# Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence

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## INTRODUCTION

Mexico has suffered a severe security crisis over the last decade. As in several other Latin American countries, elevated levels of crime and violence—and especially the proliferation of violent organized crime groups—have presented a serious threat to the Mexican state and to ordinary citizens. During the presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006–2012), the Mexican government attempted to address these problems primarily through law enforcement and military operations to combat organized crime and reforms to enhance the institutional integrity and efficacy of police and judicial sectors. Calderón's successor, President Enrique Peña Nieto (whose six-year term began in 2012) spent much of his first year in office attempting to shift the narrative within and about Mexico from security issues to other matters, including political, economic, and social reforms to help move the country forward. However, while placing less emphasis on such matters, Peña Nieto also largely continued Calderón's approach to security by targeting major organized crime figures, deploying federal forces to address urgent local security crises, and pushing ahead with efforts to implement Mexico's new criminal justice system.

Still, for many Mexicans, there have been few improvements in their day-to-day sense of security, their confidence in law enforcement authorities, or their ability to attain access to justice. Indeed, crime and violence remains such a serious concern in certain parts of the country that ordinary citizens have taken to extraordinary measures—hiring private security guards and embracing vigilantism—to protect themselves. In recent years, the emergence of self-professed citizen self-defense groups has introduced a new dimension to Mexico's security situation. Such developments raise concerns about the course of Mexico's security

1 The authors wish to acknowledge the feedback and direct contributions of various colleagues who have generously contributed to this introductory chapter. In particular, the authors are deeply grateful to Andrew Selee, who was instrumental in conceptualizing and implementing this project and helped draft the initial framing paper for this introduction. In addition, the authors are also indebted to Christopher Wilson, Allison Cordell, Cory Molzahn, and Octavio Rodriguez for their keen insights, direct contributions, edits, and recommendations.

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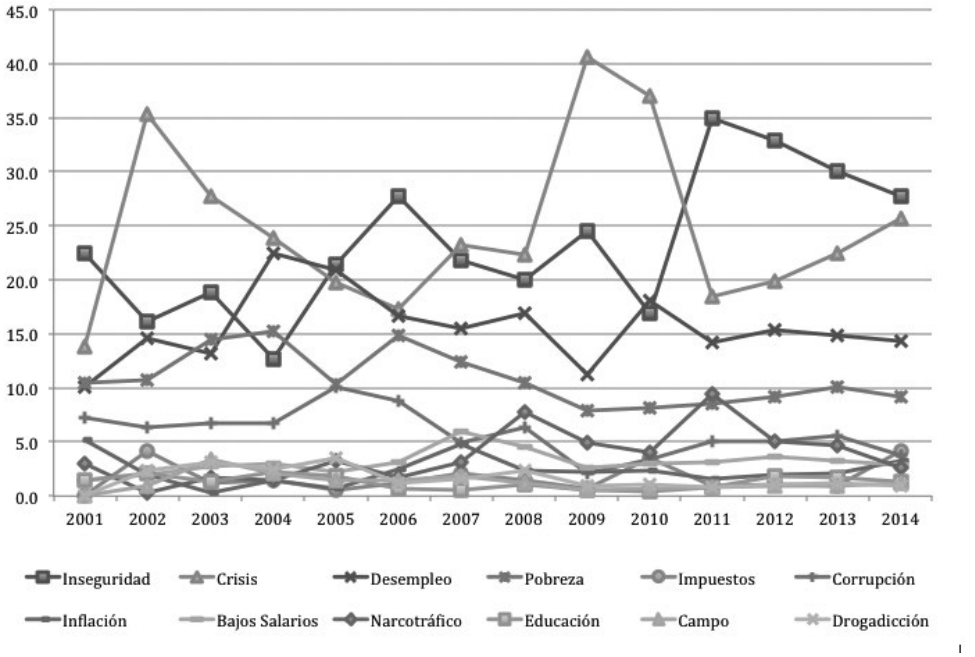
situation over the longer term. On the one hand, there are serious questions about the capacity of the Mexican government to fulfill its responsibility to provide for basic citizen security. While not a failed state, Mexico has proved highly vulnerable to penetration and corruption by powerful organized crime groups, and the government's ability to maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of force has been challenged by both political insurgents and violent criminal organizations.

On the other hand, while policy analysts have typically focused primarily on these issues of state capacity, there are also major deficits in Mexican society that provide a weak foundation for state efforts to promote the rule of law, including a lack of social capital, weak civic institutions, and even widespread participation in corrupt or criminal activities. Fortunately, there have also been a number of positive civic initiatives working to provide constructive solutions to Mexico's security challenges. Such efforts have worked to strengthen the capacities of ordinary Mexican citizens and civic organizations to monitor and document security concerns, to work with authorities to improve official responses, and to promote societal resilience in responding to crime and violence. Understanding such efforts can help to illuminate the mechanisms, strategies, and interventions that heal societies suffering from trauma and build more resilient communities.

This study is part of a major, multiyear effort by the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Justice in Mexico Project at the University of San Diego to analyze the obstacles to and opportunities for improving citizen security. Each of the authors featured in this edited volume makes a significant contribution to this endeavor through original research—including exhaustive data analysis, in-depth qualitative interviews, and direct field observations—intended to inform policy discussions on how to foster robust civic responses to the problems of crime and violence. This research was developed with an intended audience of policymakers, journalists, leaders of nongovernmental organizations, and other current and future leaders working to address these problems in Mexico. However, there are also important lessons from Mexico's experience that may have resonance in elsewhere in Latin America and other societies grappling with similar challenges. With this in mind, this edited volume offers several general observations about the role of civil society in promoting citizen security, along with concrete policy options for the Mexican and U.S. governments to consider to enhance civic engagement, encourage civic partnerships, and embolden these current efforts.

FIGURE 1: TOP POLICY CONCERN AMONG MEXICANS, FEBRUARY 2001–FEBRUARY 2014




Source: Mitofsky, various years. "Cúal es el principal problema del país?" Question reads: "What is the principal problem of the country [Mexico]." The translation of the policy concerns are, from left to right of the first row: Insecurity, Economic Crisis, Unemployment, Poverty, Taxes, Corruption. Second row: Inflation, Low Wages, Drug Trafficking, Education, Rural Development, Drug Addiction.

