

Silenced Voices: The Role of State Corruption in Perpetuating Femicide

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Femicide has plagued Mexico for decades, serving as a testament to the country's intersecting challenges of corruption, over militarization, gender inequality, and organized crime that afflict the country. This thesis serves to address the various factors that perpetuate femicide. Through a case study analysis this research explores the ways in which systemic corruption within governmental institutions creates a system of impunity that is conducive to violence, specifically gender-based violence. This thesis gives a close examination to the President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's militarized approach to combat organized crime and its effect on femicides throughout the state. Through a critical analysis of this approach, this study finds how organized crime has been the country's scapegoat for gender-based violence, and the "War on Drugs" approach has not been effective in addressing femicide and has only exacerbated the situation. This thesis aims to highlight that a comprehensive reform in Mexico is needed within its government. In order to adequately address femicide and gender-based violence, there needs to be urgent change. Through an approach that prioritizes dismantling corruption, Mexico can break through generations of oppression that has been bestowed upon on women for decades.

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Introduction

Esmeralda was 14 years old when she went missing on May 19th, 2009. She was last seen around the city center in Juarez in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Her usual route to her high school consisted of taking two buses, but she never made it to school that day. When her family reported her missing to the authorities, their concerns were not taken seriously, and Esmeralda's disappearance was not investigated. 15 years later, her family still seeks justice and answers for Esmeralda. Maria de Jesus Jaimes Zamudio was killed in 2016 and has yet to get justice. Miriam Elizabeth Rodriguez Martinez was killed in 2017, because of her fight for justice for her daughter Karen Alejandra Salinas Rodriguez. All women taken too soon, with their loved ones having to put immense pressure on authorities to get any type of attention to their cases. The state of Mexico has formally recognized its ongoing crisis of femicide in 2012, after years of public outcry. Femicide has been taking place in Mexico long before 2012, with hundreds of women going missing in the 90s in Ciudad Juarez, in Chihuahua, Mexico. Femicide is a type of gender-based violence in which women are murdered because of their gender. The victims are usually subjected to extreme violence and often endure sexual assault, torture, and more. Mexico has been unable to overcome their history of femicide and violence against women; there is an unreasonably high number of women who go missing or are killed and uncovering the root causes is crucial for developing effective policies to prevent these killings.

There is already a culture of fear for women that has manifested itself in the state of Mexico and has affected many communities. This thesis seeks to explore the complicated variables that have been driving the epidemic of femicide by closely examining Mexican society. Although there are several existing theories, this study focuses on a widespread but frequently overlooked culprit: corruption within the government. The relationship between the rising rates of femicide and government corruption is a clear indication of how justice is diminishing in Mexican society. The goal of this thesis is to unveil the structural

flaws that support this violence against women and discover what paves the road for substantive change. Using multidisciplinary studies and three individual cases, this thesis aims to hear the numerous women whose voices have been silenced by femicide. This research is essential because there is a human rights violation occurring when women are intentionally targeted solely because of their gender. Confronting femicide is necessary to establish gender equality and protecting people's rights. This research aims to explain the social, political, and cultural factors that contribute to the widespread presence of femicide in Mexico. Previous scholars have looked at this topic by focusing on gender inequality in Mexico and how that contributes to femicide. This thesis is an important extension and contribution because it takes an integrative approach by assessing more than one factor that could be contributing to the gender-based violence.

The cases I will examine provide crucial information into how Mexico's government fosters a culture of impunity, protection of public figures, and the normalization of violence against women. This thesis proposes two questions regarding the femicide in Mexico, first, how do issues with law enforcement, gender inequality, and organized crime contribute to the widespread presence of femicide in Mexico. A lot of crimes against women in Mexico go unpunished and these injustices for women is because of Mexico's weak law enforcement and lack of investigations into these femicides all together. Examining the problem with law enforcement closely could be crucial to identify policies and social interventions that could prevent femicide and lower their rates of violence of against women. Gender inequality can be attributed to the cultural machismo in the state. This cultural norm promotes the ideology of male dominance over women. This cultural practice can encourage men to feel entitled and normalizes violence against women. Gender inequality also leads to domestic violence encounters in Mexico. There is a long history of femicide in the country, which continues on, therefore all of the interconnected factors contribute to the prevalence of the gender-based

violence today. The second question is how can legal reforms and gender equality initiatives at the national and local levels impact efforts to prevent and address type of violence against women. Femicide continues in Mexico because of the gender roles, societal norms, and lack of government interference. This research aims to explore all of the stated factors of femicide in Mexico.

This thesis is explanatory research of comparative politics. This thesis argues that the cultural, political, and social factors that contribute to the high rates of femicide in Mexico are the organized crime, gender inequality, and problems with law enforcement. As of today, women who are in domestic violence situations have very little resources, and the ones that are there are not widespread. Violence against women is seen as a natural part of interpersonal relationships in some parts of Mexican society. This may appear as physical abuse, emotional exploitation, or domineering conduct. Cultural beliefs and traditional gender roles have an impact on the normalization of violence. This project will use multiple case studies that intricately investigate the organized crime, drawbacks in law enforcement, and their deeply ingrained societal norms of violence against women in Mexico and their role in femicide. This thesis will uncover social and political interventions that can address this violence as well. Understanding the root causes of femicide in Mexico is paramount in the creation of a society that is a fairer tomorrow than it is today. The social and political interventions have the potential to combat violence and challenge the cultural norms of Mexico. This thesis will be exploring the ways to effectively intervene in Mexico's longstanding issue of femicide.

