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Anomie and Social Disorganization among Latin American Youth: A Durkheimian Comparative Analysis of Colombia and Mexico

拉丁美洲青年失范与社会失序：基于埃米尔·涂尔干理论的哥伦比亚与墨西哥比较研究

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to comparatively analyze contemporary manifestations of anomie and social disorganization experienced by young people in Colombia and Mexico, considering Émile Durkheim's sociological theory. This paper seeks to understand how the processes of modernization, structural violence, social exclusion, and the weakening of collective norms have affected social cohesion and order in these two Latin American countries. This article aims to comparatively examine how the phenomena of anomie and social disorganization manifest themselves among young people in both Colombia and Mexico in Latin America, using Émile Durkheim's theory as an analytical framework. This paper seeks to identify the structural, cultural, and normative factors that weaken social cohesion and favor the breakdown of social order in both contexts. This article describes a new method in sociolegal research in Colombia, called the sociolegal method compared to the Durkheimian approach. It uses Émile Durkheim's theory of anomie as an analytical tool for understanding not only social processes but also normative effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, and the fragility of the legal order in contexts marked by exclusion, violence, and inequality. Using quantitative analysis, the authors illustrate with statistical data that this approach revitalizes the dialogue between sociology and law and does so from a structural-functionalist perspective that has been little explored in Colombian normative analysis. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the new method proposes the use of empirical indicators (such as homicide rates, labor informality, institutional trust, or perception of justice) to measure the degree of anomie, thus incorporating interdisciplinary tools that connect quantitative data with normative interpretation. The new research results complement studies that have been carried out by authors such as Albornoz-Arias et al (2023) and Ortegón Salazar (2020). The novelty and scientific contribution points towards a qualitative comparative analysis between Colombia and Mexico, which not only observes formal legal norms, but also how young people interact in weakened social structures, marked by phenomena such as drug trafficking, informality, corruption and forced displacement.

摘要：

本文旨在在埃米尔·涂尔干社会学理论视角下，对哥伦比亚与墨西哥青年所经历的当代失范与社会失序现象进行比较分析，力图理解现代化进程、结构性暴力、社会排斥以及集体规范弱化等过程如何影响这两个拉丁美洲国家的社会凝聚力与社会秩序。进一步地，本文以涂尔干失范理论为分析框架，比较考察失范与社会失序在哥伦比亚和墨西哥青年群体中的具体表现，识别在两国情境下削弱社会凝聚力并促使社会秩序瓦解的结构性、文化性与规范性因素。本文同时提出并论证了一种适用于哥伦比亚社会法学研究的新路径，即将“社会法学方法”与涂尔干取向加以对照的分析框架。该路径以涂尔干的失范理论为核心分析工具，不仅用于理解社会过程本身，还用于把握在排斥、暴力与不平等高度突出的情境中，规范效力、制度合法性以及法律秩序脆弱性的运行机制。通过定量分析，作者借助统计数据表明，这一方法从哥伦比亚规范分析中较少涉及的结构—功能主义视角出发，重塑并激活了社会学与法学之间的对话。在对该新方法的效力评估中，本文主张引入一系列经验性指标（如凶杀率、劳动非正规性、制度信任水平与正义感知等）来度量失范程度，从而将定量数据与规范解释有机衔接，融入跨学科工具。研究所得的新结果，对阿尔博尔诺斯-阿里亚斯等（2023）以及奥尔特贡·萨拉萨尔（2020）等学者的相关研究形成了有益补充。本文的创新性与科学贡献在于开展了哥伦比亚与墨西哥之间的质性比较分析，不仅关注形式法规范本身，而且考察在毒品贩运、非正规性、腐败及被迫流离失所等现象所标记的弱化社会结构中，青年群体如何实际互动与行使其主体性。

Keywords: Youth, Anomie, Social disorganization, Normative cohesion, Structural violence, Social modernization, Institutional fragmentation

关键词： 青年；失范；社会失序；规范凝聚力；结构性暴力；社会现代化；制度碎片化

1. Introduction

In Latin America, the processes of social, economic, and political transformation of recent decades have revealed deep fractures in the social fabric of numerous countries. Colombia and Mexico, in particular, have experienced persistent phenomena of structural violence, weakening of institutions, a crisis of normative legitimacy, and a loss of citizen trust in states. These states, like Colombia and Mexico, reveal symptoms of social

disorganization that go beyond visible crime. Based on these scenarios, it is pertinent to revisit the theory of anomie proposed by Émile Durkheim to understand how the weakening of social and legal norms contributes to the loss of cohesion, the rise of divisive individualism, and the emergence of new forms of disorder in collective life.

Using Durkheimian sociology as a theoretical framework and critical socio-legal research as a method, this article proposes a comparative analysis of the structural and normative elements between Colombia and Mexico. Through documentary review, analysis of social and normative indicators, and the contrast of historical contexts, since it seeks to identify common patterns and significant differences in the way in which anomie is expressed in both countries [1]. Thus, a reflection is raised on the need to rethink legal and social structures from integrative approaches that respond not only to formal legality, but also to social legitimacy, the collective moral order and the reconstruction of the community bond in societies fragmented by structural, historical and normative factors that have weakened the bonds of social cohesion and the legitimacy of the legal order.

A. Problem Statement: Structural inequality, social exclusion, and systemic corruption generate distrust in the political institutions of Colombia and Mexico.

The problem under investigation lies in the fact that, despite having formal legal frameworks and apparently consolidated institutional structures, both Colombia and Mexico face a growing breakdown of the normative order and weakening of social cohesion, manifested in phenomena such as the rise of organized crime, structural informality, systemic corruption, loss of trust in institutions, and the fragmentation of the community fabric [2]. This situation highlights a profound social anomie, understood as the insufficiency of shared norms to guide individual and collective behavior.

The central problem lies, therefore, in the current disconnect between the normative system (legal and moral) and the Colombian and Mexican social reality, which generates state disorganization, delegitimization of law, and a crisis of collective social meaning [3]. In this context, Émile Durkheim's theory of anomie offers a useful analytical framework for interpreting how the lack of social regulation and the absence of shared values contribute to the ineffectiveness of norms and the reproduction of conditions of exclusion, violence, and inequality in both countries.

