Explaining Variations in Violence:
Civil Allyship and Drug War Outcomes in China and Mexico

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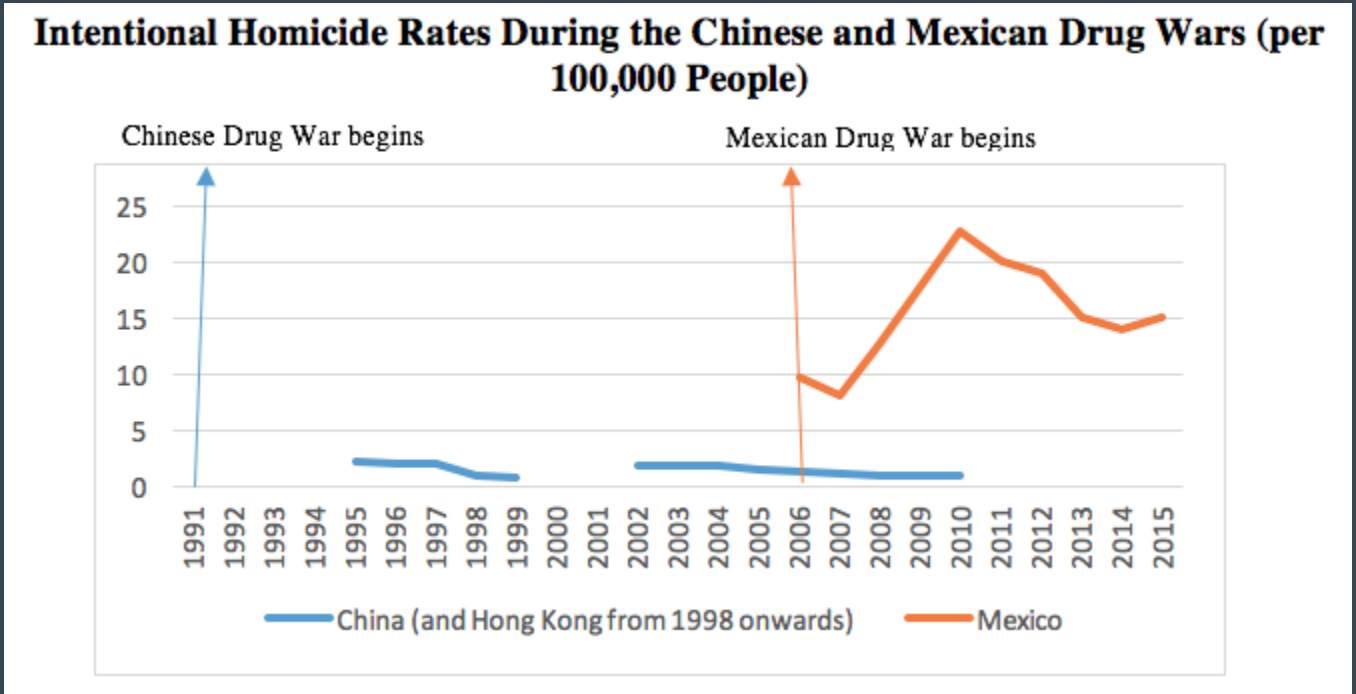
RESEARCH PUZZLE