## PATTERNS OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

Citizen security is of paramount concern in Mexico. For more than a decade, public opinion surveys have consistently found that citizens rank security among their top concerns, and often as their greatest preoccupation (See Figure 1). Today, the general perception among many ordinary citizens is that the country is less safe than it was a decade ago, as a considerably greater proportion of the population has ranked "insecurity" among their top policy concerns in recent years (Figure 1).

Citizens' preoccupations about crime and violence are not simply the result of popular imagination. They reflect the fact that various forms of crime and violence have proliferated at extreme levels in many parts of Mexico in recent years. This has been most notable with regard to homicides. After decades of declining rates

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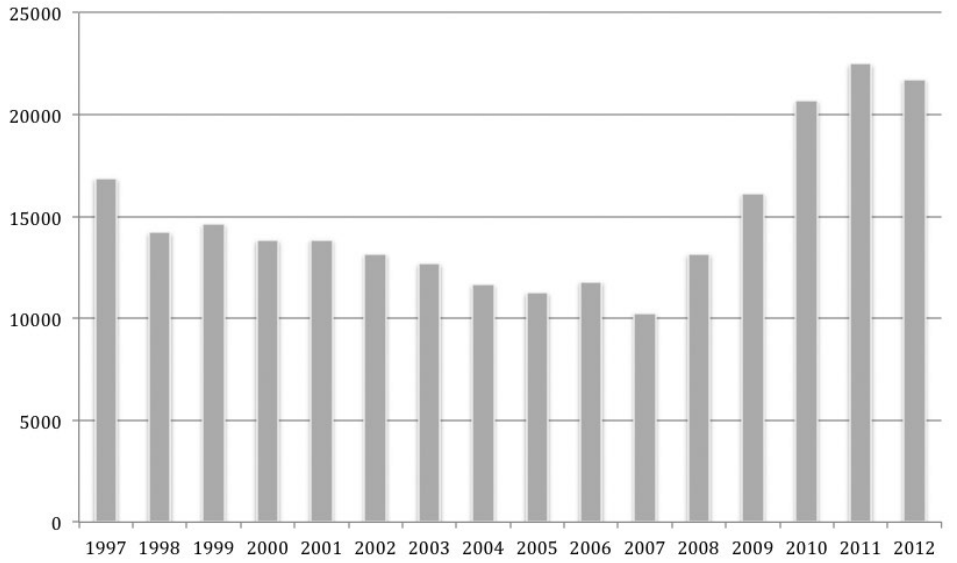
and absolute numbers of homicides, Mexico experienced a sudden and dramatic increase beginning in 2008 (See Figure 2). By 2010, the number of homicides in Mexico stood at more than double the figure for 2006. A major share—if not a majority—of Mexico's homicides from 2008 onward are believed to be "drug-related killings" or "executions" committed by organized crime groups vying for control of territory or market share. As a result, this violence was highly concentrated in key drug trafficking corridors, production zones, and transshipment points, producing dramatic increases in the number of homicides and homicide rates (per 100,000 inhabitants) in certain Mexican municipalities, notably Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, Culiacán, Chihuahua, and Acapulco (See Table 1).

## FIGURE 2: TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMICIDES IN MEXICO, 1997–2012




Source: SNSP.

The surge in violent crime in Mexico has resulted primarily from clashes among organized crime groups vying for control of drug production zones and trafficking routes in Mexico. This newfound competition is attributable to several factors. First, proliferation of organized crime in Mexico is partly the result of a series of economic crises beginning in the 1970s which drove many Mexicans out of formal employment and into the informal sector, which also led to significant increases in a wide range of criminal activity. The emergence of new market opportunities for Mexican organized crime groups in the 1980s, particularly in the trafficking of cocaine into the United States, was also partly attributable to changes in international drug

## TABLE 1: HOMICIDES IN THE 10 MOST VIOLENT MUNICIPALITIES IN MEXICO, 2007-12

| | 2007 | | | 2008 | | | 2009 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Municipality | # | Rate | Municipality | # | Rate | Municipality | # | Rate |
| 1 | Culiacán | 249 | 30 | Cd. Juárez | 1,332 | 101 | Cd. Juárez | 2,230 | 168 |
| 2 | Tijuana | 176 | 12 | Tijuana | 614 | 41 | Culiacán | 476 | 56 |
| 3 | Cd. Juárez | 136 | 10 | Culiacán | 576 | 69 | Chihuahua | 414 | 51 |
| 4 | Monterrey | 67 | 6 | Chihuahua | 301 | 38 | Tijuana | 399 | 26 |
| 5 | Acapulco | 65 | 9 | Nogales | 102 | 49 | Gómez Palacio | 230 | 71 |
| 6 | Uruapan | 57 | 19 | Durango | 99 | 18 | Acapulco | 150 | 19 |
| 7 | Iztapalapa | 40 | 2 | Mazatlán | 79 | 19 | Torreón | 135 | 22 |
| 8 | Morelia | 35 | 5 | Navolato | 78 | 58 | Nogales | 123 | 57 |
| 9 | Chilpancingo | 32 | 14 | Acapulco | 70 | 9 | Navolato | 118 | 87 |
| 10 | Hermosillo | 31 | 4 | Rosarito | 68 | 81 | Durango | 115 | 20 |

| | 2010 | | | 2011 | | | 2012 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Municipality | # | Rate | Municipality | # | Rate | Municipality | # | Rate |
| 1 | Cd. Juárez | 2,738 | 206 | Cd. Juárez | 1,460 | 110 | Acapulco | 1,152 | 146 |
| 2 | Chihuahua | 670 | 82 | Acapulco | 1,008 | 128 | Cd. Juárez | 799 | 60 |
| 3 | Culiacán | 587 | 68 | Monterrey | 700 | 62 | Monterrey | 630 | 56 |
| 4 | Tijuana | 472 | 30 | Culiacán | 649 | 76 | Culiacán | 552 | 64 |
| 5 | Acapulco | 370 | 47 | Chihuahua | 554 | 68 | Torreón | 521 | 82 |
| 6 | Mazatlán | 320 | 73 | Torreón | 455 | 71 | Chihuahua | 451 | 55 |
| 7 | Torreón | 316 | 49 | Tijuana | 418 | 27 | Nuevo Laredo | 334 | 87 |
| 8 | Gómez Palacio | 277 | 84 | Ecatepec | 325 | 20 | Tijuana | 327 | 21 |
| 9 | Tepic | 230 | 61 | Mazatlán | 307 | 70 | Cuernavaca | 293 | 80 |
| 10 | Nogales | 196 | 89 | Guadalupe | 254 | 38 | León | 202 | 14 |

Derived from INEGI and SNSP data by Molzahn et. al. 2013.

demand and greater enforcement efforts in earlier trafficking areas, notably Miami and the Caribbean. The result was that Mexico became a primary supplier and route for the flow of drugs into the U.S. market in the 1980s and 1990s.