The persistence of phenomena such as criminal violence, the weakening of the rule of law, institutional mistrust, and the rise of social practices outside the legal framework in Colombia and Mexico reflects a broader process of erosion of social control and loss of normative effectiveness. This deterioration is manifested in the inability of positive law to regulate social behavior and resolve conflicts legitimately, especially in territories marked by poverty, structural inequality, and the dominance of illegal or informal actors [4]. In this context, the law is perceived as alien or ineffective, which fuels institutional fragmentation and favors the emergence of parallel orders, often violent or arbitrary. Furthermore, the problem is exacerbated by the poor articulation between formal legal norms and the cultural and social realities of local communities. The imposition of abstract legal models, lacking a true foundation in the moral and community fabric, creates a gap between legality and legitimacy, which fosters anomie because of the mismatch between the normative aspirations of the State and the concrete dynamics of social life [5]. This disconnect constitutes a threat to the construction of citizenship, the effective exercise of rights, and the consolidation of democratic processes in Latin America. This makes it important to conduct a critical and interdisciplinary analysis that recognizes the social dimension of law.

The notion of anomie, developed by Émile Durkheim in the late 19th century, describes a social state characterized by the absence or weakening of collective norms that regulate individual behavior. This can be interpreted as meaning that anomie can be equated with anemia, and although they belong to completely different fields, they can have very similar meanings [6]. In the field of sociology anomie is the state of social disorganization or lack of clear norms that regulate the behavior of individuals in a society and anemia is the medical condition in which the body does not have enough healthy red blood cells or hemoglobin, which causes fatigue, weakness and other symptoms that can lead to cancer called leukemia, that is, social anomie is a type of social cancer in which the State [7] does not realize that its bad citizens (white blood cells) harm good citizens (red blood cells) and hemoglobin is not produced, which is like social cohesion, because there is an active citizenship with a strengthened social contract against the legitimacy of the State, a situation that does not produce institutional trust [8]. In the contemporary Latin American context, this category acquires special relevance to understand the dynamics of institutional crisis,

social fragmentation and loss of collective sense, both in Colombia and Mexico, since the high rates of violence, corruption, informality and structural exclusion reveal scenarios where the legal and social order is in dispute, and where formal norms coexist - and sometimes collide - with informal practices that configure a field of functional and structural anomie, that is, a social cancer [9].

Faced with these challenges, this research aims to analyze how the processes of social disorganization in both countries reflect a crisis of moral and legal integration that prevents the consolidation of full citizenship. This merits the understanding of these phenomena [10], which requires a critical socio-legal perspective, capable of transcending traditional normative analysis to situate itself at the intersection of the legal, the social and the cultural. From this perspective, the Durkheimian approach allows us to question the normative foundations of life in society and explore how their weakening impacts governability, justice, and social cohesion in Latin America [11].

The study of anomie and social disorganization must be contextualized within the framework of the structural transformations that have affected the Latin American region in recent decades with neoliberal reforms, which caused the weakening of the social state, giving way to the expansion of illicit economies, and the growing citizen disenchantment with democratic institutions [12]. These factors have generated deep tensions in the normative fabric of societies, evidencing a disconnect between the established legal order and the effective forms of organization of daily life. In this scenario, formal law loses its regulatory capacity and the presence of informal norms increases, often imposed by armed actors, such as in Colombia, which governed the Prosecutor's Law 45, named after the caliber of the weapons used by the Guerrillas (FARC, ELN, EPL, M-19, etc.) or the Paramilitaries (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), [13] in conjunction with corruption networks or clientelist practices, as occurred in Bogotá, a Colombian city where clientelist networks have been a constant in local politics, manifested through various scandals that reflect the use of public resources and positions to favor particular interests, which exacerbated the crisis of legitimacy of the Colombian legal system [14], for example, we find the Carousel of Contracting (2009–2011). The previous scandal involved officials from the administration of then-Mayor Samuel Moreno Rojas, who, in complicity with contractors such as Grupo Nule, manipulated contracting processes for public works, including Phase III of the TransMilenio project. The loss of assets is estimated to have exceeded 2.2 trillion Colombian pesos. High-ranking officials, council members, and businessmen were convicted of crimes such as bribery and improper execution of contracts [15].

Thus, Durkheim warned that modern societies, as they transition from forms of mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, face the risk of falling into states of anomie [16] when regulatory mechanisms fail to adapt to the pace of social change. In Colombia and Mexico, this phenomenon is clearly observed in the processes of accelerated urbanization, persistent inequality, and structural violence that have created environments where collective rules are weakened or replaced by particularistic power logics. This reality raises fundamental questions about the role of law as an instrument of social cohesion and control in contexts marked by exclusion and fragmentation [17].

The choice of Colombia and Mexico as case studies in this article is not arbitrary, as both countries share historical and structural characteristics that allow for meaningful comparisons: a long history of armed conflict or organized violence, weakened institutions in certain regions, and a civil society that, although active, faces serious obstacles to effectively influencing public decision-making. Through the comparative analysis conducted by professors from the Autonomous University of Sinaloa (Mexico) who have completed academic internships in Cartagena (Colombia), and professors from the Universidad del Sinu Cartagena Section in Mazatlán, Los Mochis, and Culiacan in the State of Sinaloa (Mexico), the aim is not only to identify similarities and differences in the way anomie is expressed in each country, but also to construct a deeper understanding of the social and legal conditions that allow—or impede—the consolidation of the normative order currently existing in both countries. This research is part of a critical socio-legal perspective [18], which recognizes that law is not a closed or autonomous system, but a social construction in constant tension with the reality experienced by communities. Therefore, understanding anomie from this perspective implies analyzing how norms lose effectiveness when they do not respond to collective values or when inequality prevents their equitable application. Thus, the study of anomie and social disorganization becomes a way to reflect on the need to rebuild the legitimacy of law from below, through participatory, intercultural processes anchored in the concrete realities of Latin American territories [19], as recounted by the Colombian experience

with the Seventh Ballot initiative, which emerged in 1990 as a civic movement driven primarily by university students, including former Bogotá mayor Claudia López. This movement made a symbolic and political call to hold a referendum to amend the 1886 Constitution, which at the time was considered insufficient to guarantee a political and social pact between Colombians and the rule of law [20]. This Constitution, in force for more than a century, had become obsolete in the face of the challenges of violence, exclusion, and lack of institutional legitimacy that the country was facing. The Seventh Ballot was voluntarily cast by millions of citizens during the legislative elections of March 1990, requesting the convening of a National Constituent Assembly. Although it did not initially have legal status, its massive support led the government of César Gaviria to recognize the popular will and promote the issuance of Decree 927 of 1990, by which the primary constituent assembly, that is, the Colombian people, was officially convened to elect an Assembly charged with drafting a new Constitution. This process culminated in the promulgation of the Political Constitution of 1991, which refunded the country's legal and political order on democratic, pluralistic, and participatory principles and with a new emphasis on fundamental rights [21].

