

H-Diplo ARTICLE REVIEW 1016

27 January 2021

Tony Payan. "Improvising and Muddling Through: Transnational Government Networks and Security Cooperation between Mexico and the U.S." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 18:2 (2020): 253-276.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42738-020-00047-w>.

<https://hdiplo.org/to/AR1016>

Editor: Diane Labrosse | Commissioning Editor: Lindsay AQUI | Production Editor: George Fujii

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Within academia and particularly amongst political scientists, there is a general consensus that institutions matter. The debate has been over which institutions matter and why. This discussion was quite salient after the end of the Cold War when many Eastern European and former Soviet Republics gained their independence, seeking to emulate Western countries by creating strong political institutions which would foster democratization.¹ These countries also clamored for membership in transnational institutions, such as the European Union (EU) or the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) as a hedge against a return to authoritarianism, particularly under a resurgent Russia.

In North America, another dynamic took hold between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, where the formation of a transnational North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s was viewed as the first step toward a broader North American Community, which would also include political and security institutions.² While some critics worried that this was really an attempt to create a North American Union and threaten state sovereignty, in reality it was an attempt to institutionalize the mechanisms for interstate cooperation on a number of issues impacting the hemisphere. The United States' obsession with the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and concern over its safety and security led to the Waco Summit in March 2005 and the signing of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) agreement.³ However, the SPP died and fifteen years later formal institutional processes aimed at regional security remain bilateral, with Canada and the United States maintaining strong ties through NATO and the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) and Mexico and the United States relegated to more informal security relations through what Tony Payan calls transnational governmental networks.

In his article, Payan argues that despite not having formalized security institutions, the United States and Mexico do have informal security relations through transnational governmental networks (TGNs). He argues, however, that these TGNs are "dependent on the will and ability of individuals to create and sustain them" and are thus vulnerable when leadership changes occur in both countries due to the politics of personalism (253). This has become more evident in the last four years with the arrival of two populist presidents in Donald Trump and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). Since TGNs

¹ R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman, *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1993).

² Council on Foreign Relations, "Building a North American Community," (2005)
http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NorthAmerica_TF_final.pdf.

³ Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., Abelardo Rodriguez, and Todd Hataley, *North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2012).

are informal agreements, they do not have the formal institutional processes that can survive changes in presidential administrations. Yet, as we have witnessed with the Trump administration, even treaties and long-standing alliances can be threatened due to personal fiat despite the role that Congress plays in approval of such agreements.

Payan provides historical context for the emergence of TGNs related to security cooperation between the United States and Mexico, focusing primarily on the 1990s, when NAFTA emerged and then 2000s following the 9/11 attacks. He summarizes these networks as functioning in three domains: information; enforcement; and harmonization. Information sharing includes intelligence, particularly related to countering transnational criminal organizations (TCO). Enforcement also focuses on TCOs and joint operations against drug traffickers, while harmonization includes processes related to extradition and prosecution. A recent example is the 2017 extradition of Joaquín Guzmán, the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel who is known as El Chapo, to the United States for trial and incarceration, since Mexico could not keep him in custody.⁴ Payan argues that TGNs are informal and may not be transparent, but he believes they benefit the United States more than Mexico (although the intangible benefits to Mexico may not be as evident for domestic reasons, since Mexico may not want such agreements known publically).

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Thus the challenge for any scholar seeking to learn about TGNs and how they operate in the United States and Mexico is gaining access to sources and materials that are not readily available through archival research. Payan's research over four years included over 40 interviews with U.S. and Mexican governmental officials. Due to the sensitivity of the information sought and positions held, the sources could not be named out of concern for their safety, which also required the use of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Having also conducted research on U.S.-Mexican security (particularly defense) relations I can attest to the challenges posed in obtaining primary source data and having sources provide candid assessments.⁵ Yet Payan does a credible job in exposing the nature of these TGNs and provides a good understanding of how bureaucrats in each country develop these networks through personal relationships.

One of the key events Payan focuses on in fostering TGNs was the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) which emerged from a meeting of U.S. President George W. Bush, Mexican President Vicente Fox, and Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin in Waco, Texas in March 2005. The SPP led to a number of commissions and councils which increased information sharing, enforcement, and harmonization between the three countries, yet Payan notes that the main goal of the SPP was to ensure that security did not trump prosperity, particularly given concerns over terrorism after 9/11. However, one of the five pillars of the SPP focused on North American Emergency Management and there was unprecedented defense cooperation after Hurricane Katrina impacted the United States in August 2005. Both Mexico and Canada sent their militaries to support rescue and relief operations. Since the United States had also just stood up the U.S. Northern Command, and Canada was already a part of NORAD, there was hope expressed by U.S. military leaders that Mexico would soon join in a formal regional security alliance that went beyond air defense, to include both land and sea defense of the hemisphere.⁶ That has yet to occur and probably never will. As Payan argues, TGNs exist to fill voids where formal institutional processes do not or cannot occur between the United States and Mexico.

⁴ Guzman had escaped Mexican prisons twice before being arrested a third time in 2016 when he was extradited to the United States. "Mexican Drug Lord Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman Escapes Jail," 12 July 2015, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-33497301>.

