

International Connections Paper #1

When examining the dynamics of power as they pertain to drug production, distribution, and abuse, I want to focus specifically on the corruption of politicians and law enforcement.

While countries have laws and systems in place to police illicit substances, very often there are corrupt officials involved who do anything from blocking legislation and throwing out court cases to tampering with or destroying evidence (Nagle 1).

I believe that this corruption is a product of these officials having power over regular citizens (where they believe they are above the law that others are prosecuted under) while being at the mercy of cartels and drug lords. Nagle explains that when she worked as a judge for the judiciary of Colombia, she was first bribed, then threatened: she had to quit and relocate when she received threats against her family's lives (1). These intimidation tactics are successful because cartels regularly murder people standing in their way with impunity, so if someone's choice is to accept a bribe to look the other way or risk losing their life or their family's lives, it becomes a clear choice.

Another factor that I think could explain an individual's decision to give in to corruption is when this corruption is systematic. When the police officers at the bottom, the lawmakers at the top, and even local representatives have all been bought out, it's incredibly difficult and frustrating to be a lone individual fighting against the entire system. Laws are toothless without enforcement, it's difficult to prosecute a crime where evidence gets lost, and legislation that is not just lip service will be sure to be killed before it can be passed.

The final factor that I think greatly contributes to corruption within the system designed to fight against the drug epidemic is money itself. Everyone involved, from poor farmers, to the individuals who traffic the product, to the distributors, to the officials who look the other way, are

influenced by a lucrative payoff that exceeds income opportunities otherwise available to them. These people have a chance to move up and better themselves and I think that's a pretty difficult offer to refuse.

In summary, I think it's easy to accuse law enforcement and politicians of accepting bribes and giving into corruption simply for their own personal gain, but the reality might be that these individuals are powerless against cartels and drug traffickers and are making survival-based decisions instead making decisions based on their principles.

Works Cited:

Nagle, Luz E. "Corruption of politicians, law enforcement, and the judiciary in Mexico and complicity across the border." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21.1 (2010): 95-122.