escobar Gaviria, head of the Medellín Cartel as substitute candidate to the Congress of the Republic of Colombia for the Department of Antioquia in 1982. Another example is the nomination of Jose Luis Abarca by Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in 2012 for Mayor of Iguala, in the state of Guerrero, Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

In a second generation narco-campaigns the candidate is not a drug trafficker himself, but is supported during the electoral process by individuals or organizations engaged in drug trafficking, and accepts the conditions set forth and the benefits provided by those individuals and groups to get him elected [4].

An example of second generation narco-campaigns include the campaign of PRI candidate Mario Villanueva Madrid between 1994 and 1999, who was elected governor of Quintana Roo, a state in South-West Mexico. Villanueva plead guilty of drug trafficking before a court in Nueva York and became the highest-ranked Mexican public official ever prosecuted and extradited to the United States of America.<sup>8</sup> Hundreds of second-generation campaigns have occurred in Latin America. Only in Peru, in August of 2014, 124 candidates were investigated and prosecuted as a result of their links to drug trafficking

<sup>6</sup> This means that a narco-campaign may also exist within the processes followed by a party to nominate its candidates to elected offices in a democratic system. These types of campaigns may be described as “a combination of actions and resources used by drug trafficking groups during the internal electoral process to have an individual that represents and advocates for their interests nominated to an elected office.

<sup>7</sup> Abarca was considered the leader of a drug trafficker group called “Guerreros Unidos”, and was accused with his wife, María de los Angeles Pineda Villa, of being responsible for the disappearance of 43 students from rural Teacher’s School Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa Guerrero, and the death of other six individuals. This happened by the end of September of 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Villanueva pleaded guilty of conspiring to wash millions of Dollars from the Juarez Cartel lead by the Carillo Fuentes brothers through Banks in United States and other countries. Villanueva obtained the money after reaching an agreement with the criminal group to transfer tons of cocaine from South America through the state of Quintana Roo.

by the National Elections Jury (JNE) and the Home Minister at the time, Daniel Urresti.<sup>9</sup>

Second generation narco-campaigns are more frequent although in Mexico, several first-generation campaigns have taken place in the past years, like the case of Iguala Guerrero with Jose Luis Abarca, and Tamaulipas with Tomas Jesus Yarrington Ruvalcaba in 1999.<sup>10</sup>

In third generation electoral narco-campaigns individuals and organizations engaged in drug trafficking become involved in the political process of a certain electoral district in a direct, indirect or veiled way by murdering opposition candidates or filling people with fear from the high rates of violence<sup>11</sup> aimed at the population<sup>12</sup> and/or supporters of competing candidates; or by creating “artificial peace” to favor and make their political choice win; or increasing the rates of violence and conflict within a determined time and space in order to make opposing candidates lose.

In this type of campaigns, candidates to an elected office are not drug traffickers or receive any support or funds from criminal groups for their campaigns. However, drug traffickers’ actions or omissions in the electoral context foster or discourage some choices. This means that what they do or not do makes possible for a certain candidate or party – those who serve their interests better – to win the election.<sup>13</sup>

This type of campaigns is common in Mexico, although most of the constituency is not aware of them because of their discretion; and also because a scenario of high rates of insecurity and criminal violence provides a series of both advantages and disadvantages for the contending parties and candidates, as from the political standpoint a fearful society is easily manipulated.

For instance, the narco-blockades and organized crime attacks, such as the one occurred in Guadalajara, Jalisco, on May 1st, 2015, including shootings in the streets, blocking of avenues, burning of gas stations and banks, shooting down a helicopter of the army, and intentional burning of trucks, buses and private cars,<sup>14</sup> produced effects including anxiety crisis, post-traumatic stress, uneasiness and

fear among the population. When a “terror atmosphere” results from such actions, and criminals confront the authorities or state security forces on the street, the population normally withdraws and disperses, panics and some individuals experience shortness of breath and extreme fear.<sup>15</sup> Narco-terror makes the behavior of the population easy to manipulate and predict.