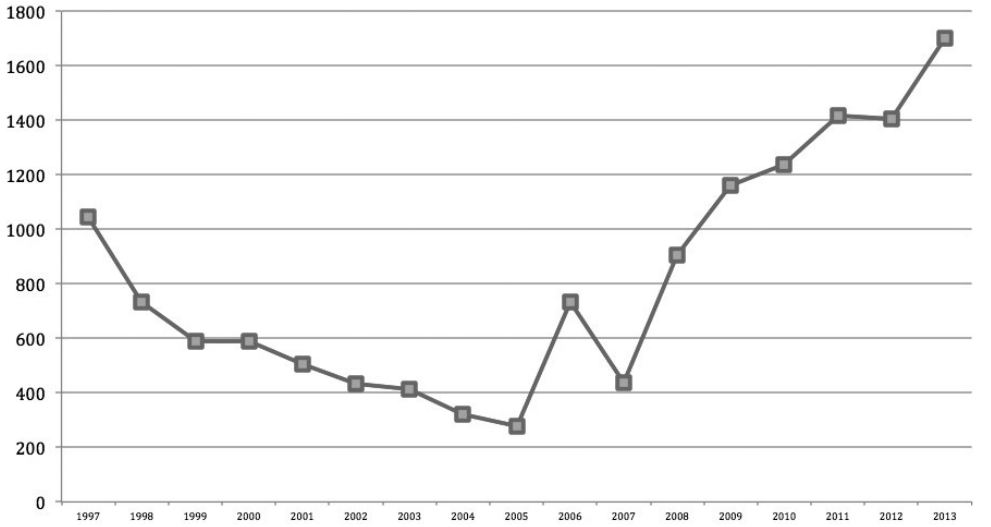
However, this merely explains the growth of organized crime in Mexico, and not the recent proclivity of organized crime groups to engage in widespread violence. Indeed, while drug trafficking has long and well-established roots in Mexico, for most of the 20th century Mexico's organized crime groups operated in relative tranquility. In part, this can be attributed to the high degree of impunity and even protection that Mexican drug traffickers enjoyed for decades. As many scholars have amply documented, the complicity of government officials gave Mexico's early traffickers license to operate within the country in exchange for a share of their revenues.[2] This arrangement was sometimes the result of intimidation by powerful organized crime figures offering officials a devil's bargain: "bribe or a bullet" (*plata o plomo*), but in others the result of rent-seeking by politicians, military personnel, and law enforcement eager to enrich themselves.

Thus, some scholars have argued that political and bureaucratic changes over the last few decades have been an important contributor to rise of criminal violence in Mexico. These scholars suggest that growing electoral competition and political pluralism, as well as the gradual breakdown of old forms of public security enforcement under Mexico's authoritarian regime in the 1980s and 1990s, interfered with a system of widespread protection that organized crime groups enjoyed. In some cases, political alternation brought to power new officials with an interest in cleaning house and cracking down on organized crime. In other cases, political change may have simply interrupted previously corrupt arrangements—and possibly introduced new ones—in ways that opened new opportunities for competition among rival organized crime groups.

Whatever the case, the breakdown and restructuring of Mexico's drug trafficking organizations has led many criminal organizations to turn to new predatory activities to complement or substitute revenues from trafficking in illicit drugs. For example, kidnapping provides a useful illustration of how the business model of organized crime has changed in recent years. First, it must be noted that there are enormous problems and inconsistencies with data on kidnapping, particularly in Mexico. Statistics on kidnappings are quite unreliable because they reflect only those kidnappings that are officially reported and acknowledged. Due to a lack of confidence in police—and documented involvement of police in kidnappings—victims and family members are often unwilling to report kidnappings to authorities. Reporting rates tend to vary dramatically by state, depending on levels of citizen confidence in authorities, and some states appear

2 It must be noted that a similar pattern of "official" protection existed for U.S. organized crime groups in the 20th century, particularly during the heyday of Italian mafia organizations from the prohibition era of the 1920s until at least the 1950s.

## FIGURE 3: CASES OF KIDNAPPING IN MEXICO, 1997-2013




Source: Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública.

to record and report kidnappings differently, depending on the nature of the abduction.[3] Meanwhile, government data are often inconsistent, with figures for a particular state or year often shifting without explanation from one official report or table to another. However, even taking these limitations into consideration, official data still offer at least a sense of general trends.

That said, there was a dramatic increase in the number of kidnapping investigations in Mexico during the 1990s, in part due to the proliferation of so-called "express kidnappings" that effectively constituted a form of robbery (See Figure 3). A typical scenario involved taxi passengers or pedestrians being accosted by another individual or a small group, forced to withdraw money from automatic teller machines (ATMs), and often held against their will in order to make multiple ATM withdrawals. These kidnappings became very common at the height of the economic crisis that followed Mexico's 1994–95 peso devaluation, and the number of kidnapping cases appeared to decline dramatically from 1997 to 2005. However, kidnappings began to increase significantly again beginning in 2007, along with the general escalation of drug-related violence. Typical scenarios have involved

3 For example, the data presented here includes only those cases that were investigated by state prosecutors. Thus, while INEGI reports that there were 1,073 kidnappings reported to municipal police agencies in 2008, the number that the National Public Security System (SNSP) reported as actually investigated by state prosecutors was about 20% lower, as noted in the graph provided here. Some states show discrepancies from SNSP's reporting. http://www.lapoliciaca.com/nota-roja/discrepan-pgjh-y-snsp-en-cifras-de-secuestros-2011/.

The under-reporting of crime in turn makes it difficult for law enforcement authorities to respond effectively to the problem. … citizen distrust of law enforcement and the problem of criminal impunity become mutually reinforcing.

individuals who were abducted by organized crime groups for significant periods of time. Sometimes kidnappings are part of an effort to extract large ransoms from the victim, or their family members and associates. In other cases, often referred to as a *levantón*, a person is abducted primarily in an effort to cause the victim fear, physical harm, or even death.