Literature Review

I have explained the concept of femicide and its alarming presence in Mexico as well defined the purpose of this thesis, which is to research the social and political causes of femicide in Mexico. I will be looking at specific aspects like gender inequality, organized crime, and issues in law enforcement, while analyzing which interventions are best suited to combat this multifaceted issue.

I will now conduct an extensive literature review that summarizes previous studies done on this subject. The literature will provide a basic understanding of the background, frequency, causes, social movements, and other elements in relation to femicides in Mexico. With this review, I hope to create a solid understanding of this thesis's upcoming sections, which will go into the depth about the origins, effects, and potential solutions for Mexico's ongoing femicide issue.

The Cases in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Ciudad Juarez is notorious for its violence involved with organized crime and the high number of femicides that have taken place in the city. There are many already existing studies on femicides in Mexico specifically looking into the cases in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Some of the literature suggests that the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement has contributed to the rise in femicides in Mexico. This was a trade agreement made in 1994 between Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The agreement was made to eliminate taxes on trade between the three countries to promote economic partnership and an integrated North American economy. Mexico signed the agreement in hopes to improve its economy and create better job opportunities to stop illegal migration from the country. "In 2003, Juarez was the most heavily populated city in Chihuahua. According to Chabat, the overcrowding of the area resulted in 'an increase of chaos and violence'" (Meno, 2017). The overcrowding in the area was due to the creation of the factories that were made to combat Mexico's unemployment rates. Many of the factory workers were women, because they were cheap labor.

...the factories hired women en masse since they were seen as ideal workers for the assembly lines: besides being substantially cheaper than men, they were said to be docile, easily controlled, undemanding, nimble-fingered, lacking in union experience and disposable when production cuts became necessary since their primary role was that of a homemaker, wife, and mother not career-maker (Kynclova, 2015).

The North American Free Trade Agreement

could be linked to the rise in femicides in Mexico because of the creation of the maquiladoras, which increased violence against women since women made up most of the population of the workers. Luevano expands on the cases of the femicides in Juarez, implying that one of the big factors contributing to the violence is the number of people coming from all over the world to find work in Juarez. Luevano also describes how the domination of narcotics trafficking is part of globalization and part of the reason why Juarez is very troubled (Luevano, 2008). Maquiladoras are factories that were in the northern part of Mexico, by the US border. The factories are an important part of Mexico's economy because of the number of jobs and for its exports. The link between the maquiladoras and the femicides in Mexico is still unclear, but many of the women who worked in maquiladoras turned up missing or dead. The maquiladora murders are what has made Juarez known for being the dangerous city it is known as today, and research has been done to try to figure out why the murders took place and what contributed to them. Pantaleo gives different social perspectives of the murders from the newspaper article conclusions to the peer-reviewed journals.

Despite the indications in the headlines, most of the narratives discussed the victims, perpetrators, and causes in some depth. A number of thematic patterns emerged through analysis. The first of these themes concentrates on the victims. One pattern that developed across the narratives is the description of the victims as female maquiladora workers. Another pattern that developed is the nature of the murders (Pantaleo, 2010).

In this study it examines the different narratives that the murders were made to be, looking at different patterns and different forms of media.

Organized Crime

Other studies suggest that the femicides in Juarez are because Chihuahua is in the northern part of Mexico, which is a hotspot for drug cartels who are transporting to their number one consumer, the United States. Organized crime plays a huge role in contributing to femicide in Mexico because the killings are a result of the

already existing culture of violence. Organized crime is criminal activity that is done by powerful groups, like drug cartels, but it could even be done by the government or just any group that has power over the society. The state of Chihuahua has one of the biggest drug cartels in the world, The Juarez Cartel. The cartel practically runs the state with their power, wealth, and ability to intimidate people. With more people coming into Ciudad Juarez for work, more of them were being brutalized by the cartels. Some cartels started to use the brutalization of women as an initiation process, to send warnings to their competition or just in their free time (Vela, 2023). Studies suggest that over the last ten years, criminal organizations in Mexico have undergone a transformation, widening their range of activities, creating a competition between cartels to become the most powerful with the most territory.

This transformation of criminal organizations, as well as the diversification of their activities, has brought about unprecedented human degradation in their quest for financial profit. Women in particular, have become a target and source of funding for criminal organizations by means of human trafficking, prostitution, child trafficking, pornography, and drug trafficking.... (Anaya-Munoz, 2019).

The expansion of these groups only leads to more violence and has led some scholars to believe it is almost a civil war or an armed conflict within the state.