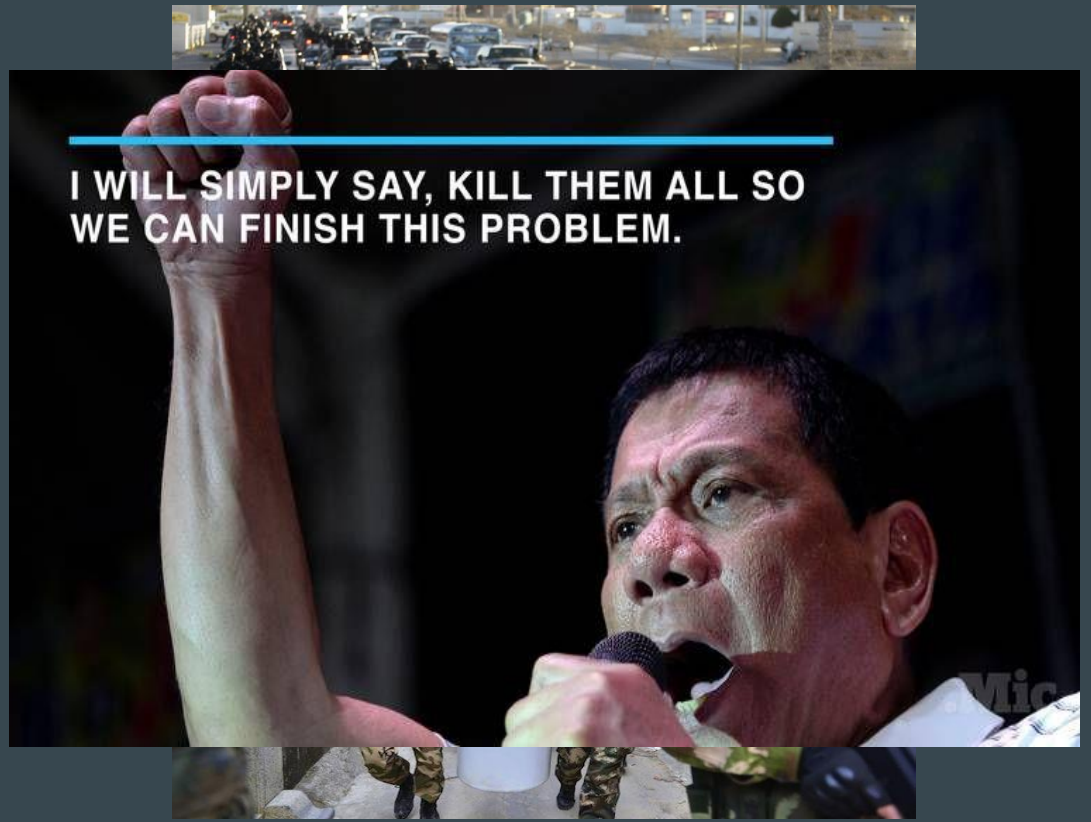
What factors cause disparate levels of violence across drug wars?



TOPIC RELEVANCE

Drug prohibition regime: 185 nations signatories to the UN Conventions Against Drugs

Drug wars in United States, Colombia, China, Mexico, and Philippines



DRUG WAR

State-sponsored, militarized counternarcotics campaigns that seek to curtail the production, trafficking, and use of illegal drugs.

- ❏ “Fighting” to defend the homeland
- ❏ “Declaration of war” as watershed moment in a country’s drug policy

Accounts for variations in drug war violence

What do we know?

Traditional Literature

Criminal networks and violence
(Keeney 2007; Williams 1998; Gambetta 1993; Koivu 2016; Shirk et al. 2015)

State institutions and violence
(Evans 1989; Lindau 2011; Snyder and Duran-Martinez 2009; Flanigan 2014)

Civil society and violence?
(Evans 1996; Baiocchi et al. 2011; Amengual 2016)

Alarmist Literature

Drug wars increase violence
(Miron 2001, 2004; Allen 2015; Resignato 2000)

POLICY-SYNERGY (Evans 1996)

Collaboration ties between society and state authorities that facilitate the implementation of policies.

- ❏ Local presence of the state
- ❏ State complementation of society's own efforts
- ❏ Maintenance of dialogue with key interest groups

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

TO WHAT EXTENT AND IN WHAT WAYS DOES POLICY-SYNERGY CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS DETERMINING VIOLENT OUTCOMES ACROSS DRUG WARS?

WHY HAVE HOMICIDE RATES INCREASED DURING THE MEXICAN DRUG WAR, BUT DECREASED DURING THE CHINESE DRUG WAR?

ARGUMENT

Drug wars are less violent when enforcement authorities ally with members of local community to implement policies (high policy-synergy), and are more violent where state officials lack such ties with civil society (low policy-synergy)

RESEARCH DESIGN

What I observed:

- ❏ Community-based initiatives in reaction to the drug war

Step one: Cross-national comparison
Step two: Within-case analysis

RESEARCH DESIGN

FIELDWORK RESEARCH

Mexico City and Guerrero: June-August 2015
Beijing, China: January 2017

- Participant interviews: 15 semi-structured interviews, predominantly in Chinese or Spanish
- Government reports on drug control, Chinese or Spanish

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Government Statistics Bureau, INEGI, and UN reports on violence rates
- Newspapers:
  - La Jornada, El Universal
  - China Daily, People's Daily, Xinhua News
- InsightCrime analytical reports, National Drug Dependency Institute reports, Uppsala Database, academic articles

CHINA: LOW VIOLENCE, HIGH SYNERGY

- National: High levels of civil support towards drug war policies

Source: National Narcotics Control Commission website.

