



## Rodrigo Canales: The deadly genius of drug cartels

*“Whether we like it or not, the U.S. is the largest market for illegal substances in the world, accounting for more than half of global demand...”*

*“The question is whether we are willing to continue our support of a failed strategy based on our stubborn, blissful, voluntary ignorance at the cost of the deaths of thousands of our young.”*

Up to 100,000 people have died in drug-related violence in Mexico in the last 6 years. We might think this has nothing to do with us, but in fact we are all complicit, says Yale professor Rodrigo Canales in this unflinching talk that turns conventional wisdom about drug cartels on its head. The carnage is not about faceless, ignorant goons mindlessly killing each other but is rather the result of some seriously sophisticated brand management.

### Level:

- Advanced, Discussion Focus

### Themes

- The legalization of drugs
- The role of international crime in society

### Suggested Grammar:

- Vocab
- Present Perfect revision

NB: This talk is long enough to contextualize many different grammar points. Adapt as necessary.

### **Discussion**

Discuss how crime, in particular the drug trade, influences society in your country:

- Are any drugs legal in your country? Do you think that they should be? Why/Why not?
- Do you know of any large criminal organizations in your country (or elsewhere), and how do they affect people's lives?
- What kind of part does crime play in your country? Is organized crime a problem? Does it have consequences for the society or economy?

**Comprehension  
Checking**

Answer the T/F Questions

1. The law in Mexico states that all people are equal.
2. The number of people who have died as a result of drug-related violence is very close to the number of those who have died in the Syrian civil war.
3. The U.S. is not the largest market for illegal substances in the world.
4. Mexico is important as a “*geographic corridor*” to the U.S.
5. There are three major organizations that control most of the drug trade in Mexico.
6. All of the organizations kill the same number of people.
7. The Los Zetas operate a “franchise” style business using fear.
8. The Knights Templar created a brand of “social enterprise” – of helping and protecting the citizens of their towns.
9. The Sinaloa Federation is a truly integrated, multi-national corporation.

**Vocab**

**Vocab matching – Definitions or Synonyms**

- |                   |                                                                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Encounter      | A. To give a record/reason for something.                                  |
| 2. Defunct        | B. As a consequence, as a result, therefore.                               |
| 3. To Fumble      | C. To sell in large amounts, usually to other organizations.               |
| 4. Numb           | D. In this context, an unexpected fight or confrontation. Usually violent. |
| 5. To account for | E. Without central organization.                                           |
| 6. Wholesale      | F. Used to describe something that doesn't exist anymore.                  |
| 7. Hence          | G. To not feel or know.                                                    |
| 8. Decentralized  | H. To make a mistake, error.                                               |

**More Useful  
Vocab**

**Goons** – Informal. Criminals who are stupid, and remain the bottom level of an organization.

**Sociopath** – A person who has a lack of conscience when thinking about other people. Generally anti-social and/or violent.

**Body Count** – The number of people killed.

**To leverage** – To use something (e.g. resources) for gain – to get an advantage.

**Possible Grammar Present Perfect Revision:**

- Has/Have + Past Participle

**Find these examples in the transcript:**

- Fill the gaps with the correct form of the Past Perfect:

*Page 4:*

Like any multinational would, they \_\_\_\_\_ and focused only in the most profitable part of the business, which is high-margin drugs like cocaine, heroine, methamphetamines.

*Page 1:*

It's also shockingly close to the number of people who \_\_\_\_\_ in the Syrian civil war, which is an active civil war. This is happening just south of the border.

*Page 1:*

...Because you will quickly find out that in the past six years anywhere between 60 and 100,000 people \_\_\_\_\_ their lives in drug-related violence.

*Page 4:*

...They, as social enterprises do, \_\_\_\_\_ a moral and ethical code that they advertise around, and they have very strict recruiting practices.

**Remember:**

We use the Present Perfect to say that an action happened at an unspecified time before now. The exact time is not important. You **CANNOT** use the Present Perfect with specific time expressions such as: yesterday, one year ago, last week, when I was a child, when I lived in Japan, at that moment, that day, one day, etc.

We **CAN** use the Present Perfect with unspecific expressions such as: ever, never, once, many times, several times, before, so far, already, yet, etc.

## **Discussion and Debate**

### **General Discussion:**

- Do you think drugs should be made legal?
- Would legalizing drugs solve the problem?
- Do you think that the “War on Drugs” has been effective? Should it continue?
- Where do you think the blame lies – with the Mexican government, or with the U.S. government?
- Is it possible to stop people using drugs on a large scale? Why/Why not?
- In which parts of society are drugs most common? How do we make them less common?
- If not made legal, should drug use be “tolerated” by those who enforce the law? In what way?
- Do you think that the U.S. Incentivize the drug trade?
- Do you know of any other countries involved in this economy like the U.S? Are they different in any way?
- What is drug law like in your country? What is the social situation like, and what are people’s attitudes?
- Drug cartels are huge employers – How do you think this affects people’s attitudes towards them? Are they really helping the community?

### **Debate topics:**

- The problem with the drug trade is its customer base – removing the demand for illegal drugs will remove the problem. Legalizing drugs is therefore the solution.
- The best solution is to use the military – the drug production and transit “companies” should just be destroyed.
- The U.S. and other countries should mind their own business and simply tighten border control as much as possible. Mexico’s own government is the only authority that can make decisions regarding the problem. Nobody else should interfere.
- The drug cartels are huge employers in their territories. The real problem is government corruption that allows them to do whatever they want. Local, state and federal governments should be trying to reach a compromise with the organizations in order to improve the situation in regard to the body count.