Injustices in the Justice System

Mexico's weak judicial system intersects with organized crime, the presence of corruption in the justice system only leads to failing the victims of femicide. In Mexico, there is a serious problem with corruption in the legal system starting in law enforcement. In cases of femicide, organized crime groups, like the drugs cartels, have a hold on the system, they're able to compromise investigations, intimidate police, and impede on the execution of justice. "Corruption and the drug trade have run rampant across the city and local politicians and police forces have been found to have ties with the local cartels. Impunity is the norm in the city where thousands have gone

missing over the years” (Munoz, 2022). Munoz critiques Mexico’s judicial system, implying it has failed to hold the perpetrators responsible for the heinous acts of violence against women, which only leads to more violence against women because there will be no consequences. Impunity sends a message to people all over Mexico, that violence against women is tolerated. Research has shown the inactive and unhelpful law enforcement investigations only contribute to the culture of fear among the women in Mexico, making them feel like no one is on their side, not even the state. Gayón’s take on organized crime and femicide in Mexico is that it is not just drug trafficking that has taken femicides to an entirely different level than before, because the killing of women was not something new in the country. The impunity of the femicides only encouraged the perpetrators. Gayón suggests that when the infamous femicides took place in Juarez, the government had already showed signs of being bought by the cartels, and corruption had solidified itself in Mexico’s northern border, leaving citizens in a state of unprecedented vulnerability (Gayón, 2015). In cases of femicides in Mexico it’s important to listen to the families of victims whose cases were mishandled. Ortega’s research closed in on the social body of women and their feelings of fear and insecurity due to the lack of convictions in cases of femicide.

“[...] you cannot do anything, because the same police walk with the drug traffickers and all, they just say that it will end and that it will end, but they do not say when, and then we go from bad to worse, or:

[...] they are the same federals the ones who disrespect us, and well, I am already scared. ..., I pretend I am very brave and everything, but no, the truth is yes, it scares me. (Focus groups, February, March 2011).” (Ortega, 2010-2011).

Ortega argues that the war on drugs is a coverup from the ongoing institutional and social corruption. Monica Citlalli Diaz is an example of one of the hundreds of women that have gone missing in Mexico whose case has received little to no attention, even with her family pressuring law enforcement to make advances. Her relatives blocked streets in front of the school to demand

action from law enforcement. (Translated by Content Engine LLC, 2022). Many cases like hers have gone unsolved in Mexico. Wright dives into the gendered politics of organized crime, and how once again, the government hides behind the “war on drugs”. This study tries to understand the masculine traits of the drug trade. Acevedo examines the legal frameworks that contribute to impunity in Mexico. “... the lack of data is directly tied to inadequate funding for law enforcement to effectively collect evidence and assist the prosecutor’s office...” (Acevedo, 2023). It’s important to understand all the factors that impede on judicial processes to determine what interventions would best work. Attributing femicide to only organized crime and the war on drugs, not recognizing the other societal and judicial injustice, is wrong and a form of victimblaming. Aldrete studied how sensationalism was carried out on newspapers all over the world regarding the femicides in Mexico.

One of the first studies on femicide news carried out on Mexican newspapers revealed the use of the information as a spectacle, which serves the newspaper to increase their sales. In countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States studies found that the media reports IPV murders as rare ‘terribly unfortunate/spontaneously occurring/who could have seen it coming? tragedy with no further discussion of the broader social patterns...’ (Aldrete, 2023)

The misrepresentation of the victims is a broader issue but still an injustice, nonetheless.

Gender Inequality

Mexico has traditional gender roles and patriarchal standards, which are the belief that men should have more authority and control over women. This is perpetuated through practices of unequal power dynamics, and this may lead to men feeling entitled and superior to women, resulting in the objectification and devaluation of women. With these ideas and standards put out in society, it only increases their vulnerability to violence. Frías dives into the gender inequality aspect of femicides in Mexico.

Backlash theory contends that as gender inequality decreases, men might feel vulnerable

by women's increased status in society and gender-based violence against women might increase. Gender inequality threatens men's status in society; backlash or retaliation is manifested through social strategies aimed at controlling women and their achievements (Frías, 2021).

If women are more equal to men in society, it could cause them to lash out against women with violence; in Mexico's society it has shown that gender inequality has been decreasing and violence against women has been increasing. Some scholars suggest that the country blames the killings on organized crime. Fria describes cultural machismo, which is a form of gender inequality, it's an ideology that reinforces male dominance and female submission. Cultural machismo in society contributes to women accepting violent behavior from men; this leads to a lack of accountability for perpetrators and impunity. The normalization of this violence in society might make others turn a blind eye if they see something that isn't right.

Going out 'covered' to the street; returning home early; looking for company when walking down the street; carrying pepper spray; feeling your stomach turn, at night, a car pass by you; sharing your location in real time; taking care of your glass at parties... this is the reality that Mexican women live in a femicidal country (Translated by Content Engine LLC, 2022).

This is the reality women face when living in a country that has dangerously high femicide rates combined with cultural machismo, news articles will continuously tell the same story of a woman turning up missing after walking home from work, school, etc. Mendez and Barraza use Galtung's theory and rejection of the positivist concept of violence to make their own interpretation of the violence and femicide in Mexico. "From January to December 2022, a total of 968 murders were classified as femicides in Mexico. This type of homicide is defined as the killing of a woman or girl on account of their gender" (Statista Research Department, 2023). Statistics showing the number of women who are killed on account of their gender is important for both society and governments. It shows the progress of government interventions or the lack

thereof.