The first ten articles of Colombia's 1991 Political Constitution enshrine the fundamental principles upon which the country's legal and democratic order is structured. Article 1, for example, establishes that Colombia is a social state governed by the rule of law, organized as a unitary, democratic, participatory, and pluralistic republic. This implies that sovereignty resides exclusively in the people and that authorities are established to protect rights and promote the general welfare. This principle introduces a break with the merely formal conception of law, placing human dignity, material justice, and social inclusion at the center of state action [22].

Article 7, for its part, recognizes Colombia as a multiethnic and multicultural nation, which represents a historic advance in the constitutional recognition of the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. It also obliges the State to protect the collective identities, languages, territories, and rights of Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and other traditional communities [23]. Along with these principles, the 1991 Constitution enshrines in its first articles a set of fundamental rights (such as life, equality, liberty, due process, among others), which constitute the core of the constitutional system and are directly applicable; that is, they can be demanded even without legislative development, reinforcing the guarantee-based nature of the Charter [24]. Together, these founding articles outline a constitution that not only structures political power but also projects a model of inclusive, democratic society that respects human rights [25].

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Colombia and Mexico reveals that anomie and social disorganization are not marginal phenomena, but rather structural expressions of a profound crisis of normative integration that affects broad social sectors in these Latin American countries. The weakening of the link between formal legal norms and the social, political, and economic realities of the population generates a rupture between law and everyday life, which translates into high levels of informality, violence, impunity, and institutional distrust. This crisis, far from being merely legal, is above all a moral and social crisis, as Durkheim anticipated in his reflections on the integrative function of law in modern societies.

Émile Durkheim's theory of anomie has allowed these problems to be interpreted not only from a normative perspective, but also from a functional perspective of social cohesion [26]. In contexts where the State has been unable to guarantee equality, justice, and order, anomie becomes an almost permanent anemic condition that affects the collective sense and the possibilities of building common projects because bad individuals (white blood cells) and armed actors are harming good individuals and social groups (red blood cells) in civil society. The presence of parallel orders, informal norms imposed by illegal actors, or survival practices outside the law are symptoms of this normative fracture that erodes the law's capacity to fulfill its regulatory role in society. In this sense, the findings of the academic research call for a rethinking of state intervention strategies to address the problems of governability and legitimacy in Latin America. Beyond strengthening the coercive apparatus of the state, it is urgent to rebuild the normative fabric from a cultural, participatory, and territorial perspective in Colombia and Mexico. This entails recognizing local forms of organization, community knowledge, and the resistance that emerge amidst disorder as legitimate sources of social normativity, capable of contributing to a new form of cohesion and justice in historically excluded contexts, just as Colombia did with the 1991 Constitution.

Finally, the research raises the need to move toward a more critical and contextualized Latin

American socio-legal system that transcends Eurocentric legal models and engages with the concrete realities of our societies. Understanding anomie not only as a social pathology, but as a symptom of unjust and exclusionary structures, is a fundamental step toward imagining more inclusive, just, and legitimate normative alternatives. Only in this way will it be possible to advance in the reconstruction of an active citizenship and a right that responds to the complexities of the Latin American social world.

A. Contribution of the Study. Social Anomie in Colombia and Mexico: Normative Ruptures and Institutional Disorder

Colombia's recent history is marked by profound manifestations of social anomie, understood since Émile Durkheim as the breakdown of the normative ties that bind society together [27]. Beginning in the 1960s, the combination of structural poverty, inequality in land distribution, and political exclusion generated conditions of collective frustration and loss of faith in state institutions. In this context, guerrilla movements such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the ELN (National Liberation Army), and later the M-19 emerged, adopting Marxist-Leninist discourses influenced by the Cuban Revolution and supported directly or indirectly by Fidel Castro's government with the support of the Kremlin leader who governed the then Soviet Union. These groups emerged as a reaction to a state that did not guarantee basic rights or real democratic participation, which evidenced a clear normative dysfunction and profound social disorganization [28].

During the 1970s and 1980s, the situation worsened with the emergence of drug trafficking, a phenomenon that aggravated institutional and moral anomie. Figures such as Pablo Escobar, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha of the Medellín Cartel, and the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers of the Cali Cartel established a parallel order based on the power of money, corruption, intimidation, and systematic violence [29]. State institutions, infiltrated by drug trafficking, lost their capacity for social regulation, and citizens began to be governed more by norms of survival imposed by criminal actors than by positive law. Durkheimian anomie manifested itself here as a crisis of shared values and as the replacement of formal legality with a culture of illegality, impunity, and the logic of armed power [30]. In response to the guerrilla threat and the rise of drug cartels, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) emerged in the 1990s as a national articulation of rural paramilitarism. Although they presented themselves as defenders of security and order, the AUC only deepened social disorganization by establishing a reign of terror in vast areas of the country through massacres, forced displacement, and armed social control. [31] The simultaneous existence of guerrillas, drug cartels, and paramilitary groups generated a scenario of chronic anomie, like a form of leukemia, where the State lost its legitimate monopoly on force and where legal norms were systematically replaced by de facto violent orders.