The bottom line is that the level of crime and violence in Mexico has increased dramatically, and ordinary citizens are increasingly finding themselves in the crosshairs. What is more, the public feels that the government has largely failed to address the problem, as we discuss below. What is perhaps most striking and concerning about the proliferation of such violence is that authorities have been incapable of resolving the problem. Indeed, many Mexicans feel that the real problem is that authorities have neither the integrity nor the capacity to do so. Below, we examine the Mexican public's frustration with their law enforcement and judicial system.

## PUBLIC FRUSTRATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Many Mexican citizens have such low levels of confidence in judicial and law enforcement authorities—either due to perceptions of incompetence or corruption—that they are disinclined to report a crime (see Table 2). In a study released in 2011, ICESI found that 39 percent of those who do not report crimes think doing so would be a "waste of time," 16 percent distrusted the authorities, 10 percent thought the process would be too cumbersome, 9 percent said that they lacked evidence of the crime, 6 percent feared retaliation by their aggressor, 3 percent felt that an official had a hostile attitude, and 1 percent were afraid of being extorted by authorities.[4] The under-reporting of crime in turn makes it difficult for law enforcement authorities to respond effectively to the problem. Hence, citizen distrust of law enforcement and the problem of criminal impunity become mutually reinforcing. Thus, as Bailey and Chabat noted over a decade ago, low levels of confidence in Mexico's law enforcement and judicial sector institutions constitute a serious crisis of "public insecurity."[5]

4 "Guadalajara, Número Uno En Delitos No Denunciados," *El Informador*, January 18, 2011 2011.

5 John J. Bailey and Jorge Chabat, eds., *Transnational Crime and Public Security: Challenges to Mexico and the United States* (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2001).

## TABLE 2: LEVELS OF CONFIDENCE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SECURITY INSTITUTIONS

| Agency | Level of Confidence | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | High | Little | None | D/K |
| Navy | 55.0 | 38.3 | 4.6 | 2.1 |
| Army | 52.5 | 40.1 | 6.7 | 0.8 |
| Federal Judicial Police | 24.8 | 59.4 | 15.3 | 0.4 |
| Federal Police | 24.6 | 61.0 | 13.9 | 0.6 |
| Agents of Federal Attorney General | 21.6 | 61.4 | 16.5 | 0.6 |
| State Judicial Police | 17.4 | 60.5 | 21.4 | 0.7 |
| Judges | 17.2 | 61.7 | 19.8 | 1.4 |
| State Police | 14.9 | 65.4 | 19.1 | 0.6 |
| Agents of the State Prosecutor | 13.7 | 62.5 | 23.2 | 0.6 |
| Transit Police | 10.3 | 63.8 | 25.3 | 0.6 |
| Municipal Police | 10.2 | 67.4 | 22.1 | 0.3 |

Note: D/K means "Don't know."
Source: INEGI. Dirección General de Estadísticas Sociodemográficas. Encuesta Nacional sobre Inseguridad, 2010.

Perhaps the most disturbing manifestation of citizen frustration with the inability of authorities to address problems of crime and violence are the acts of vigilantism and street justice that have taken place periodically over the last several years. Such incidents have been long associated with rural, poor or indigenous communities where the absence of effective law enforcement leads a reliance on informal means of justice.[6] However, citizens have also resorted to public lynching and vigilantism in urban settings as well, as when a mob attacked three undercover federal police officers that were allegedly taking pictures outside an elementary school in November 2004. In that incident, in the community of San Juan Ixtayopan Pueblo, in the outskirts of Mexico City, a crowd of people accused the officers of planning a kidnapping, dragged them from their vehicle, and began to

6 In 2002, for example, *The Washington Post* described a rural Mixtec community whose punishments buried one murderer alive with his dead victim, a lifelong friend killed in a drunken fight. Chris Kraul, "In Mexico, Vigilantism Rises on Surge of Crime, Public Disgust," *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 2004 2004; Andrew Sullivan, "In Mexico Hinterland, Life Beyond the Law," *The Washington Post*, 2002.

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beat the men with metal pipes. Authorities and local police attempted to intervene and were able to rescue one of the men, but the crowd grew to an estimated 200 people and succeeded in keeping authorities at bay while they beat the two men to death—despite their on-camera appeals identifying themselves as police officers—and burned their bodies in the street.[7]

More recently, as this edited volume went to press, Mexican authorities were grappling with the emergence of citizen "self-defense groups" and militias in response to extortion, kidnapping, and gang activity. In states like Guerrero and Michoacán, such groups have formed patrols, set up checkpoints, and even taken up arms to fight against criminal organizations. In general, federal, state, and local officials have appeared to tolerate such self-defense groups as a necessary evil—if not a positive and welcome development—in the fight against organized crime. Indeed, several Mexican officials frankly admitted the state's lack of capacity to address the needs of certain communities, effectively abdicating these as ungoverned spaces.

However, in January 2014, the Mexican federal government was ultimately compelled to intervene in Michoacán when armed militias were poised to storm the city of Apatzingán, with a population of roughly 100,000 inhabitants, in an effort to rout an organized crime group known as the Knights Templar Organization. While the federal government was able to assert control of the situation—thanks in part to the deployment of thousands of troops to the area—officials were unable to achieve an agreement to disarm militia groups, many of which have questionable membership composition, dubious financial backing, and enormous firepower.

Developments such as the uprising of self-defense groups in Apatzingán call attention to the fact that too little attention has been given to the responses of ordinary people and communities in promoting citizen security. Ideally, societies that suffer traumatic experiences can identify positive ways to respond, recover, and rebuild. A growing literature has described successful efforts to do so as an indication of "community resilience." Below, we consider this concept—which serves as a central theme throughout this book—as a framework for evaluating the responses and capacities of Mexican society to rebound and recover from the country's current problems.

7 In reaction to public outrage over the incident, President Vicente Fox fired Mexico City police chief Marcelo Ebrard. James C. McKinley and Ginger Thompson, "Lynchings of Policemen Ignite Outrage at Violence in Mexico," The New York Times, Thursday, November 25, 2004.