Women's Rights Movements

Women's rights movements in Mexico have been vital to raising awareness for the gender-based violence that has been taking over the state. They are one of the only people pushing for change, and these movements have brought about change. A lot of these movements have brought about legal reforms in Mexico's justice system. One study done by Michel compares the two forms of feminist movements in Mexico, one in Chihuahua and one in Estado de Mexico and the mobilization from the streets to the courtroom. Reforms have come in part as a response to grassroots demands that push for legal reform (Michel, 2020). The study discusses the opportunity of reforms that have taken place and the women's rights movements that have brought them there. In this thesis, it's important to take into account the real experiences of the women who have experienced this violence firsthand. Here are the translated words of one of the women who marched on March 8, 2022, Decades of repeating it: they are killing us. We haven't gotten tired of shouting it, but they still don't listen to us. Here we are again in the streets marching against violence that crosses us and hurts us head on every day, 11 femicides a day in Mexico and more than 14 thousand missing people in Jalisco. We are tired of being told that it is not a big deal (Lopez, 2022). The women took to the streets chanting "not one more", in solidarity with victims' families and women who are tired of the senseless gender-based violence. News articles publish the protests that take place, and the words of the women are to be heard by everyone.

Over Militarization in the "War on Drugs"

In a fight against the cartels that run certain states of Mexico, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has launched a "War on Drugs". Masullo and Morisi go into detail on the human costs of the war on drugs in Mexico and the peoples' attitudes towards militarization of their state. They provide three studies that address whether people support militarized strategies

if that means there are civilian casualties. Even when military operations against organized criminal organizations are successful in capturing criminals, they often generate high human costs. The general public is aware of these costs. The media regularly reports the human tally they leave behind, and national and international non-governmental organizations routinely denounce and condemn the military's role in widespread human rights abuses, openly linking increasing levels of violence to militarization (Masullo & Morisi, 2023).

While these operations against organized crime could be successful, they come with a significant human cost, and a violation of human rights. This use of force only exacerbates violence in Mexico instead of relieving it of the problem. This shows the complexity and inefficiency of military solutions to organized crime and the need for a better strategy that tackles the underlying cause of violence in Mexico. From the beginning of time, women have always been targets of war, and the Mexican government calling for a war on drugs has only increased violence against women, allowed the use of gender-based violence as a tactic, and allowed complicity of security forces.

Falcon examines rape as a weapon of war in Mexico, specifically along the U.S.-Mexico Border. The presence of rape and sexual violence at the U.S.-Mexico border is closely related to femicide, in the context of gender-based violence against women. Similar to femicide, rape and sexual violence are plagued with impunity and lack of accountability for perpetrators. This phenomenon are all manifestations of structural violence that has not been addressed. 16 Factors contributing to the prevalence of militarized border rape include unaccountability, abuse of power, ineffective hiring protocols, minimizing civil rights standard, and a culture of militarization (Falcon, 2001).

Rape and sexual violence at the U.S.-Mexico border are linked with femicide in the broader context of impunity, gender-based violence, and structural corruption. Medeiros and Guzman write about how women become weapons of war indirectly. "In this context of multiple violence's women's bodies in poor, racialized territories also

become a signifier to mark control over those racialized geographies...rather than diminishing the influence of drug trafficking, this territorial occupation by the army has led to an increase in alcoholism, drug sales, and prostitution" (Medeiros & Guzman, 2023). Within the context of organized crime, femicide serves as a form of intimidation and control. Medeiros and Guzman argue that this phenomenon of women's bodies being used as a signifier to mark control disproportionately impacts indigenous communities. In the context they discussed, women's bodies become symbolic battlegrounds in the wider conflict against gender-based violence

Methodology

This thesis will use a case study to research femicide in Mexico and the interwoven factors of organized crime, gender inequality, and issues in law enforcement. I will be examining three different cases to further understand the phenomenon of femicide and its alarming prevalence in Mexico and the direct or indirect causes. A case study design is used to explore a subject in detail. For this research question, a case study will give a comprehensive observation of each of the factors to determine their roles in the femicides. It will allow connections to be made, or how the cases differ from one another. There is no direct cause of femicide, and they might differ throughout cultures and geographical areas. A case study will give a focused examination of the cultural and political environment in which femicides might occur.

The research question seeks to explain the intricate patterns of femicide in Mexico and if there is any connection between the killings and the factors stated above. A case study design is the most appropriate because of the complexity of the research question and its specificity. Femicide is shaped by several different elements, making a case study approach best suited to examine this research question. There are many unique cases and within a specific context can help provide different perspectives on the phenomenon. By focusing on specific incidents and cases, this research design can provide insight into the

different socio-cultural and political context in which femicide occurs.

One of the specific cases I will be exploring is that of Esmeralda-Castillo Rincon, who is one example of hundreds of women that have went missing in Mexico. She was a high school student who one day never showed up for class, and police made little effort to find her. Her family was determined to get the attention of law enforcement and officials. Her family would not receive answers until years later. The case received widespread attention, when her body was found near Hotel Verde, a human trafficking hot spot. Her family would not be satisfied until her killer was brought to justice. Another case is Maria de Jesus Jaimes Zamudio, from Mexico City, which is one example of the impunity in femicide cases in Mexico. Maria was an engineering student at the National Polytechnic State University. She was found near her home and her death was almost ruled a suicide. This ruling provoked outrage in her mother, among her classmates, and other people in the community because this confirmed justice would not be served.

The study will be conducted by firstly defining the research question that my case study will address, which is, “how do issues in law enforcement, gender inequality and organized crime contribute to the widespread presence of femicide in Mexico?” I will be using the cases of Esmeralda Castillo-Rincon, Maria de Jesus Jaimes Zamudio, and Miriam Elizabeth Rodriguez Martinez which are all widely known cases. I will review the literature I have gathered to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of femicide in Mexico. The case study will use media reports and documents for information that will be analyzed and organized. After collecting the data, I will find if there are patterns or themes noticed in the research. After analyzing the documents needed I will interpret the findings discuss the ramifications of these findings and how they add to what is already known about the subject. This case study will follow the structure stated above to provide a detailed analysis of the chosen cases.