This long period of anomie in Colombia [32], whose structural roots lie in poverty, inequality, and exclusion, demonstrates how the absence of moral cohesion and normative integration triggered cycles of prolonged violence. Durkheim warned that a society in which individuals do not feel integrated or regulated tends to develop profound social pathologies. In the Colombian case, the convergence of armed conflict, drug trafficking, and paramilitarism not only fragmented the territory but also the very sense of political community, affecting the legitimacy of the state and hindering processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Similarly, in Mexico, the 1960s were marked by a strong concentration of wealth, high rural marginalization, and an economic development model that favored urban industrial centers, leaving vast peasant sectors such as the Ejidos and Rancherías in a situation of structural poverty. This economic and social exclusion, especially evident in states like Sinaloa, created an environment conducive to the emergence of illicit networks that offered alternative means of subsistence in the face of state abandonment. From the perspective of Émile Durkheim, this situation can be interpreted as a manifestation of anomie, [33] that is, a fracture of the normative order that prevents the integration of individuals into a collective project and fosters the emergence of deviant behaviors as a form of social adaptation.

The emergence of drug trafficking in Sinaloa occurred precisely in this context of structural vulnerability. Entire families linked to agriculture especially in the so-called "Golden Triangle," which includes the mountainous regions of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua began to dedicate themselves to the cultivation of marijuana and poppies as their only economic option. In cities like Culiacan and Mazatlán, this activity gained social, economic, and territorial power, giving way to the consolidation of family clans that, over time, would transform into powerful cartels, such as the Sinaloa Cartel [34]. These actors not only replaced the State in its role of social control in large territories, but also imposed their own normative codes, often

accepted by the local community as a response to the institutional absence.

The expansion of drug trafficking brought with it a profound disorganization of the legal and moral order in many regions of Mexico. Internal wars between organized crime factions, such as those waged by the Beltrán Leyva brothers, the Guzmán Loera brothers, or the Zambada García brothers, have turned cities like Culiacán into scenes of recurring violence and laboratories for forced coexistence between illegality and everyday life [35]. The state's inability to exercise effective control, coupled with the naturalization of the illicit economy as a way of life, consolidates a state of chronic anomie, where the law loses its symbolic and practical effectiveness. This phenomenon not only reflects a security crisis, but also a crisis of normative legitimacy that questions the law's ability to regulate social life in contexts marked by poverty, exclusion, and organized violence.

2. METHODOLOGY

In Latin America, historical processes of inequality, structural violence, and social exclusion have weakened normative cohesion and eroded the legitimacy of legal institutions [36]. In countries such as Colombia and Mexico, this situation has led to persistent manifestations of anomie and social disorganization, reflected in citizen distrust, the emergence of illegal economies, the fragmentation of state power, and the consolidation of parallel normative orders [37].

Since the 1960s, phenomena such as rural poverty and urban marginalization have led to the emergence of guerrilla movements, as well as the expansion of paramilitarism and organized crime (in Colombia), and of drug-trafficking clans (in both Colombia and Mexico), which have deepened the disconnect between formal law and social reality [38].

This fracture between legal normativity and the social framework, which Émile Durkheim conceptualized as anomie, [39] highlights a crisis in the legal system as a tool for social cohesion and regulation. However, there is an analytical gap in Latin American socio-legal literature regarding comparative studies that address anomie from a structural, historical, and normative perspective in the countries of this region of the world. From this problem arises the need to understand how the processes of social disorganization in Colombia and Mexico have been configured and expressed, and what structural elements explain them, together with the implications they have for the legitimacy of law and the reconstruction of social ties in the region, it is from there that the question that guided the research is: How are they manifested and what structural factors explain the processes of anomie and social disorganization in Colombia and Mexico since the 1960s, and in what way have these phenomena affected the legitimacy of law and social cohesion, in light of Émile Durkheim's theory?

The general objective was to comparatively analyze the processes of anomie and social disorganization in Colombia and Mexico since the 1960s, based on the theoretical approaches of Émile Durkheim, to identify the structural, historical, and normative factors that have weakened social cohesion and affected the legitimacy of law in both contexts. The specific objectives were: To examine the historical, social, and economic factors that generated conditions of anomie in Colombia and Mexico since the 1960s; To analyze the impact of drug trafficking, armed movements, and illegal economies on the configuration of parallel regulatory orders in cities such as Medellín and Cali (Colombia) and Culiacán and Mazatlán (Mexico), revealing patterns of social disorganization. To determine, using Émile Durkheim's theory, how the loss of social cohesion and the crisis of moral order have affected the symbolic and practical effectiveness of law in the territories most affected by anomie in Colombia and Mexico, such as rural areas (Corregimientos and Veredas of Colombian Municipalities and Ejidos and Rancherías of Mexican Municipalities). In turn, the hypothesis constructed determines that anomie and social disorganization in Colombia and Mexico are the result of historical processes of structural poverty, social exclusion, and institutional weakness. These processes have generated a rupture between formal law and effective social norms, allowing the consolidation of parallel orders—such as drug trafficking and armed groups—and weakening the legitimacy of law as an instrument of social cohesion.

This research is methodologically framed within a quantitative socio-legal perspective,[40] as it seeks to empirically analyze the relationship between social phenomena such as poverty, violence, and exclusion and the normative effectiveness of law in Colombia and Mexico. This approach allows for the measurement and correlation of social and legal variables, providing a more objective and systematic understanding of how anomie and social disorganization affect the legitimacy of the legal system. According to Medina-Romero [41], the quantitative approach in legal research facilitates the testing of hypotheses and the obtaining of results in shorter periods of

time, through the creation of indices or measurement scales that make it possible to propose alternative solutions and/or changes in the object of study. This is particularly relevant in contexts where an accurate assessment of regulatory effectiveness and its impact on social cohesion is required. Furthermore, deductive reasoning, characteristic of quantitative research, allows for inferring conclusions from general principles to cases, which is essential for analyzing how general regulatory structures manifest themselves in specific contexts of social disorganization. This methodological approach is fundamental to understanding the dynamics between legal norms and social realities in Colombia and Mexico. Therefore, by adopting a quantitative socio-legal methodology, this research seeks to provide a solid empirical basis for the analysis of anomie and social disorganization, which contribute to the formulation of more effective public policies and the improvement of the legitimacy of law in Latin American contexts [42].

The method used in this research is analytical and statistical, which allowed us to examine the relationship between social and legal variables through the processing of quantitative data. Statistical data were used as the primary data collection technique, providing firsthand information that served as the basis for the empirical analysis of the phenomenon of anomie and social disorganization in the selected contexts.