## The Concept of Resilient Communities

The term "resilience" is generally used to refer to a system that has the ability to flourish amidst or after suffering adversity. Resilience is the capacity, to borrow from Taleb (2012), to be "anti-fragile."[8] That is, the concept of resilience goes beyond the notion of "strength" or "protected," in so far as it refers not only to warding off stresses, breakdown, and harm but actually recovering from and prospering despite harm. A rock may be "strong" in that it is difficult to break, but it is not resilient; once broken, it cannot repair itself. Resilience is a concept that has been applied in various contexts, including a substantial literature in the sciences on the ability of ecological systems to persevere in the face of change—such as drought or global warming—since biological organisms and systems often necessarily have adaptive capacities that enable them to rebound when confronted by adversity.[9] As Ahmed (2006) notes, there are actually two contending understandings of resilience in the ecological literature, one that emphasizes an ecosystem's ability to return to stasis (equilibrium) and another that focuses on an ecosystem's ability to evolve (transformation) in response to some shock or adversity.[10]

The concept of "community resilience" implies a capacity for society to withstand and recover from hazards, stresses, and shocks. The notion of resilience has also been applied in reference to societies and communities recovering from economic crises, health epidemics, terrorism, and natural- and human-caused disasters.[11] For example, Kendra and Wachtendorf (2003) employed the concept of community resilience to analyze medical professionals' responses to the 9/11 terror attacks.[12] The concept of community resilience was also widely used in

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8 As Taleb applies the notion of anti-fragility, it refers to systems or organisms that actually thrive when faced with adversity. It is a concept for which there are arguably few examples: many things can be absolutely fragile (i.e., capable of breaking), but there are few examples of absolute anti-fragility (i.e., infinitely capable of thriving from adversity). However, it is arguably the case that communities are made stronger by suffering from adversity. Victims and survivors of catastrophic experiences often find themselves bound together through a reinforced sense of mutual understanding and social trust that would not have developed in the absence of adversity. Nassim Nicolas Taleb, *Anti-Fragile: Things That Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2013).

9 C.S. Holling, "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973).

10 Atiq Kainan Ahmed, "Concepts and Practices of 'Resilience': A Compilation from Various Secondary Sources," in "Working Paper Prepared U.S. Agency for International Development" (Bangkok, Thailand: Coastal Community Resilience (CCR) Program, 2006), 10-11.

11 C. Folke et al., "Resilience and Sustainable Development: Building Adaptive Capacity in a World of Transformations," *Ambio* 31, no. 5 (2002); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "World Disaster Report," (2004); Susanne C. Moser, "Resilience in the Face of Global Environmental Change," ed. Community and Regional Resilience Initiative (Southeast Region Research Initiative, 2008); Susan L. Cutter et al., "Community and Regional Resilience: Perspectives from Hazards, Disasters, and Emergency Management," (Southeast Region Research Initiative, 2008).

12 J. Kendra and T. Wachtendorf, "Elements of Community Resilience in the World Trade Center Attack: Reconstituting New York City's Emergency Operations Center," *Disasters* 27, no. 97–122 (2003).

international relief circles in the wake of the 2004 tsunami that severely impacted Indonesia and much of South and Southeast Asia, and was also applied to disaster relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina in the United States.[13]

Across the different uses of the concept, there are some broad commonalities in the type of factors that are often associated with resilience. The list below is by no means complete, but helps to illustrate the characteristics that may lend resilience to a system or community:

- *Strength:* Having properties that enable a system to exert force (or resist external forces).
- *Self-Sufficiency:* Systems that have substantial autonomy may be better protected against external disruptions.
- *Inner-dependence:* Elements within a system are interconnected and mutually supportive.
- *Redundancy:* Duplication of functions in ways that reduces the vulnerabilities of a given system.
- *Perceptivity:* Some means of intuition, communication, or intelligence that enables a system to detect harm and opportunities.
- *Diffusivity:* An ability to transmit or disseminate warnings, information, or resources within the system.
- *Diversity:* Systems with diverse elements that can prove adaptable to different circumstances, needs, and opportunities.
- *Flexibility:* Systems that have a capacity to adjust and transform while remaining largely intact.[14]

In short, the concept of resilience emphasizes a system's ability not only to withstand adversity but to recover from it: not only to survive but to thrive. While the use of the term "community resilience" is relatively new, the idea that societies and communities may have attributes that enable them to flourish in the face of adversity is not. From classic social scientific studies of the "civic culture" to more contemporary studies of "social capital," many experts attribute great importance to the (often elusive) norms, values, and attitudes that can help to foster healthy and productive societies. The key question is how these elements of resilience can take root and flourish? What are the triggers and mechanisms for promoting community resilience? Below, we consider how the concept of community resilience has been applied as a means to address Mexico's current security challenges.

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13 F. H. Norris et al., "Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008); D. Paton and D. Johnston, *Disaster Resilience: An Integrated Approach* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas., 2006).

14 David R. Godschalk, "Urban Hazard Mitigation: Creating Resilient Cities," *Natural Hazards Review* 4, no. 3 (2003).

## Promoting Resilient Community Responses to Crime and Violence in Mexico

In Mexico, the term "resilient community" was first introduced as part of the language discussing U.S.-Mexico security cooperation under the Merida Initiative, a binational aid program proposed by Presidents Felipe Calderón and George W. Bush.[15] The first three years of the Merida Initiative, from 2007 to 2009, were focused on channeling $1.4 billion in U.S. assistance to support Mexican government efforts to combat organized crime (e.g., sharing equipment, training, and intelligence), bolster judicial sector capacity (e.g., police and judicial reform), and improve border interdiction efforts (e.g., southbound detection of firearms, ammunition, and cash). Later, as outlined in speeches and policy documents, the promotion of "community resilience" became a fourth key priority or pillar for cooperation under the Merida Initiative in 2009, the first year of the Obama administration.

While the Merida Initiative is a bilateral initiative with many progenitors, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Carlos Pascual appears to have been a pivotal player in incorporating the notion of community resilience as a key policy objective. However, Pascual's tenure as U.S. ambassador was cut short by political wrangling, and he resigned under pressure from the Calderón administration.[16] While both the U.S. and Mexican governments continue to support programs and initiatives that help to promote community resilience, there has been little analysis of whether Pillar IV efforts have lived up to their promise. More important, there has been little attempt to systematically evaluate the responses of Mexican society—and the evolution of Mexican civil society—in response to the country's ongoing security crisis. For this reason, it is worth examining some of the civic initiatives that have gained prominence in recent years.