This research methodology will be based in qualitative analysis. The goal is to look at the personal experiences of the women who have

been affected by femicide, how their cases were handled, and what the underlying cause of the femicide was. The data will be media reports, articles, journals, and government documents. With this research, I will be looking for and acknowledging any patterns between cases or the experiences of the individuals, how law enforcement handled the cases, whether gender inequality played a role in the femicide, and if organized crime was involved. Since this research consists of three specific cases of women who were victims of femicide, I will be able to extensively examine each case. The qualitative approach will allow for a greater comprehension of the issues and the perspectives of those affected. For this study, there will be strong internal validity, because there will be a causal relationship tested that is reliable. Internal validity refers to the ability of the research to accurately prove a causal relationship. In this research, there will not be strong external validity because this specific data that will be contextualized is not generalizable. Generalizations cannot be made to other situations or cases based off this study because the study will only look at a limited number of cases.

The limitations found in this study is that there is only a select number of cases that will be analyzed to find whether issues in law enforcement, gender inequality and organized crime play a role in the high number of femicides in Mexico. The qualitative research is specific to the context and because of this, the chance of generalizability is very low. Qualitative research involves a lot of interpretation which may lead to biases in the way the researcher interprets the data. The researcher’s perspective might influence the data but the data itself is subjective. The data collection itself is up to the researcher which could also be done based off personal biases.

Results and Analysis

The cases of Esmeralda Castillo-Rincon, Maria de Jesus Zamudio, and Miriam Rodriguez Martinez were not unlike many of the other femicide cases in Mexico, but they accurately highlight the government’s failures, protection of public figures, and corruption. Esmeralda

Castillo-Rincon went missing on May 19th, 2009, and when her family reported her disappearance, there was no investigation launched. Authorities refused to take her family serious and insisted that she would turn up in a few days. Her father, Don Jose, knew he could not count on law enforcement to look into the disappearance of his daughter, so he took matters into his own hands. He never gave up trying to get justice for his daughter, he pushed authorities for months and even went looking for Esmeralda himself around the border. In 2015, Esmeralda's family got a small glimpse of what her fate might have looked like on that fateful day that Esmeralda went missing. They found Esmeralda's left tibia among the remains of 27 women who were found near Hotel Verde, a hotel that recently shut down. Hotel Verde was known to be a huge hotspot for human trafficking and was supposedly the main human trafficking center in Juarez (Alvarez, 2023). Near this hotel, there was a local police station just a few blocks away that allowed the trafficking center to operate uninterrupted. Locals in the area claim that the police were part of the clientele. Five people were convicted for the murder and exploitation of these 27 women, and it was the trial of century (Alvarez, 2023). It was the "Arroyo del Navajo" case. All of the men who were convicted were accused of being members of the gang known as the "Aztecas". These men were convicted for the murder and exploitation of these 27 women, but no one has accounted for the 1,850 women who went missing in that area between 1993 and 2015 (Alvarez, 2023). Shockingly, this was the state's first case involving human trafficking and gender-based killings, which is an indication that human trafficking is not being adequately addressed in Juarez or any of Mexico (Alvarez, 2023). They convicted only five people out of what is clearly a larger scale human trafficking organization. Esmeralda's family does not believe her tibia being found is proof of her death, they believe she might still be out there. Her father still marches for Esmeralda every year wearing a pink shirt with her face on it, his shirt reads, "Don't forget me, I'm missing". Esmeralda's case differs from the thousands of women who have

gone missing in Juarez because it clearly shows a government cover up of a large-scale human trafficking organization, and the participation of local law enforcement. The five men convicted could not have been the only participants, or people responsible, of this human trafficking ring, especially when there were thousands of women going missing in the area in from 1993 and 2015. Esmeralda's case emphasizes the corruption in Mexico's law enforcement, a human trafficking center was able to operate for years without facing justice when a police station was just blocks away. Thousands of women have gone missing in the same area and have not been accounted for and their disappearances will continue to remain a mystery for their families. Authorities refused to investigate Esmeralda's case from the very beginning, which is part of the problem in Mexico's judicial system.

Maria de Jesus Jaimes Zamudio was 19 years old when she was killed by being thrown from a fifth story window in her home. The event took place in 2016 in Mexico City after a night out, where she was with one of her professor's and some classmates. Her courageous mother, Yesenia Zamudio has not stopped fighting to get justice for her daughter. She has taken to the streets and social media, screaming for justice, not allowing the state of Mexico to forget her daughter's name. Originally, police tried to rule Maria's death an accident or suicide, but her mother never believed that, and did not allow that to happen. In 2019, her death was reclassified as a femicide (Ramos, 2020). Her family believes that Maria de Jesus was killed by one of her professors and classmates, and the National Polytechnic Institute is protecting them and impeding in the fight for justice for Maria. (Rodriguez, 2020). In a powerful video posted on Facebook, Maria's mom, Yesenia, screams, "I am a mother whose daughter was murdered, and I am an empowered mother and a feminist! And I've had enough! I have every right to burn and break. I'm not going to ask permission from anybody, because I am breaking for my daughter. Those who want to break, break. And those who want to burn, burn. And those who don't, don't stand in our way! Mother of Maria de Jesus