3. RESULTS

This section develops each of the analytical categories, which were defined as conceptual parameters in the specific research objectives. The analysis of these categories emerges from the systematic process of data collection through bibliographic records. Based on these, a textual analysis and hermeneutical interpretation of the selected documents were conducted to provide a theoretical basis for the study. A. Historical, social, and economic factors that generated conditions of anomie in Colombia and Mexico beginning in the 1960s.

Beginning in the 1960s, both Colombia and Mexico faced historic transformations marked by unbalanced modernization processes, deepening inequality, and concentration of political and economic power. In Colombia, for example, the National Front (1958–1974) closed the democratic system to the participation of alternative sectors [43], while in Mexico, the PRI regime consolidated an authoritarian model of a hegemonic party. In both countries, this political exclusion impeded the effective integration of broad social sectors, generating collective discontent, a loss of institutional legitimacy, and a widespread perception that the legal system did not respond to the real needs of the population.

From a social perspective, both Colombia and Mexico experienced rapid urbanization accompanied by structural poverty, disorderly internal migration, and the marginalization of rural areas. These phenomena created spaces where the state was weak or absent, fostering the emergence of informal norms, often imposed by armed groups or criminal networks. In Colombia, these conditions favored the emergence of guerrilla movements based in abandoned rural areas, while in Mexico, especially in states such as Sinaloa, Durango, and Guerrero, marginalized rural families found drug cultivation an economic alternative to state neglect.

In the economic sphere, the neoliberal policies adopted in the 1980s deepened social inequality, dismantled labor guarantees, and weakened social protection systems. These reforms widened the gap between legal norms and the population's actual living conditions, contributing to a regulatory crisis characterized by a loss of trust in the law as a mechanism of justice and order. Thus, in both countries, forms of structural anomie [44] were consolidated, in which laws lost their ability to guide collective behavior, being replaced, in many cases, by parallel orders based on violence, the illegal economy, and institutional fragmentation.

Drug trafficking in Colombia emerged strongly in the 1970s and 1980s, driven initially by marijuana trafficking and later by the expansion of the cocaine market to the United States. This phenomenon reached transnational dimensions when major Colombian drug lords, such as Pablo Escobar, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha (Medellín Cartel), and the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers (Cali Cartel), established strategic alliances with Mexican drug traffickers, who acted as intermediaries in distribution northward. One of the most emblematic links was with Amado Carrillo Fuentes, known as "El Señor de los Cielos" leader of the Juárez Cartel, who facilitated the airlift of cocaine shipments from Colombia to the United States. These alliances not only consolidated a binational drug trafficking network but also deepened the processes of anomie [45] and social disorganization by imposing illicit economies, corrupting institutions, and generating systematic violence in both Colombia and Mexico. In the state of Sinaloa, Mexico, drug trafficking consolidated as a highly organized criminal structure beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, centered in the cities of Culiacán,

Mazatlán, and Badiraguato, where factors such as rural poverty, institutional weakness, and a tradition of illicit crops converged. In this context, the Sinaloa Cartel emerged, initially led by figures such as Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, both of whom were arrested, prosecuted, and convicted for drug trafficking in U.S. federal courts. They established a hierarchical and decentralized network of operations that combined territorial control with sophisticated international drug trafficking routes. The cartel operated under a criminal business model [46] that includes the presentation of criminals as simple workers with caps, sunglasses, balaclavas and black t-shirts, khaki pants and industrial boots in the production, logistics and transportation process for the control of the territory and the drugs, in addition to money laundering and institutional corruption that contributes to the illicit trafficking of cocaine and its derivatives from Mexico to the United States, even expanding micro-trafficking to remote regions such as Australia. Unlike other more violent groups, the leadership of Guzmán and Zambada was characterized by a strategy of alliances and negotiations with other cartels and co-optation of state actors as part of a structured strategy of territorial control, social legitimation and operational protection, which allows them to maintain and expand their power within and outside the State. This institutional co-optation is part of a phenomenon known as state capture [47], in which criminal groups directly or indirectly influence the decisions, functions or structures of public power, which allows them to consolidate a parallel power in the region and maintain relative stability within illegality for decades, exacerbating lawlessness and seriously weakening the rule of law in this area of Mexican territory.

The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) emerged in the late 1990s as a federation of paramilitary groups [48] that initially presented themselves as a response to the guerrilla threat in rural areas where the State had little or no presence. However, far from strengthening the institutional order, the AUC imposed armed social control based on terror, forced displacement, extortion, and collusion with drug trafficking sectors, generating a parallel system of authority that undermined the legitimacy of the State and the law. Its national expansion and involvement in crimes against humanity deepened social anomie by weakening collective moral ties and replacing legal norms with logics of violent power and structural informality. In this way, the AUC not only challenged the guerrillas for territorial control but also imposed a coercive order that disrupted social cohesion and exacerbated institutional distrust in vast regions of the country.

Historical Evolution of Poverty, Social Exclusion, and Institutional Weakness in Colombia and Mexico (1960–2000): A Comparative Statistical Analysis.

Between 1960 and 2000, both Colombia and Mexico faced significant challenges in terms of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion [49]. In Colombia, the combination of economic recessions, armed conflicts, and forced displacement exacerbated poverty and weakened institutions. In Mexico, despite periods of economic growth, the lack of equitable distribution of wealth and the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s led to a stagnation in poverty reduction and an increase in inequality. These factors contributed to social anomie in both countries, characterized by distrust in institutions and a fragmented social fabric.

In Colombia, in 1991, 54% of Colombian households lived below the poverty line. This figure fell to 49% in 1995 but rose to 59% in 2000 due to the economic recession of the late 1990s. In rural areas, poverty was more pronounced, rising from 74% in 1995 to 85% in 2000. Income inequality also intensified. In 1991, the richest 10% of the population earned 30 times more than the poorest 10%; by 2000, this gap had widened to 77 times [50]. During this period, unemployment rose, particularly among young women, whose unemployment rate rose from 15% in 1992 to 40.6% in 2000. Informal employment also grew, affecting 61% of the employed population in 2000, with a 92.5% incidence in the poorest decile. Forced displacement totaled approximately 2 million people between 1985 and 2000, reflecting the institutional weakness in guaranteeing security and fundamental rights [50].