One thing seems clear from Mexico's experience: despite their fears and frustrations, most Mexicans are not resigned to accept the status quo. The question for individual citizens and communities is whether they will find positive ways to prevent and recover from crime and violence, or whether they will respond in ways that exacerbate the problem, whether by cowering in fear or resorting to taking the law into their own hands. Many of the most positive examples spring

15 U.S. House of Representatives, "Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crime Authorization Act of 2008 : Report Together with Additional Views (to Accompany H.R. 6028) (Including Cost Estimate of the Congressional Budget Office)," ed. Committee on Foreign Affairs (2008); United States Government Accountability Office, "Mérida Initiative: The United States Has Provided Counternarcotics and Anticrime Support but Needs Better Performance Measures," (Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, 2010); Shannon O'Neil, "Refocusing U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation," in *Policy Innovation Memorandum*, ed. Council on Foreign Relations (2012); Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin M. Finklea, "U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond," in *CRS Report for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2013); Diana Negroponte, "Pillar Iv of 'Beyond Merida': Addressing the Socio-Economic Causes of Drug Related Crime and Violence in Mexico," in *Working Paper Series on U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, ed. Eric Olson (Washington, D.C.: Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011).

16 "U.S. Mexico Envoy Carlos Pascual Quits Amid Wikileaks Row," *BBC*, March 20, 2011.

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from great tragedy. For example, in August 2008, the abduction and brutal murder of Fernando Martí, the 14-year-old son of prominent Mexico City businessman Alejandro Martí, triggered a nation-wide series of anti-crime demonstrations involving over 150,000 people. The Mexican public was particularly outraged upon discovery of the involvement of law enforcement—including federal police officers—in the kidnapping ring. The Martí family had paid an estimated sum of $2 million to the kidnappers to secure his return, but the boy was brutally murdered and his body discovered weeks later in the trunk of a car.

In the wake of the Martí murder, public pressure led to the introduction of new security measures by President Calderón and Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, including tougher sentences and special police units to prevent and investigate cases of kidnapping. Also, representatives from all three federal branches of government and state authorities met in a televised session to discuss a new 74-point security plan to be implemented over the next 100 days. While significant numbers of Mexicans supported these efforts, critics expressed skepticism since harsher sentences are not a significant deterrent without an effective criminal justice system. Meanwhile, Alejandro Martí, the father of the murdered kidnapping victim, launched his own nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting victims' rights, and urged authorities to do whatever they can to reduce crime. "If you can't, resign," he admonished Mexican officials.[17]

Martí's case and many others illustrate that civic engagement is a necessary component to change the culture of lawfulness on the ground and to hold government authorities accountable for their efforts. Civic efforts can also provide a vital complement to government efforts in building livable communities, help overcome the fear imposed by organized crime groups, and ensure the flow of information about criminal activities. Yet, to date, efforts to engage citizens have been largely absent from the cooperation agenda between the two countries or the strategies of either country. As a result, a missing link in the binational strategy to address organized crime has been the failure to fully engage citizens in these efforts.

Fortunately, Mexican citizens and civic organizations have made bold efforts to engage authorities, demand greater accountability, improve the effectiveness of public

17 "Unidades Antisecuestro de SSP inician operaciones." *Vanguardia,* August 11, 2008; "México, primer lugar en secuestros a nivel mundial: ONG." *El Universal,* August 14, 2008; "Con 200 agentes de PGJDF y 100 de la SSP crean Fuerza Antisecuestros," *La Crónica de Hoy,* August 20, 2008; "Pactan; les dan 100 días," *Reforma,* August 22, 2008.

policies, and repair the damage caused by recent violence. As Lauren Villagran notes in her contribution to this book, many of these groups have been launched by victims frustrated by crime, violence, and impunity. Among the most notable examples is the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity started by Javier Sicilia, a poet who lost his son in the violence, and the movement started by Martí, discussed earlier.[18] Similarly, in several of the cities with high levels of violence, including Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Monterrey, local civic efforts are making a difference in police and judicial reform, helping put together programs for youth employment, and challenging the climate of fear instilled by organized crime groups. There have been some initial attempts by government to respond to these initiatives. Nevertheless, as Villagran examines in detail, civic engagement and its potential contribution to a culture of lawfulness and security in Mexico are incipient and highly vulnerable to internal fissures and difficulties in dealing with authorities.

Despite the deep gulf between policymakers and the community in designing and carrying out the state's public security strategy, important signs exist of citizen efforts to engage their authorities and demand greater effectiveness and accountability. In several cities most under stress by organized crime violence, significant local movements have emerged to "take back" the cities in several key local examples (see Table 4). In some of these cities, these movements have helped shape policies designed to rebuild the police, reform the justice system, and design more livable cities. Often these movements have brought together an eclectic mix of business leaders, nonprofit organizations, public figures, and average citizens to build a common agenda for the city or state in question.

This is the case, for example, in Tijuana, in the state of Baja California, which has developed a series of organizations, some business-oriented, others focused on victims' rights, that have become crucial players in that city (and state's) efforts to reform its police, prosecutors, and justice system. Indeed, Tijuana has gone from the country's second most-violent city to one of the least violent ones on the U.S.-Mexico border in the space of a few years, as concerted pressure from citizens helped drive a rapid (though still far from complete) professionalization of the police and prosecutor's office and the gradual implementation of new, more transparent and efficient court procedures. In an ambitious move, several citizens' groups banded together to host a biannual exposition titled "Tijuana Innovadora" (Innovative Tijuana) as a showcase to help create an alternative vision of the city's present and future. This effort has succeeded in attracting international attention by bringing high-profile figures such as then-President Felipe Calderón, former U.S.

The key question is whether the interventions of Mexico's power brokers and corporate interests trickle down to provide better protections for the rest of society.