Zamudio I demand justice for me, for my family and for my daughter, and for all the women who nobody names. Because every day they kill a woman, and another and another. I cannot solve my daughter's case, but 10, a hundred, a thousand more cases have already come to me" (Yesenia Zamudio, 2020). Despite her mother's cries and her active participation in marches, little movement has been made in Maria's case, her killers are still walking free, fleeing justice. Maria's mom, Yesenia, insists that one of her professors and classmates killed her daughter and are being protected by the university. In a video posted online, she is at one of the marches for missing women and names the people she believes killed her daughter. In the video, she criticizes law enforcement, stating they should be embarrassed for trying to contain this crowd of women, instead of protecting the women that go missing every day, instead of protecting their daughters. Maria de Jesus Jaimes Zamudio's case also highlights corruption within Mexico's government. Police were quick to try to write off her death as a suicide or accident, proving that femicide cases are hardly looked into. Justice has not been brought to Maria's killers because they are public figures and her mother's claims have not been taken seriously by law enforcement.

Miriam Elizabeth Rodriguez Martinez is one of Mexico's most infamous cases of femicide that attracted the attention of many media news outlets because of its shocking details. Miriam was the mother of a victim, Karen Alejandra Salinas Rodriguez, and then became a victim herself. When her daughter, Karen, disappeared in 2014, Miriam demanded answers from authorities (Villegas, 2017). She went missing in the state of Tamaulipas, where organized crime runs rampant. Miriam joined an organization of families searching for their loved ones because they know authorities will not find justice for their loved ones taken from them too soon. Miriam insisted her daughter was kidnapped and killed by the Zetas cartel members. She looked for her daughter herself, because she knew she could not rely on law enforcement or the government to bring justice for her or her daughter. She became an activist for women's rights and became the

voice for many women who have not found justice in Mexico's justice system, she became the director of an organization called Colectivo de Desaparecidos. (Villegas, 2017). Families have to put extreme pressure on authorities in order for some progress to be made in their loved ones' cases, but sometimes even that is not enough. "Frustrated by a lack of government help, groups of families began their own searches for people who had disappeared in their areas, taking courses in forensic anthropology, archaeology, law, buying cave equipment and becoming experts in identifying graves and bones" (BBC News, 2017). Miriam herself found her daughter's remains in a grave two years after her disappearance. After finding her daughter's remains, she launched her own investigation into the Zetas cartel members, which put her own life in grave danger. She transformed herself and truly took on the role of a detective because she desperately wanted justice for her daughter. She received several threats from the cartel and other organizations trying to silence her and the efforts she made not just for her daughter but for hundreds of other families whose loved ones were taken from them. Eventually, nine people were accused of the kidnapping and murder of her daughter. Miriam was responsible for finding information about each of these individuals and their participation in her daughter's death and kidnapping, which resulted in their imprisonment. Miriam had gone on the news several times stating that she had been receiving death threats and the local authorities were not protecting her, she felt scared for her life and even began to carry a gun around with her. (BBC News, 2017). A few months before Miriam's death, a few of the men who were involved in her daughter's murder escaped from prison, and Miriam had told news outlets that law enforcement wasn't doing anything to protect her. On May 10, 2017, Mother's Day, Miriam was shot 12 times just outside her home in a drive by shooting. Her death caused outrage, and people took to the streets, fighting for justice for Miriam, as she did for so many others. Miriam's case also highlights the country's failure to protect their women, as well as corruption within the government as well. Miriam, a singular

woman, was able to track down nine members of the Zetas cartel and get them jailed, but the entire government of Mexico is unable to dismantle these criminal organizations that practically run some states like Tamaulipas, Juarez, and Sinaloa. Miriam's case is a clear representation of how the government and law enforcement blatantly ignore victims of femicide. Miriam had to look for her daughter herself, found her body herself, and tracked down her killers herself. Therefore, the lack of investigations are not due to limited resources, it's because missing women and crimes against women are not viewed as important or urgent. Miriam was not protected by law enforcement even after she informed them she was receiving death threats.

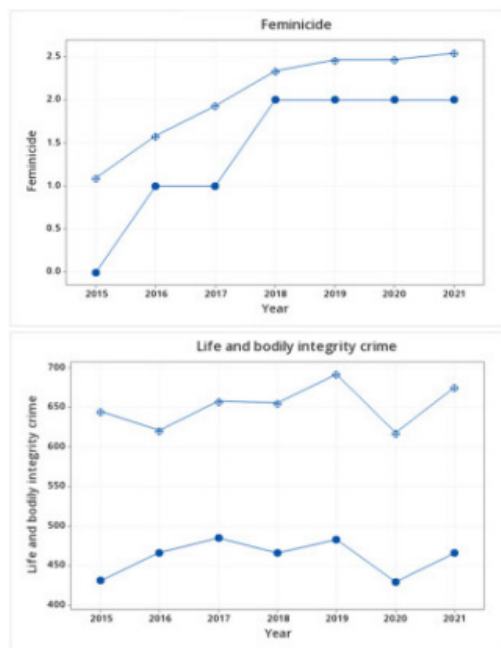


Figure 1. Femicide rates in Mexico since 2015 (National Library of Public Medicine, 2023).