In the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia experienced homicide rates above 70 per 100,000 inhabitants, particularly during the rise of drug trafficking and armed conflict. In 2022, the homicide rate was 25.3 per 100,000 inhabitants, with a total of 13,097 recorded homicides. In 2005, approximately 49% of the working population was in informal employment; and by 2019, the national informality rate was around 60%, while in urban areas it was close to 47%. In 2022, labor informality nationwide was close to 58% [50]. In 2020, 71.7% of people considered justice to be slow or very slow, and 43% perceived judicial officials as corrupt or very corrupt. Trust in Congress decreased from 42% to 25% between 2018 and 2021, evidencing a crisis of credibility in institutions [50].

In Mexico, poverty decreased significantly between 1950 and 1984. However, between 1984 and 1994, poverty remained almost constant, and in 1996, during the economic crisis, there was a sharp increase in poverty levels. Inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, showed an inverted U-shaped trend during the period 1950-1984, initially decreasing and then increasing almost continuously between 1984 and 2000 [51]. Despite sustained economic growth during the "Mexican Miracle" (1940-1970), this benefit was not distributed equitably. The poorest 50% saw their living conditions worsen, while the richest 20% saw their share of national wealth increase. The share of the bottom decile in total income decreased from 1.9% in 1963 to 0.9% in 1977, evidencing a growing income concentration. In 1990, the homicide rate was 16.6 per 100,000 inhabitants; in 2020, 35,644 homicides were reported, reaching a rate of 27.8 per 100,000 inhabitants; and in 2024, 43,118 homicides were recorded, representing an increase of 2.6% over the previous year [51]. In 2020, the informal labor rate was 54.5%. In 2024, informal labor remained at 54.5% of the working population. According to the 2022 Global Impunity Index Mexico (IGI-MEX), Mexico ranks 60th out of 69 countries evaluated, placing it as one of the countries with the highest levels of impunity globally. For example, the study "The Decline of Institutional Trust in Mexico" indicates that fluctuations in trust depend on contextual factors, such as the economic situation and the government's ability to combat corruption [51].

These indicators reflect persistent challenges in both countries in terms of security, employment, and trust in institutions—fundamental aspects for social cohesion and the strengthening of the rule of law.

B.- Impact of drug trafficking, armed movements, and illegal economies on the configuration of parallel normative orders in cities such as Culiacán and Mazatlán (Mexico), and Medellín and Cali (Colombia), revealing patterns of social disorganization.

In Medellín and Cali, two of Colombia's main cities, the rise of drug trafficking in the 1980s and 1990s, led by the Medellín Cartel and the Cali Cartel, transformed the urban order. In Medellín, under the leadership of Pablo Escobar, social control structures were created that combined extreme violence and contract killings (Oficina de Envigado and Las Terrazas) with charitable works such as the construction of shantytowns for poor families [52], creating a kind of tacit pact between the kingpin and the popular sectors ignored by the Colombian state. In Medellín and Cali, the emergence and expansion of drug cartels during the 1980s and 1990s profoundly transformed the social and political fabric. The Medellín Cartel, under the leadership of Pablo Escobar, and the Cali Cartel, led by the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers, not only controlled international cocaine trafficking but also infiltrated government institutions and established networks of patronage and violence. These organizations implemented parallel justice systems and offered services in areas underserved by the state, gaining legitimacy among certain sectors of the population. The presence of these cartels disrupted existing social norms, fostering a culture of lawlessness and distrust of official institutions, which has had lasting consequences for the stability and governability of these cities.

In Cali, the cartel led by the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers deeply infiltrated state and judicial institutions, creating an environment of eroded legality. These illegal economies—connected with networks of corruption, contract killings, and clientelism—established parallel regulatory orders that disrupted the legal system and fragmented social cohesion, generating spaces of anomie where state law was irrelevant or ineffective in the face of the norms imposed by illegal armed and economic actors.

In cities like Culiacán and Mazatlán, in the state of Sinaloa (Mexico), drug trafficking has not only shaped a large-scale informal economy but has also established forms of authority parallel to the state [53], where criminal actors like the Sinaloa Cartel impose norms, resolve conflicts, and regulate social behavior. The presence of leaders such as Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada consolidated a system of territorial control based on networks of complicity, family loyalties, and institutional co-optation [54], generating a non-state order that, although illegal, enjoys legitimacy in vulnerable sectors by offering security, employment, and a certain form of immediate justice. This phenomenon has contributed to profound social disorganization, where legal norms lose effectiveness and are replaced by codes of conduct imposed by organized crime groups, such as setting up checkpoints on public roads where criminals are seen as simple workers of a large (criminal) company, dressed in caps, sunglasses, black balaclavas and T-shirts, khaki pants, and industrial boots to denote that they control the territory through which drugs are transported to be sent to the United States. In cities like Culiacán and Mazatlán, drug trafficking has established power structures that operate outside the state, imposing their own rules and controlling various

aspects of daily life. The Sinaloa Cartel, historically led by figures such as Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, has consolidated its influence through institutional corruption, violence, and the provision of services [55] in marginalized communities. This dynamic has created an environment where official laws are replaced by codes imposed by organized crime, weakening state authority and fostering a culture of lawlessness. Violence stemming from internal disputes and clashes with other groups has exacerbated insecurity, seriously affecting social cohesion and economic development in the region [55].

C.- Loss of social cohesion and the crisis of moral order have affected the symbolic and practical effectiveness of law in the territories most affected by anomie in Colombia and Mexico, according to Émile Durkheim's theory.

From Émile Durkheim's perspective, anomie [56] arises when social norms lose their capacity to regulate individual behavior, generating a moral vacuum that leads to social disorganization. In the contexts of Colombia and Mexico, the fragmentation of the social fabric, the product of decades of violence, structural inequality, and institutional corruption, has weakened community ties and legitimate forms of authority. As a result, law loses its symbolic capacity to represent a just and commonly accepted order, giving way to parallel forms of normativity imposed by armed groups, drug traffickers, or clientelist networks.

