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

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 gure 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 tra cking 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.

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

demand and greater enforcement e orts in earlier tra cking areas, notably Miami and the Caribbean. The result was that Mexico became a primary supplier and route for the ow 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 tra cking has long and well-established roots in Mexico, for most of the 20 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 tra ckers enjoyed for decades. As many scholars have amply documented, the complicity of government o cials gave Mexico's early tra ckers license to operate within the country in exchange for a share of their revenues. This arrangement was sometimes the result of intimidation by powerful organized crime gures o ering o cials 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

to record and report kidnappings di erently, depending on the nature of the

individuals who were abducted by organized crime groups for signi cant periods of time. Sometimes kidnappings are part of an e ort to extract large ransoms from the victim, or their family members and associates. In other cases, often referred to as a ＿＿＿ , a person is abducted primarily in an e ort 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 nding 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 con dence in judicial and law enforcement authorities—either due to perceptions of incompetence of law e 32.3(i)6

Perhaps the most disturbing manifestation of citizen frustration with the

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 o cers—and burned their bodies in the strĕet.

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 ght against criminal organizations. In general, federal, state, and local o cials have appeared to tolerate such self-defense groups as a necessary evil—if not a positive and welcome development—in the ght against organized crime. Indeed, several Mexican o cials frankly admitted the state's lack of capacity to address the needs of certain communities, e ectively 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 e ort 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—o cials were unable to achieve an agreement to disarm militia groups, many of which have questionable membership composition, dubious nancial backing, and enormous repower.

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 su er traumatic experiences can identify positive ways to respond, recover, and rebuild. A growing literature has described successful e orts 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.

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7 In reaction to public outrage over the incident, President Vicente Fox red 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.

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. Similarly, in several of the cities with high levels of violence, including Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Monterre1ee caica08. fo-27.5(r)-4-27(as)-22.6(a)-21.6(r-18.3(, m)-286.5((o

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

TABLE 4: KEY NATIONAL CIVIC MOVEMENTS

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 e orts 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 insu cient without "buy-in" from society at large. According to this program's mission and vision, "citizens and government o cials 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 e orts 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 su cient publicity to gain traction for police and

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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 ine ective 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 e orts, even if only partially, while other state and municipal governments have appeared to resist these e orts. The Mexican federal government has pledged some funds to complement U.S. e orts in Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and Monterrey under Pillar IV, although the extent of these e orts 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 tra cking, 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 e orts 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 e ective state response to problems of crime and violence, but also on the resilience of communities a ected by violence. Failure to strengthen and fully engage civil society in security e orts will further undermine public con dence 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 e ectively.

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 e ectively 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 e ectively ght organized crime, restore public con dence in the institutions of government, and ultimately fail to ensure public security for citizens.

Thus, this book o ers several concrete policy options for government leaders in the United States and Mexico to build on current civic engagement e orts 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 ndings will help to in uence 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 e orts 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.