In brief, an environment of increased public insecurity and crime-related violence lays out the conditions for someone to win/lose the constitutional elections.<sup>16</sup>

## The Electoral System and Government Regime in Mexico

An electoral system is a set of means whereby the will of constituents turns into government organs or public representation (Valdez Zurita, 2001). Electoral system refers to the components or variables of the rules of the game- which have a critical political impact and allow for the empirical analysis and assessment of the efficiency of the rules that regulate the run (García Díez).

In fact, electoral systems set the rules that govern the process that turns votes into parliamentary seats (Nohlen, 2004) in accordance to the type of government system (parliamentary, semi-parliamentary or presidential).

In Mexico, the electoral system includes electoral the National Electoral Institute (INE) and the Electoral Court of the Judicial Branch of the Federation (TRIFE); state institutes, councils and courts; the regulation framework that includes the Constitution of the Mexican Republic and the constitutions of the states, federal and state electoral laws, and their regulations; the parties and national and state political organizations and candidates; and citizens – both as constituents and contenders to a public elected office.

This means that the Mexican electoral system is made up by a series of institutions, laws and individuals that take part in electoral

<sup>9</sup> See “Puno: ocho candidatos investigados y sentenciados por narcotráfico” at Consultation date: April 20, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Tomás Yarrington was the mayor of Matamoros from 1993 to 1995, and governor of the State of Tamaulipas from 1999 to 2004. In year 2012 Yarrington was accused in the United States of America for offenses related to organized crime and financial offenses. Up to the date of preparation hereof, Yarrington was a fugitive.

<sup>11</sup> The Attorney General’s Office estimates that from 2006 to this date 100 thousand people have been murdered in Mexico and at least 26 thousand have been kidnaped or disappeared as a result of crime-related violence.

<sup>12</sup> The main advantages resulting from an insecurity context include: enhanced media visibility of government leaders; favorable to candidates with a profile linked to firmness and force; the ruling parties may present themselves as a solution and not part of the problem. Main disadvantages include: result in frustration and votes against the ruling party as a punishment by angry voters. It produces fear and uneasiness among a major part of constituency.

<sup>13</sup> This type of campaigns creates favorable or unfavorable conditions, as applicable. And the specific context and circumstances of the election for a certain political option – construed by drug traffickers as beneficial or least inconvenient for their interests – to win an election and, consequently, make the political choices opposing their interests lose.

<sup>14</sup> The official balance of this terrorist acts was: 39 blockades on avenues in several cities in Jalisco including Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta and Ciudad Guzmán, 4 confrontations, 10 casualties, and the shutdown of a helicopter of the National Defense Secretariat.

<sup>15</sup> In Guatemala, Otto Pérez Medina (retired soldier and expert in anti-guerilla activities) and Manuel Baldizón (hotel business owner) were the two most competitive president candidates in the election of 2011. Both promised to be tough on crime and drug cartels, and reinstate the death penalty. They also promised to get the armed forces onto the streets to fight insecurity or create a civil guard. Otto Pérez was dubbed “strong hand”, and a fist was used as emblem by his party with the aim to send a message of firmness and character. In fact, Perez was the first member of the military to get to power since 1986 in Guatemala – the year when democracy got reinstated and the army went back to their headquarters. As a candidate, Perez promised also to push stricter laws against offenders and organized crime.

<sup>16</sup> High rates of insecurity produce much anguish, fear and uneasiness among the people. Drug traffickers use such situation to favor parties and groups linked to their interests.

processes, who greatly influence the character of public representation at national, state and municipal instances [5].

The government regime, on the other hand, is the form in which each republic or State lays out its political representation and establishes relations among its government institutions (Hurtado, 2002). This means that a government regime is a model of organization of the constitutional power implemented by a State based on the relationship existing between the different branches (Nohlen 1998). It is the way the power is organized by a State and the way such power is exercised (Planas, 1997).