The symbolic effectiveness of law is based on its recognition as a legitimate source of social order. However, in territories dominated by drug trafficking or armed groups—as is the case in Medellín, Cali, Culiacán, Mazatlán, or Guerrero—the law is perceived as ineffective or exclusionary. In such scenarios, citizens find no effective means of conflict resolution or effective protection of their rights in legal institutions. This normative breakdown stems from the state's inability to guarantee minimum conditions of equity, security, and access to justice, which reproduces citizen mistrust and the adoption of informal norms that, although illegal, are more functional for everyday life.

The crisis of the moral order, another central concept in Durkheimian theory, is expressed in the loss of shared collective referents that give meaning and direction to individual action. In anomic contexts such as those of many rural and peripheral areas in Colombia and Mexico, this loss of meaning is manifested in the naturalization of practices such as extortion, contract killings, or vigilante justice, where formal law no longer serves as a normative guide. This type of deviant adaptation occurs when institutional means fail to achieve socially valued ends, forcing individuals to seek alternatives outside the law.

Consequently, the practical effectiveness of the law is profoundly limited. As Sampson and Groves point out, high levels of social disorganization directly correlate with the deterioration of formal control mechanisms. Anomie not only challenges the rule of law but also questions its cultural and functional relevance, especially in contexts where the state is weak or absent. Overcoming this crisis requires not only legal reforms but also processes of moral reconstruction and social cohesion that restore legitimacy to the legal system and restore a collective sense of justice.

4. DISCUSSION.

The concept of anomie was developed by Émile Durkheim [57] to describe the state of social disorganization that occurs when collective norms lose their ability to regulate individual behavior. This phenomenon is exacerbated in times of accelerated social change, economic crisis, or moral breakdown, when the balance between personal aspirations and the realistic possibilities of achieving them is disrupted, generating frustration, extreme individualism, and normative disorientation. From this perspective, anomie is not only an individual deviation, but a structural condition that reflects the loss of social cohesion and shared values within a community.

The Durkheimian concept [58] is revisited to explain deviant behavior as a response to the dissonance between culturally established ends and the institutionally available means to achieve them. In countries like Mexico and Colombia, where large sectors of society have historically been excluded from access to basic goods, justice, and political participation, anomie manifests itself in the adoption of illegal or informal behaviors as strategies for survival or social advancement. Drug trafficking, corruption, vigilante justice, and informal labor can be understood, from this framework, as adaptive expressions in contexts where formal law has lost functional and symbolic legitimacy [59].

In Colombia, anomie has historically been expressed through the coexistence of internal armed conflict, the illegal economy, and state weakness, especially in rural areas and urban peripheries. The state's normative order has been challenged by guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers, who impose their own rules in historically marginalized territories. This multiplicity of armed and regulatory actors generates confusion, fragments authority, and

erodes the legitimacy of law, evidencing a form of structural anomie where citizens fail to recognize the state as a legitimate source of social regulation.

In the case of Mexico, institutional weakening in regions dominated by drug trafficking, such as Sinaloa, Guerrero, and Michoacán, has contributed to the emergence of parallel regulatory orders. Hitman violence and territorial control exercised by cartels such as Sinaloa or Jalisco Nueva Generación have established forms of de facto authority that replace the state, normalizing illegality and disrupting citizens' connection to legality. In this context, anomie translates into widespread distrust of the law and institutional justice, and the consolidation of a culture of violence as a legitimate means of conflict resolution.

Thus, in both countries, anomie becomes a key category for understanding the disconnect between formal legality and social reality [60].

5. CONCLUSION.

As the main findings of this investigation, the comparative analysis of Colombia and Mexico based on the theory of Émile Durkheim allows us to understand that anomie and social disorganization are not mere temporary symptoms, but structural phenomena deeply rooted in historical processes of inequality, exclusion, and fragmentation of the moral order. Both countries have experienced prolonged contexts of institutional weakness, systematic violence, and illegal economies that have eroded the symbolic efficacy of law, weakened community ties and fostering the emergence of parallel normative orders. Durkheimian theory, in this sense, provides valuable analytical tools for understanding how social cohesion disintegrates when norms lose legitimacy and social goals become unattainable.

In Colombia, the confluence of armed conflict, drug trafficking, and state precariousness has produced anomic territories where state authority is replaced by illegal armed groups. The partial demobilization of violent actors (the demobilization of the AUC through Law 975 of 2005, or the Justice and Peace Law, during the Álvaro Uribe Vélez administration; and the Legal Framework for Peace, which gave rise to the Peace Agreement between the FARC-EP and the Juan Manuel Santos administration) has not resolved the underlying regulatory crisis, and large regions still have not incorporated the state as a legitimate guarantor of order. In Mexico, the situation is similar in regions dominated by cartels such as Sinaloa or Jalisco Nueva Generación, where the fragmentation of power, criminal violence, and institutional complicity reproduce a state of functional anomie. In both contexts, official legal norms coexist and are often displaced—by regulations imposed by force or by the need for survival.

The social disorganization associated with these processes is expressed in the weakening of the community fabric, the deterioration of citizen trust in institutions, and the loss of the collective sense of legality. When law ceases to reflect social consensus and becomes a repressive or elitist tool, its capacity to regulate social life collapses. In these scenarios, as Merton (1968) argues, individuals develop adaptive strategies that distance them from formal regulatory compliance, generating a fragmented and selective legality. This dysfunctional legal system jeopardizes not only the social order but also the very legitimacy of the democratic state.

Based on the analysis carried out, it is concluded that addressing anomie in Colombia and Mexico requires more than punitive interventions or superficial legal reforms. A profound transformation of the social conditions that generate exclusion is needed, along with a rebuilding of trust in the State and the strengthening of community and intercultural justice mechanisms that recognize the existing normative diversity, as Colombia did in the 1991 Political Constitution. This represented a legal, political, and symbolic response to the state of social anomie that had profoundly affected the country since the 1970s and 1980s, a product of widespread violence, institutional mistrust, and the expansion of criminal structures such as guerrillas, paramilitary groups (AUC), and drug trafficking. Furthermore, the design of public policies aimed at restoring the link between legality, legitimacy, and social well-being is required, with the participation of the communities affected by social disorganization.