- Subnational: Higher levels of policy-synergy in Yunnan (lower violence) than Guangxi (higher violence)

MEXICO: HIGH VIOLENCE, LOW SYNERGY

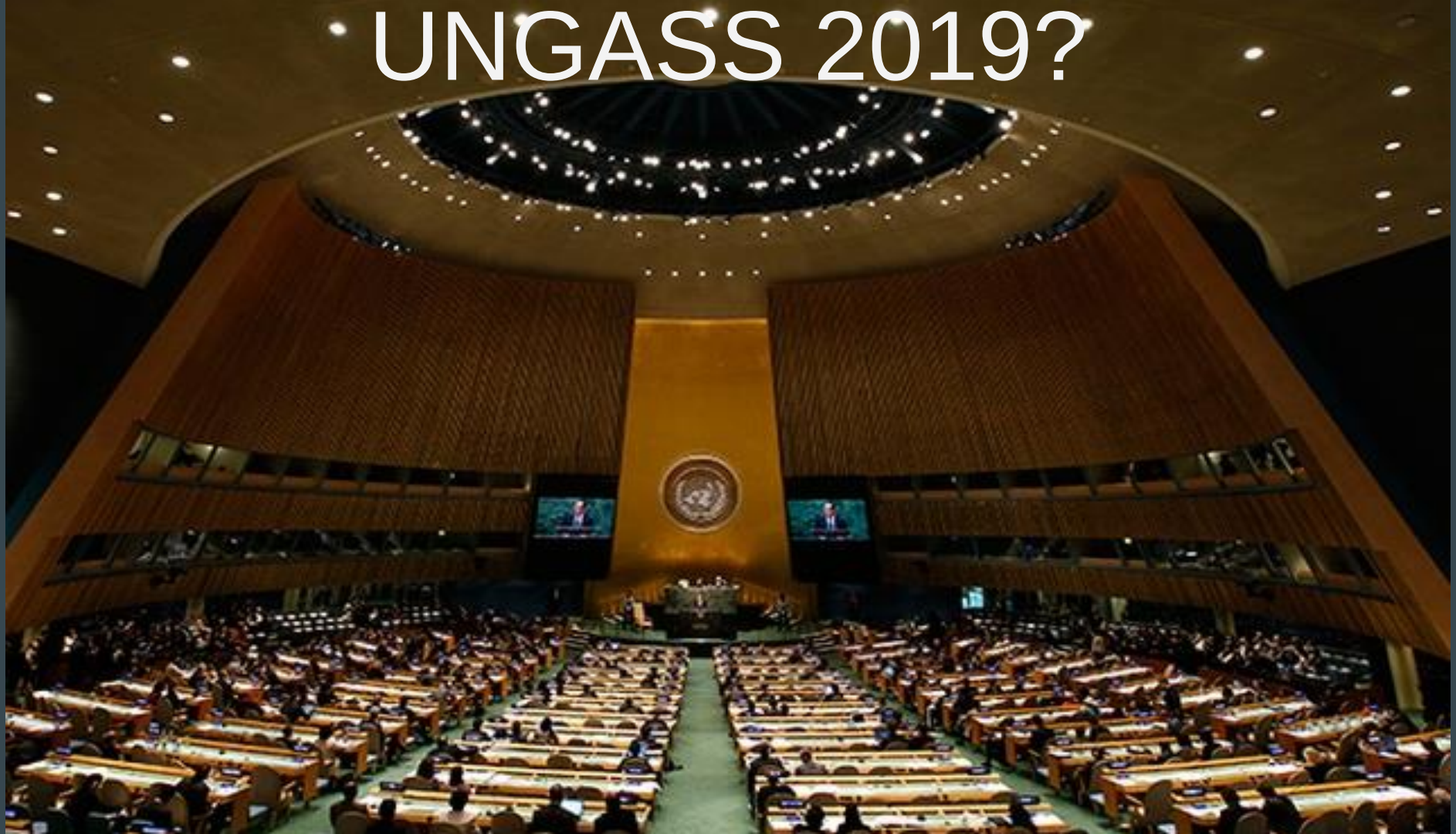
- National: Low levels of civil support towards drug war policies

- Subnational: Lower levels of policy-synergy in Guerrero (higher violence) than Sinaloa (lower violence)
  - Civil allyship with Sinaloa Cartel could explain lower violence in Sinaloa

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. Policy-synergy and civil society influence violence outcomes across drug wars

1. Civil allyship to drug wars depends on security concerns and socio-historical narratives

1. “One size fits all” international drug policy is counterproductive; governments should adopt policies that are responsive to national contexts

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