In Mexico, the government regime includes the political party system and the electoral system; the set of government institutions (federal, state and municipal), and the branches of power (executive, legislative and judicial).

### The Impact of Electoral Narco-campaigns

Electoral narco-campaigns impact not only the electoral system by determining, for instance, the character of public representation and public powers at the different levels, but the way government institutions organize and operate.

Particularly, drug traffickers influence or create distortions in the electoral system as described hereunder:

One - By providing support and funding, they strengthen or weaken the political parties running for an office, as applicable, thus increasing or reducing their possibilities to win the offices at stake.

Two - Due to the supports provided, namely monetary, narco-campaigns affect enormously the constitutional principle of equity in the electoral battlefield by providing competitive advantages to one of the contenders.

Three - Electoral narco-campaigns, distort the nature of public representation and introduce artificial elements in the electoral process. Thus, the winners are not usually the contenders with the highest rate of people's support but those supported by criminal groups.

Four - As long as they purchase wills and co-opt part of the constituency, narco-campaigns tarnish citizenry – for citizens decide upon their involvement in the election and their vote not based on political considerations such as the ideology, proposals and platforms of a party; candidate profile or project, but other kind of considerations.

Five - Narco-campaigns affect the principles of independence and impartiality of the electoral organs and authorities for their corrupting power warps not only citizens but the referees of the competition by moving them away from the principles of autonomy, impartiality and integrity of electoral authorities typical of democratic systems.

Six - Narco-campaigns distort the principle of freedom of press and consciousness as many times the money of drug traffickers is used to pay some media or journalists to manipulate news and informational guidelines and favor the interests of criminal groups. Hence, the level of public debate and the quality and coverage of the electoral process is negatively affected.

Seven - Electoral narco-campaigns keep “independent” constituents away from the ballots by generating fear and mistrust on the process, thus increasing the rate of abstentionism.

Eight - Electoral narco-campaigns reduce the credibility of electoral processes and institutions and foster the mistrust of the population thereby bringing discredit on electoral processes and institutions and affecting their reputation and public image.

Nine - Electoral narco-campaigns have an impact on the political culture of broad social sectors and take them away of the principles of a democratic and plural society that respects rule of law.

Ten - Electoral narco-campaigns affect the level of institutionalization of political parties as well as the very electoral system as they usually support a system where celebrity politics prevail over institutional politics.

Eleven - When made known to the public opinion, narco-campaigns generate various degrees of scandal and public shame affecting the rates of credibility of the electoral processes and institutions, and the public representation principle (representative democracy); and their acceptance by the constituents.

Twelve - Sometimes, electoral narco-campaigns terrify, intimidate and attack<sup>17</sup> any candidates and parties opposing their criminal agenda. Some candidates decline their nominations<sup>18</sup> affecting the level of political competition and the political rights of part of the constituents.<sup>19</sup>

Electoral narco-campaigns weaken and distort the modern democratic systems turning the public representation system into something artificial, and distorting the people's willpower.

The injurious effects of successful electoral narco-campaigns on government regimes, when able to get drug-trafficking related candidates to power include:

One - The credibility of government institutions and actors is affected as candidates get to power through illegal and unlawful means.

Two - A series of shady commitments and agreements is established between the authorities and criminal groups that distort and pervert the nature of public representation and the professional ethics of government officials.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Ulises Fabián Quiroz, candidate of PRI to the mayor's office in Chilapa, state of Guerrero, was murdered on May 1st, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Since 2009 to this date, hundreds of individuals have declined or resigned offers to run for mayor, councilor, municipal representative and local representative offices in the states of Michoacan, Guerrero and Tamaulipas as a result of repeated threats by drug traffickers. Opposing parties have been most affected by this situation.