Ultimately, Durkheim's theory of anomie remains relevant and useful for understanding the normative challenges facing Latin America. The 2022 assassination of Paraguayan prosecutor Marcelo Pecci, renowned for his fight against organized crime, has been interpreted as an indication of an emerging social anomie in Paraguay, understood as a breakdown in the normative order and a loss of trust in institutions. This crime, allegedly orchestrated by criminal networks with potential political and business ties, revealed the growing infiltration of drug trafficking and organized crime into state structures, such as the control of prisons by the Rotela Clan. This has deepened citizen distrust, highlighting the weakness of the rule of law and

the emergence of parallel orders that challenge state authority, creating a scenario of social disorganization and institutional erosion.

That is why, the contemporary manifestations of anomie and social disorganization experienced in Colombia and Mexico, in light of the sociological theory of Émile Durkheim, allow us to understand how the processes of modernization, structural violence, social exclusion affect Latin American youth, generating a weakening of collective norms which have affected social cohesion and order in these two Latin American countries revealing not only similarities in the patterns of normative decomposition, but also the urgency of rethinking the role of law as a living expression of social consensus, especially that of youth citizenship, in order to recover the effectiveness of law in anomic contexts, a situation that requires integrating interdisciplinary approaches that combine formal justice with processes of reconstruction of the moral, economic and political fabric of our societies, therefore, as final recommendations we find:

Reformulating the law from the ground up: It is essential to adapt the legal system to local sociocultural realities, incorporating citizen participation and recognizing communities' own normative forms as legitimate, as long as they respect fundamental rights.

Overcoming the punitive approach: In both Colombia and Mexico, responses focused on militarization and repression have not solved the problem of anomie. It is recommended to strengthen social justice, community prevention, and bottom-up peacebuilding strategies.

Consolidating public policies with a structural approach: The fight against anomie must be addressed by reducing social gaps. Comprehensive programs for access to education, healthcare, decent employment, and housing are essential to restoring normative cohesion.

Promoting differential diagnoses: Strategies must be evidence-based, recognizing that anomie does not manifest itself homogeneously. The production and use of data disaggregated by region, social group, and type of predominant informal or illegal economy is recommended.

Strengthening institutional ethics and social oversight: Restoring trust in the law requires a frontal fight against corruption and impunity. It is recommended to develop mechanisms for citizen oversight, institutional transparency, and ethical training for justice officials.

6. Research Limitations

Although this article offers novel perspectives on contemporary manifestations of anomie and social disorganization among young people in Colombia and Mexico, interpreted through the sociological theory of Émile Durkheim, the research acknowledges several limitations that impact the generalizability and depth of its findings.

First, the quantitative analysis was based on the use of secondary data from official national sources such as the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in Colombia and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in Mexico. While these databases are technically reliable and widely used, their aggregated nature and regional focus can limit the visibility of specific local dynamics. In particular, the realities of rural municipalities or peripheral territories, which often lack institutional representation or effective state presence, tend to be invisible, limiting the ability to capture relevant nuances regarding the conditions of social disorganization at the micro-territorial level. Furthermore, the study adopts an exploratory comparative approach, which implies that its interpretations are subject to expansion and validation in subsequent research using mixed, quantitative, or more in-depth qualitative methodologies. For example, the analysis does not incorporate interviews, ethnographies, or other tools that provide insight into youth subjectivity and the symbolic forms in which anomie is experienced in specific contexts.

In conclusion, although this research constitutes a significant contribution to the analysis of the phenomena of anomie and social disorganization in Latin American youth, its results should be understood as a starting point. Overcoming these limitations in future research will allow us to refine our understanding of the phenomenon and strengthen the applicability of the findings in the design of more contextualized and effective public policies.

7. Theoretical Contribution

This research contributes theoretically by demonstrating that Émile Durkheim's classic postulates on anomie—understood as the breakdown of normative frameworks that regulate social behavior and generate disorientation in individuals—remain relevant for understanding current phenomena affecting Latin American youth. However, it goes beyond the classic framework by articulating the notion of anomie with specific dynamics of youth exclusion, such as the lack of educational and employment opportunities, precarious well-being, social violence, and the weakening of community and institutional ties.

Furthermore, the study proposes a situated reinterpretation of the concept of social disorganization, understood not only as a disintegration of norms but also as a result of historical, territorial, and structural processes that erode traditional mechanisms of social integration, especially among young people in peripheral urban or marginalized rural contexts. In this way, the research enriches sociological theory by connecting Durkheimian notions with contemporary approaches to Latin American sociology, including elements of critical sociology, the theory of structural marginality, and public policy analysis.

In short, the theoretical value of the article lies in its ability to recontextualize and operationalize Durkheimian concepts for comparative analysis, providing an analytical framework that explains how the phenomena of anomie and social disorganization manifest and reproduce themselves among young people in two countries with different institutional trajectories but common structural challenges.

8. Practical Contribution

The research offers a practical contribution by providing comparative empirical evidence on how anomie and social disorganization differentially affect youth in Colombia and Mexico, revealing patterns of vulnerability associated with a lack of access to quality education, decent employment, social protection, and civic participation. This information can be used by local governments, educational institutions, social organizations, and multilateral agencies to target more effective and contextualized interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion and preventing phenomena such as youth crime, school dropouts, and recruitment by illegal organizations.

Furthermore, by mapping the territories with the highest rates of youth social disorganization, the study offers a diagnostic tool for public decision-making, allowing for the targeting of resources and strategies in critical areas. Likewise, the analysis highlights the limitations of current youth policies, proposing as an alternative an approach based on rebuilding social ties, institutional strengthening, and the effective recognition of young people as rights-holders and not merely beneficiaries of welfare programs. Finally, by integrating sociological theory with law, the research promotes socio-legal dialogue between academia and government, contributing to transformative praxis in the formulation of public policies aimed at preventing youth social risk and the structural inclusion of new generations.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Luis Felipe Bernal Hernández and Pedro Cazares Aboytes; Methodology: Galo Armando Lara C; Validation: Bleidis Vanessa Quintana Pérez; Formal Analysis: Celenne Judith Mariscal de Dios; Research: Janeth Yolanda Gastelum Urquidy, and; Writing: preparation of the original draft, Writing: review and editing: Elizabeth Ramirez Llerena. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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