18 AFP, "Mexico Peace Convoy to Sign National Pact," MSN News, June 11, 2011.

## TABLE 3: OVERVIEW OF KEY LOCAL CIVIC MOVEMENTS

| Location | Civic Movement | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua | Strategic Plan Juárez, Doctors' Movement, HR Movement, Others | Judicial Reform, Police Reform, City Planning, Youth Development |
| Tijuana, Baja California | Innovative Tijuana, Tijuana Development Committee, Others | City Planning, Youth Opportunities, Judicial Reform, Anti-Kidnapping Legislation |
| Monterrey, Nuevo León | Monterrey Council of Foundations, Center for Citizen Integration, Others | Police & Judicial Reform, Online Platform for Civic Action |
| State of Sinaloa | Independent newspapers, Sinaloa Business Federation | Civic Renewal, Anti-Corruption Activities, Reporting on Violence |
| State of Guerrero | Regional Police, Human Rights Network | Regional Police Force supported by communities, Accountability of Police and Anti-Corruption Efforts |
| State of Michoacán | Several Small Civic Groups | Police Reform, Anti-Corruption Activities |

Vice President Al Gore, telecommunications magnate Carlos Slim, and U.S. talk show host Larry King to Tijuana to discuss these issues.

Tijuana's experience highlights the sensitivities of the private sector toward Mexico's public security situation, a topic that is explored in detail in this book by Lucy Conger. Conger analyzes the role of the private sector—including industry, commerce, and civil society—in responding to sharp increases in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey, two of the country's most important northern industrial and commercial centers. In Ciudad Juarez in the state of Chihuahua, for example, a long-standing civic organization, Plan Estratégico de Juárez (Strategic Plan Juárez), initially started by concerned business leaders in the late 1990s, has become the nucleus of a series of civic groups concerned about police reform, justice reform, anti-kidnapping legislation, youth development, human rights, and city planning. Several other groups in Juárez, ranging from neighborhood organizations, human rights groups, the local doctors' association, and traditional business organizations, have also played a significant role in these debates, with a growing impact on actual policy decisions. Indeed, in the face of the worst violence in the country, Juárez has become a surprisingly hopeful story

about how citizens fight back against incredible odds and develop a new narrative about the future of their city based on a culture of lawfulness and demands for effective institutions. Conger makes special note of the role of the Mesas de Seguridad that were initiated by the federal government to create opportunities for civic dialogue and coordination in the aftermath of a tragic massacre at a birthday party, and sees these as a model for other parts of Mexico currently plagued by violence.

Similarly, Monterrey, Mexico's industrial and business capital located in the state of Nuevo León, became one of the most violent hotspots in 2011 and 2012. However, significant social action, building on its well-funded local civic infrastructure, were introduced that have apparently helped the city recuperate from its security crisis through police and judicial reform and accountability measures. In this technologically savvy city, there has been an effort driven by several young businesspeople to create an online social media platform that allows citizens both to report crimes and to interact with each other about projects to restore the city, a creative addition to the usual repertoire of social action in the city. However, Conger suggests, the most important actions appear to be taken by Monterrey's powerful boardroom players who have direct high-level access: "At the top, CEOs speak directly with the president or cabinet-level officials behind closed doors, press their demands and reach a gentlemen's agreement that responds to their needs for Monterrey." The key question is whether the interventions of Mexico's power brokers and corporate interests trickle down to provide better protections for the rest of society.

In other areas beset by violence, including Sinaloa, Guerrero, and Michoacán (among the states with the highest rates of violence), there have been some positive civic responses, though these have been more fragmented and have arguably been overshadowed by the attention to armed militia groups. Perhaps most interesting has been the Regional Police, a community funded police force in the poorest districts in the mountains of Guerrero, which has sought to maintain a degree of protection of civilians in the midst of some of the most destructive fights among drug trafficking organizations. Sinaloa, the birthplace of drug trafficking in Mexico and the center of the largest trafficking organization, has seen an increasingly combative civil society that has sought to clean up corruption in government and provide effective reporting on criminal groups in the face of significant threats. And in Michoacán, civic organizations have made a major push for reform of the police and justice system. In these three states, spontaneous efforts by average citizens to create their own online media platforms to report on violence and citizen responses have played an important role in providing information after traditional media have been threatened into silence.

## TABLE 4: KEY NATIONAL CIVIC MOVEMENTS

| Movement | Key Organizations | Key Activities/Demands |
|---|---|---|
| Victims' Rights Movement | Mexico SOS, Mexicans United Against Delinquency, Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity | Police, Prosecutor, and Judicial Reform, Anti-Kidnapping Legislation, Attention to Victims of Crime |
| Judicial Reform Movement | Network for Oral Trials | Implementation of judicial reforms nationally and in each state |
| Journalists' Movement | Loose network of media owners and journalists | Investigation of crimes against journalists, legislation to penalize attacks against journalists |
| Alternative Information Platforms | Several local efforts in different cities | Provide alternative information sources on crime and violence |

At the same time, there have been at least four sets of national civic movements that have helped shape the public debate and public policy around rule of law issues in Mexico (see Table 5). First, as Villagran discusses in this book, several groups organized by families that have been victimized by violence have constituted important organizations that are pushing for major police, prosecutorial, and judicial reforms in the country. Movements led by poet Javier Sicilia (whose son was killed in Cuernavaca), businessman Alejandro Martí (whose son was killed in Mexico City), Isabel Miranda de Wallace (whose son was killed in Mexico State), María Elena Moreira (whose husband was kidnapped in Mexico City), and others (including those involved in the group "Mexicans United Against Crime") have captured the public imagination and driven the public debate on reforms. These prominent victims' rights organizations have met in public interviews with Mexican authorities, organized massive marches around the country, and, in some cases, worked closely on the details of policy reform at a national and state level.

A second national movement for judicial reform, the Network for Oral Trials, made up of prominent attorneys who range from corporate lawyers to human rights advocates to university scholars, helped develop the basis for the recent constitutional reform of the justice system and continue to play a decisive role in promoting its implementation nationally and in several states. As Octavio Rodriguez notes in his contribution to this book, although less publicly visible, this network has been particularly adept at shaping public policy by gaining champions within the federal Congress and state governments. In this case,

USAID funding has actually played a critical (if little known) role in helping this network develop.

Third, as Emily Edmonds-Poli notes in her contribution to this book, a growing network of journalists and media owners has begun to organize to protect local reporters and media in Mexico that are under attack from organized crime groups. These efforts have received a boost recently from U.S. government funding, through Freedom House, for an effort to provide early warning and temporary safe haven to journalists in danger (something that we believe was inspired, in part, by recommendations in our earlier report, and embassy officials consulted extensively with the researchers on this initiative), but the most important locus of this activity remains with the journalists themselves who are beginning to pressure the federal attorney general's office and local authorities to protect journalists who have the courage to report on organized crime and associated corruption.