<sup>19</sup> In the past decades in Mexico, hundreds of candidates and pre-candidates have been murdered or harassed by the organized crime. Most notorious cases include the kidnaping and brutal murder (beheading) of Aide Nava Gonzalez, pre-candidate of Partido de la Revolución democrática (PRD) to the mayor's office of Ahuacacotzingo in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, by a group of drug traffickers in March of 2015. Previously, her husband had been murdered and one of her children had been kidnapped (he is still construed as disappeared).



Three - Government officials are hands tied and corrupted because criminal groups usually demand protection and impunity in return for the favors granted during the electoral process.

Four - The constitutional rule of law is busted down as government authorities are put under different types of pressure through different means to favor or take care of the criminal agenda.

Five - In some cases, the legal systems of a nation are modified to favor the agenda of criminal groups, grant those licenses and privileges, or reduce punishment and penalties established in the law applicable to their offenses.

Six - A higher level of violence and increased traffic of narcotics are attained as the shady agreements block the actions of the authorities against criminal groups and their businesses.

Seven - The efficiency of government agencies is impacted, namely del public safety, as criminal groups get their own members or related individuals to manage such agencies in order to protect their interests and avoid the arrest and punishment of criminals.

Eight - The balance and relations among the different branches of power – typical of democratic systems - is distorted; government relations are affected, artificially managed and twisted.

Nine - Government institutions, rulers and public officials become discredited, deteriorated and corrupted; the image and social perception of the institutions of the republic gets ruined.

Ten - Governability and government official legitimacy deteriorate as the level of conflict and criminal violence and the efficiency of institutions (namely security) decreases in the perception of public opinion; and institutions are ineffective in the control of order and preservation of peace and social calm.

In brief, when elected government officials take office through electoral narco-campaigns, different types and degrees of damage, distortion, harm and discredit are inflicted both to the institutions of the republic and government officials that affect the trust of citizenry in government institutions.

## Conclusion

Electoral narco-campaigns are part of the everyday reality in several countries in Latin America whose democracies are just emerging. The story of narco-campaigns starts with the criminalization of narcotics (namely cocaine) by the United States of America after II World War (1940-48) and the incorporation of international drug trafficking networks as of the mid-sixties. This type of campaigns did not become main stream in the region until the transition to democracy in the eighties of the twentieth century.

In Mexico, the first electoral narco-campaigns were fostered since the seventies when the narcotic business finally got established in the country namely as an operations headquarter for the trafficking of drugs from South America to the United States of America. Today, electoral narco-campaigns are still present in the political life of Mexico.

This type of campaigns affects negatively the government, electoral and political party systems, and the organization of power of the Mexican State, and the way in which such power is exercised. The quality of democracy, the institutions of the republic (specially those related to public security) and undermine the credibility of the political system and government leaders, and the trust of constituency.

It is safe to say that electoral narco-campaigns are the embryos of mob states as it is during such campaigns that commitments and covenants are established between criminals and politicians that lead to the distortions, abuses, and excesses typical of narco states.<sup>20</sup> Hence the importance of studying and analyzing the effects and risks of this type of campaigns on modern democracies.

Moreover, when successful, electoral narco-campaigns get to power individuals unprincipled, indecent individuals that jeopardize not only the security of opposing politicians and citizenry at large, but the very own democratic system. The most significant risk it that the evolving of the emerging Mexican democracy towards a “simulated dictatorship”, where the corrupting power of the drug-trafficking money consumes and damages still more the different institutions of the republic.

Hence the need to stop immediately this type of shady deals in order to prevent this cancer to undermine and destroy the incipient Mexican democracy; to block the instauration of a narco-democracy where the political contest is not among different political parties and candidates proposing alternative nation projects, but groups of drug traffickers that use the parties as letterheads to defend their own agenda and illegal businesses.

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<sup>20</sup> The kidnapping and murdering of 43 students from rural Teacher’s School Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero on September of 2014, which generated an international scandal that affected the image of Mexico resulted from a narco-campaign. As a result of the success of the narco-campaign, José Luis Abarca gained power and impunity as mayor of Iguala, Guerrero – now in jail as main responsible for the murders and disappearance of the students.