⁵ My efforts in the late 1980s researching civil-military relations in Mexico and attempts to develop survey data to support my doctoral dissertation were often discouraging. Personal interviews with U.S. and Mexican government and military personnel were the best sources of primary data, but limited due to the small n of available sources who would speak candidly on these topics. Richard J. Kilroy, Jr. *Crisis and Legitimacy: The Role of the Mexican Military in Politics and Society* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Dissertation, 1990).

⁶ Anecdotal comments from a colleague who attended the NORAD and NORTHCOM Academic Conference, December 2017. Also see Abelardo Rodriguez Sumano and Richard J. Kilroy, Jr. "Avoiding Conflict? United States and Mexico Future Security and

Another key event Payan discusses to explain how TGNs function is the Mérida Initiative, which began in 2007 and still exists today. Mérida initially provided military support to Mexico in its fight against TCOs and drug trafficking. President Felipe Calderón recognized that the Mexican cartels had grown into an existential threat to Mexico's security necessitating support from the United States. In 2009, Calderón even declared martial law in the state of Chihuahua, sending in the military to take control of Ciudad Juárez on the border with El Paso, Texas, due to the spike in the city's murder rate. The Obama administration, which had just come into office in January of that year, was quick to expand the Bush-era Mérida Initiative support to other areas such as judicial reform, institutionalizing the rule of law and human rights, as well as address the root causes of violence through community engagement and development opportunity programs.⁷ Yet, as Payan notes, the Mérida Initiative "organized existing TGNs but also created another layer of TGNs. Unfortunately, [the Initiative] would not solve any issues and sometimes would create additional ones, which raises further questions as to the right conditions for TGNs to be effective in actually solving problems" (263).

Payan provides a table (265) which explains the Policy Coordination Group relations developed through the Mérida Initiative between the different governmental agencies in the United States and Mexico. This is very helpful since it is not always clear in intergovernmental relations which departments are counterparts. For example, after 9/11, the United States formed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to serve as the primary federal agency that was focused on domestic security. Canada did likewise in creating Public Safety Canada (PSC). Mexico did not reorganize its federal bureaucracy to mirror the United States, thus there are different secretaries in Mexico whom DHS must work with depending on the issues being covered.⁸

There is some confusion in the article based on the organization of the tables and figures. There is an error on page 266 when reference is made to Figure 1, when it should be Table 1. Also, reference is made in the text to financial data in Table 2 and it is actually Figure 1, with homicide rates that precedes it. Changing the placement of these tables and figures to align with the written text would have made the discussion more coherent.

Payan provides a disclaimer to his research on TGNs under the Enrique Peña Nieto administration in Mexico (2012-2018). He states that the unification of TGNs under the Mexican Interior Ministry, which was meant to provide greater accountability, may have increased the violence in Mexico. Payan admits that he was not able to determine through his research the impact of TGNs in either increasing or reducing crime and violence in Mexico (270). Without longitudinal data, and the use of controlled variables, it would be difficult to be able to make such an assessment, but as Payan notes, it is worthy of future research.

To that end, a discussion of transnational networks related to defense and security issues between the United States and Mexico should also look beyond intergovernmental relations to nongovernmental organizations. Mexico's transition to democracy in 2000 led to a diffusion of power, not only to other political parties, which now had a legitimate chance of governing,⁹ but also empowered civil society and the proliferation of human rights groups, in particular, which has occurred

Defense Scenarios," Center for the United States and Mexico Research Paper (August 2020), Houston, Texas: Rice University, <https://doi.org/10.25613/0ycd-da23>.

⁷ Clare Ribando Seelke, "Mexico: Evolution of the Merida Initiative 2007-2019, *Congressional Research Service*, 11 March 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10578.pdf>.

⁸ For example, DHS coordinates with the Secretary of National Defense on disrupting organized crime; however, for strengthening the rule of law and human rights DHS works with the Mexican Attorney General's Office. For border security issues, DHS works with Mexico's Internal Revenue Service.

⁹ Although Mexico has had a constitutional democracy since the end of the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s, due to the 70 years of one-party rule under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), many scholars argue that real democracy did not occur in

since 2000. Such civil society organizations (CSO) play a key role in monitoring public safety institutions, to include the military, and their ability to act with impunity. They, along with journalists, also can shed light on the informal workings of TGNs, particularly those involved in security assistance between the United States and Mexico, and their impact on human rights.¹⁰ Since TGNs can operate below the radar, without transparency and accountability, CSOs play a key role within countries, but also between countries through their transnational networks in helping to provide the data necessary to assess the effectiveness of TGNs in addressing public safety issues.

While transparency and accountability have always been issues in Mexico in particular with security institutions, more recently the United States under the Trump administration has suffered a loss of credibility both internationally and domestically. The loss of trust in leaders and institutions in the United States which are responsible for transnational security cooperation with Mexico and their increasing ability to act with impunity can only increase the iceberg effect of TGNs, requiring more, rather than less, accountability. Studies like Payan's are necessary now more than ever.

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Mexico under 2000 and the election of the opposition National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox. See Enrique Krause, "Furthering Democracy in Mexico," *Foreign Affairs* 85:1 (2006): 54-65, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/20031842>.

¹⁰ Sarah Baumunk and Linnea Sandin, "Mexican Civil Society: Reclaiming Space Amidst Impunity" *CSIS Human Rights Initiative* (December 2018), https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181227_BaumunkandSandin_Mexico_layout_v7_0.pdf.