Fourth, as Daniel Sabet notes in his chapter, there have been a number of efforts directed toward increasing the public's trust in the police that will also entail greater direct citizen oversight. Drawing on evidence from groundbreaking surveys of Mexican police officers, Sabet finds that large numbers of police view society as an obstacle to law enforcement, in part because of the uncooperative attitudes and unlawful behaviors of citizens themselves. Sabet argues that authorities must work with society in a joint effort in "co-producing" citizen security. This can be done, he suggests, by developing confidence building programs that help authorities and police to do their jobs more effectively. For example, promising confidence building efforts have been made in states such as Baja California to increase public reporting of crimes via the state's 089 telephone number emergency reporting system.

In short, this book seeks to document several of the most important civic engagement activities taking place in areas hardest hit by criminal violence in Mexico, and identify and analyze the obstacles to and opportunities for greater civic engagement. Based on this research, the researchers involved have provided detailed analysis of the different movements and initiatives described above, with the goal of offering answers to several key questions: What are the most important (largest and most influential) civic responses to crime and violence in each city/state (for the six local studies) or around the particular issue (for the national movements)? What has led these groups to organize? What are their demands, activities, and capabilities? How articulated are they among each other? What are the primary obstacles to and opportunities for engagement with authorities? How have the organizations sought to overcome or take advantage of these? Have they influenced public opinion or perceptions in noticeable ways? How effective have they been at moving public policy? How could U.S. and Mexican government policy responses enhance the effectiveness of these civic efforts?

## The Potential for More Effective U.S. and Mexican Policy Responses

Policy responses from the Mexican and U.S. governments to engage civic society have been, so far, limited. Still, there are some encouraging efforts already under way that could be augmented and expanded. For example, the U.S. government has supported "culture of lawfulness" programs for several years in Mexico through grants to the National Information Strategy Center. This program is based on the pioneering work of Roy Godson and the Culture of Lawfulness Project, which has its theoretical foundations in a growing body of policy-focused academic research on the role of attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms in fostering the rule of law in new democracies. A core assumption of this initiative is that policy initiatives and institutional reform are insufficient without "buy-in" from society at large. According to this program's mission and vision, "citizens and government officials must believe that they have a personal stake in upholding the rule of law and preventing crime and corruption. They must share the expectation that laws ought to be fair and apply to everyone regardless of socioeconomic status—and that every individual has a role in creating and overseeing the implementation of the laws."[19]

Additionally, U.S. policymakers have been gradually directing more funds to support civic projects in Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and Monterrey, including youth development, employment training, and civic engagement in city planning. These funds are part of the reformulated Merida Initiative strategy to support the emergence of resilient communities where the violence has been most acute. The Justice in Mexico Project has been consulted by both governments in developing this strategy under Pillar IV of the Merida Initiative, and the Wilson Center produced a short report on these efforts in 2013.[20]

Similarly, the U.S. government has provided some support through USAID to the Network for Oral Trials (which, as noted above, promotes judicial reform) and, starting in late 2011, to Freedom House to start a project to protect journalists (for which researchers for this report were widely consulted). These are generally small initiatives within the larger overall security strategy but, nevertheless, an important indication of the U.S. government's commitment to strengthening and protecting civil society as a vehicle for improving the rule of law and an important element of it security strategy in Mexico.

At the same time, the Mexican federal government and state governments have at times responded to demands from the various civic groups, although this response has been uneven. The victims' rights movements, for example, have had some success in generating sufficient publicity to gain traction for police and

19 Vision Statement. Culture of Lawfulness Project, http://www.strategycenter.org/programs/education-for-the-rule-of-law/.

20 Negroponte, "Pillar IV.

prosecutorial reforms, both at the federal and, in some cases, state level, but they have often been frustrated by the slow and ineffective pace of implementation. Similarly, some city and state governments (e.g., the state governments where Tijuana and Monterrey are located) have appeared to show greater receptivity to citizen demands than others and been more willing to partner with civic efforts, even if only partially, while other state and municipal governments have appeared to resist these efforts. The Mexican federal government has pledged some funds to complement U.S. efforts in Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and Monterrey under Pillar IV, although the extent of these efforts is still unclear.

## CONCLUSION

The United States has a profound national interest in having a southern neighbor that is both secure and prosperous. The rise in organized crime violence in Mexico, related to drug trafficking, has severely strained the country's resources and raised questions about the state's ability to ensure the security of its citizens. The U.S. government has been working closely with the Mexican government to provide intelligence, training, equipment, and funding to address this challenge, and these efforts have led to a series of presidential summits and cabinet-level meetings to set an overall strategy for cooperation.

Restoring security and public safety in Mexico depends not only on an effective state response to problems of crime and violence, but also on the resilience of communities affected by violence. Failure to strengthen and fully engage civil society in security efforts will further undermine public confidence in government and weaken the rule of law. Worse, as the public's trust in its authorities to guarantee its safety decreases, the tendency to rely on organized crime to "provide" this safety increases. Furthermore, citizens have a vital role to play in holding government accountable and demanding that government function effectively.

In the Mexican context, it is vitally important that both governments adopt public policies that will promote civic engagement aimed at strengthening civil society and encouraging a partnership with government to effectively address security concerns. While this is primarily the responsibility of the government of Mexico, the United States can also play a constructive role in support of this important goal and ensure that this is embedded in the two governments' joint strategy. Failure to do so will undermine attempts to effectively fight organized crime, restore public confidence in the institutions of government, and ultimately fail to ensure public security for citizens.

Restoring security and public safety in Mexico depends not only on an effective state response to problems of crime and violence, but also on the resilience of communities affected by violence.

Thus, this book offers several concrete policy options for government leaders in the United States and Mexico to build on current civic engagement efforts to strengthen the rule of law and improve security by enhancing civic responses to violence in Mexico, increasing civic engagement with the state in promoting the rule of law, as well as help shape public debate on this issue more broadly.

Overall, we hope that our findings will help to influence both public discussion and public policy for dealing with organized crime groups that have driven a tragic spiral of violence in Mexico by supplying a pathway for policymakers to unleash the potential for collaboration with citizens and civic organizations. This has been a missing link in current collaborative efforts between the United States and Mexico in addressing organized crime, and we believe that providing policy ideas can help build this link into existing strategies.