

Political protection and the origins of the Gulf Cartel

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Abstract The history of drug trafficking in Mexico appears to be strongly influenced by specific features of the post-revolutionary authoritarian regime that has been characterized by its rampant corruption and poor levels of accountability. This is a rigorous empirical case study of state domination of the relationship with traffickers in a particular historical epoch and place. Based on research conducted through the examination of historic sources, this work explores the hypothesis that some political figures might have been colluding with members of criminal organizations, with the aim of protecting their businesses and fostering their consolidation. Such collusion has hindered the institutional functioning of key law enforcement and judicial institutions in the country. The present analysis considers these relationships in the course of three decades, the 1960s through the 1990s, and focuses on the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, where one of the most powerful and dangerous organized crime groups emerged, the so-called *Gulf Cartel*.

Introduction

The official and media images of organized crime in Mexico attempt to convince the public 1) that the environment is generally hostile to criminal organizations; 2) that government officials as a whole have no knowledge, except in exceptional cases, of the illicit activities of the criminal groups they are in charge of prosecuting; 3) that the documented cases of corrupt linkages between criminal organizations and public officials at various hierarchical levels are the result of individual transgressions, but are not institutionalized practices and are not widespread within the government; and 4)

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