Femicide rates in Mexico have only been increasing throughout the years. "Mexico is recognized as having one of the highest rates of femicide internationally, a trend many suggest is increasing. Ten women per day die because of femicide in this Latin American country... There is a debate in Mexico involving the current president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador who has argued that both femicide and homicide stem

from the neoliberal period, during which family disintegration and the loss of values occurred, leading to an increase in overall violence" (Hernandez et al., 2023). Since 2015, femicide rates in Mexico have concerningly increased. There is specific evidence that cases need to be ruled as a femicide, evidence that proves the woman was murdered because of her gender, and because of this, some of the statistics might show lower numbers than what is reality. "The World Health Organization defines femicide as 'intentional murder of women because they are women.' While femicides represented about 10 percent of all murders in 2019, the rate has increased exponentially, growing 145 percent since 2015" (Sandin, 2020). These statistics highlight the relentless onslaught of gender-based violence that exists throughout the state of Mexico. The growing rates can be attributed to impunity, in 2018, 93 percent of crimes were not investigated or reported (Sandin, 2020). Despite femicide being recognized as a pressing issue within the state, little has been done to put a stop to the gender-based killings. Impunity in Mexico plays a significant role in perpetuating femicide. The lack of investigations into femicides and no justice being served emboldens perpetrators and allows them to freely continue committing these crimes because they will never be held accountable for their actions. It also reinforces gender stereotypes that devalues the lives of women. In Mexico, there is already a culture of gender inequality and cultural machismo, but when perpetrators face no repercussions for violence against women, it reinforces the idea that women are disposable and violence against them is socially and legally accepted. Because of the lack of investigation and little to no faith in law enforcement, many of the crimes may even go unreported. Victims of the families may be intimidated to speak out because of retaliation or even because they know the justice system will not hold these perpetrators accountable. Because of this, a large number of crimes go unreported or are not fully investigated, which enables the perpetrators to avoid consequences and carry-on abusing women without any repercussions. Impunity is an essential step to addressing

femicide and corruption within Mexico's judicial system.

From the demand for justice for the femicides, relatives of victims, activists from social organizations and academic defenders of the rights of women in Ciudad Juarez know all too well how the impunity and absence of an ethic of truth, foster an environment of vulnerability and helplessness for women, through the reproduction of the idea that the murders of women can be committed by any group or individual without receiving any punishment. With the current militarization experience in the city, if the bodies of men do not matter, those of women are even less important...(Ortega, 2010-2011).

The failure to hold those accountable for femicide creates a culture of fear in the women of Mexico, a feeling of helplessness and creates an environment where gender-based violence is normalized. There is no transparency or honesty within the prosecution for cases of femicide, there is no one ensuring that these offenders will be brought to justice, and more times than not, they evade justice and continue to walk free, free to commit the same acts over and over.

The current president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has downplayed the situation of femicide several times and has not presented a long-term plan to solve and prevent the killings. The president blames neoliberal models which was in place before his inauguration, and this is the cause of the country's ills. In 2020, tens of thousands of women took to the streets demanding change and his response was that he refuses to try a new strategy to prevent femicide. "We are going to keep supporting, protecting women, looking after them," he said in a 2021 news conference. 'Confronting and combating femicides, all the violence against women.' But so far, his government has been unable to make a meaningful dent in the murders of women rocking Mexico: almost 3,760 women were killed in total last year, an average of more than 10 murders every single day. Femicides remain at over 900 every year" (Lopez, 2023). Lopez Obrador has not addressed the immediate needs of victims of femicide or done anything

to hold the perpetrators accountable aside from overmilitarizing some states that are already plagued with violence in Mexico. He has not addressed the institutional failures within the criminal justice system that contributes to impunity for perpetrators of femicide; this includes corruption and gender bias. The situation of femicide has not been prioritized, even though rates have been alarmingly increasing. "In March, Mexico's government said, the country's emergency call centers were flooded with more than 26,000 reports of violence against women, the highest since the hotline was created. But Mexico's president brushed aside his own cabinet's announcement, suggesting, without evidence, that the vast majority of the calls for help were little more than pranks" (Kitroeff, 2021). Lopez Obrador has claimed several times that he will make Mexico a more equal society, but his downplaying of the femicide crisis in Mexico only worsens the situation entirely. His lack of acknowledgement to these reports about violence against women proves that the situation is not important to him. If gender-based violence is not taken seriously by the president, that will reflect in the way law enforcement handles these reports. With Mexico's record of impunity, his reaction to these reports will only exacerbate violence against women. Every year on International Women's Day, women in Mexico gather to their city centers to honor those whose lives were taken by gender-based violence, and to confront those who seek to silence them. Instead of calling for action to prevent these femicides, the President himself only seeks to silence the women even more. "In advance of the announced women's march and protest, Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador ordered the National Palace and the Palace of Fine Arts to be surrounded by barriers, supposedly to protect the buildings from 'vandalism'. In response, women painted the names of hundreds of victims of femicides on the barrier..." (Jgreenberg5, 2021). AMLO has claimed to have a progressive administration but has done everything to downplay and dismiss the situation of femicide in Mexico and no true action has been taken.

In response to the drug cartels holding a lot

of power in the country, Mexico has taken a militarized approach to combat these organized crime groups. Mexico's over-militarization not only does not effectively fight organized crime, but it also breeds more corruption within the government and contributes to an environment where femicide is tolerated. The militarized strategy relies heavily on security forces has given military and law enforcement more power and more room to abuse said power. Unfortunately, a lack of accountability, transparency, and oversight has come with this concentration of power, providing the ideal environment for corruption to thrive.

The 'code of silence' found in law enforcement and military culture prevents agents from reporting on each other. This cultural norm sustains human rights violations because agents fail to report one another during incidents of wrongdoing. The 'code of silence' is integral to the militarized border system because it maintains the system's legitimacy. The code is difficult to penetrate and if an individual breaks it, negative consequences can result (Falcon, 2001).

Corrupt officials hamper attempts to address the underlying causes of femicide and hold offenders accountable by participating in criminal activity or by ignoring it altogether. The protection of women's rights and safety are ignored in this culture of violence and impunity that is fostered by the militarization of law enforcement. "We find that support for militarization decreases when military civilian casualties, even when they succeed in capturing a prominent member of a drug cartel" (Masullo & Morisi, 2024). Rather than addressing the systemic corruption that allows organized crime to thrive, the militarized strategy in Mexico adds to the cycle of violence and impunity, and further enforces the patriarchal violence that plagues Mexico. With a concentration of power, comes abuse of power, and women have always been subjected to exploitation in these sorts of environments. Since women become exploited in militarized environments, this approach only increases violence against women. For the safety of civilians and women, Mexico needs to demilitarize law enforcement and root out

corruption.

Ni Una Mas, Ni Una Menos, not one more, not one less. This has been the movement across Latin America that has played a pivotal role in raising awareness to the situation of femicide that has been plaguing Mexico for the last two decades. The movement has accomplished justice and change for many families, and even in legislation. It could be argued that the drug war overshadows the movement.

...societal actors resorted to traditional strategies used in social movements, mobilizing public opinion, organizing protests, and public demonstrations, and also creating memorials for the victims... from this federal and state effort, in 2006 an official federal report was issued on the topic of women's killings. It provided an overview of the incidence of femicide in the whole country, where Estado de Mexico figured among one of the top states with femicidal violence" (Michel, 2020).

Grassroots movements and mass mobilizations for these movements are what forced the state of Mexico to start officially counting femicides in the first place. Unfortunately, the current drug war has diverted media attention away from these movements, but the movement is alive and ongoing. The Mexican government has prioritized anti-drug strategies, thinking that will bring down femicide rates, but has overlooked the fact that femicides are not just perpetuated through organized crime but because of the system that allows organized crime to run rampant. "Notable organizations working towards ending the system violence against women in Mexico include: Nuestras Hijitas Regreso a Casa, Red Mesa de Mujeres, El Closet de Sor Juana, Las Hijitas de Violencia, etc. These activists organize campaigns, rallies, and marches in order to keep femicides in the limelight and seek a solution. For example, Juarez Imelda Marrufo Nava, a woman activist works with families of the femicide victims in order to get justice for their daughters" (Olmos, 2018). These organizations have truly brought change and justice to individual families and fights the battle that Mexico's government seeks to ignore.



Figure 2. Mexico City, Mexico (Instagram user danabrilok)

The sign reads “Mom, I came to shout for all the things they silenced you on”. Figure 2 was posted on 2024’s International Women’s Day. Every International Women’s Day, the women of Mexico take to the streets to be the voice of those who are no longer alive to be heard. Like in many of the femicide cases, these women have to fight to be heard. These organizations and this movement have been paramount in the creation of a more just society, they’ve brought justice and hope to so many families whose loved ones have gone missing.

Conclusion

The presence of femicide haunts the state of Mexico and has worked its way into Mexican society. In this thesis I identified the center of the issue and determined the complex causes that perpetuate this crisis of femicide. Gender inequality, issues in law enforcement, and organized crime all contribute to the presence of femicide in Mexico, but one factor that is overlooked is the corruption within the government that allows for all of these factors to not only continue but thrive. Impunity in the state has reached one of its all-time highs, and the overmilitarization of certain areas

has overshadowed the epidemic. President AMLO himself undermines and ignores the issue, blaming everything besides the systemic corruption. The only way loved ones of these victims have any source of hope for justice is through organizations because law enforcement is of no help.

Organized crime is one the overarching causes of femicide, but the organized crime groups would not be able to thrive as well as they do in a country that does not have corruption within its government. Some key areas where corruption contributes to femicide is in law enforcement, the judiciary, and political institutions. Mexico has used the war on drugs to cover up its inability to protect its citizens and more specifically the women. The war on drugs has only brought to light more corruption within the government. It has been linked to complicity with drug cartels, misuse of resources, and lack of accountability. There needs to be a new strategy to combat femicide, so far Mexico has solely relied on militarized strategies that has only brought the misuse of resources due to lack of transparency in how resources are allocated and used. By focusing primarily on militarized approaches to drug enforcement and failing to address systemic corruption, the Mexican government may indirectly contribute to a culture of impunity and undermining the rule of law. From inside the government to the streets of Juarez, impunity and corruption has overtaken the country, breeding a culture of injustice. In order of femicide to be adequately addressed, there needs to be a comprehensive reform from within Mexico’s government. The surface level and short-term interventions have not proven to be effective yet and will not be effective in confronting the root cause of gender-based violence. The call for reform is imperative and the women of Mexico will continue to call for a reevaluation of 32 policies, procedures, and legislation that will ensure justice for every victim of femicide. If they are heard, “Ni Una Mas, Ni Una Menos” “Not One More, Not One Less” will no longer be a cry for justice, but a promise that there will be not one more woman taken because of femicide.

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