



Violence and Citizen Participation in Mexico: From the Polls to the Streets

*“Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses
to Crime and Violence” Briefing Paper Series*

By Sandra Ley

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List of Acronyms

CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (National Human Rights Commission)
CAPAM	Criminal Aggression against Political Actors in Mexico (Dataset)
CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council)
INE	Instituto Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Institute)
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography)
MPC	Mexican Protest against Crime (Dataset)
MPJD	Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity)
OCG	Organized Crime Group
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), a Mexican political party
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party), a Mexican political party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), a Mexican political party
Províctima	Procuraduría Social de Atención a Víctimas del Delito (Special Prosecutor's Office to Assist the Victims of Crime)
PVEM	Partido Verde Ecologista de México (Ecologist Green Party of Mexico), a Mexican political party
Panal	Partido Nueva Alianza (National Alliance Party), a Mexican political party
SEGOB	Secretaría de Gobernación (Mexican Interior Ministry)
SNSP	Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (National System of Public Security)

Executive Summary

How do citizens cope politically with violence? In the face of rising insecurity, Mexican citizens, particularly victims, have poured into the streets to demand an end to violence and ask for peace and justice. However, as organized crime groups attempt to influence local elections and target political candidates and public officials, citizens have not felt equally encouraged to cast ballots on election day.

Elections in Mexico, as well as in other Latin American countries such as Brazil and Guatemala, have been marked by criminal violence. Voters, public officials, and candidates alike have been threatened or attacked by organized crime groups. It is, therefore, important to examine how violence shapes various forms of participation. This paper seeks to provide a broad view of political participation in the midst of Mexico's current security crisis, with the goal of understanding the effects of violence on civic activism.

Overall, the paper shows that violence, particularly that directed against party candidates and public officials, threatens the electorate and depresses voter turnout. At the same time, violence has stimulated non-electoral forms of participation that attempt to bring the issue of crime and insecurity onto the political agenda and to hopefully achieve peace and justice. Such demands, however, have not been met yet and much remains to be done. In addition, citizens who take part of these efforts are further exposed to violence and retaliation by criminals and colluded officials.

In preparation for the upcoming Mexican midterm elections, this paper also examines the prospects for Mexico's 2015 midterm elections in view of the recent trends in violence and civic protests. Out of the seventeen states that will hold local elections in 2015, six have a particularly alarming violent profile.

Guerrero and Michoacán have homicide rates well above the national average. Politicians in both states have also been direct targets of criminal violence. Similarly, in Nuevo León, Jalisco, the State of Mexico, and Morelos, criminal groups have made an explicit attempt to influence politics and elections in recent years. Special attention must be paid to these regions. Political authorities must begin developing effective solutions that can effectively keep voters safe and encouraged. The conclusion outlines some policy recommendations on how to generate the necessary conditions for citizens to exercise their right to vote freely.

Finally, as a result of the disappearance of the 43 students in Iguala, Guerrero, massive mobilizations have taken place across and outside of Mexico. In the face of the upcoming elections and given the prevailing weaknesses of the instruments so far created for the attention of victims—the General Law of Victims and *Províctima*—it will be important for these new citizen mobilization efforts to demand the commitment of political candidates and future elected authorities to increase financial and human resources for the effective operation of these institutions, and most important, the fair resolution of their cases. Civil society is a fundamental element for the achievement of political accountability, particularly in a violent context such as the one many Mexican citizens currently live under.

VIOLENCE AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN MEXICO: FROM THE POLLS TO THE STREETS

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Overview

Violence pushes individuals to seek survival strategies. This may range from changing door locks or hiring private security to moving to another city or country.¹ Some individuals also limit their daily activities and become less trustful of others. These are some of the social adjustments that citizens living in highly violent contexts are urged to do in order to survive. But, how do citizens cope politically with violence?

One of the issues that has recently drawn the attention of media, analysts, and academics alike is the recent surge of public frustration and protest in response to crime and violence in Mexico. In the face of elevated levels of violence, Mexican citizens, particularly victims, have made an effort to hold government authorities accountable for the issue of insecurity through marches, labor strikes, demonstrations, and sit-ins, among other forms of civic action. Victims across the country have poured into the streets to demand an end to violence and ask for peace and justice, particularly in light of recent revelations that students in rural Mexico have been targeted for disappearances and killings by both public authorities and criminal organizations.² Entrepreneurs have also made efforts to influence politics and shape security policies.³ Furthermore, community leaders in Michoacán

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¹ Wood, Charles H., Chris L. Gibson, Ludimila Riberiro, and Paul Hamsho-Diaz. "Crime Victimization in Latin America and Intentions to Migrate to the United States." *International Migration Review* Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring 2010; Ríos, Viridiana. 2014. "Security Issues and Immigration Flows: Drug-Violence Refugees, the New Mexican Immigrants." *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 49, No.3, Fall 2014.

² Villagrán, Lauren. "The Victims' Movement in Mexico," in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014; Dudley, Steven, and Sandra Rodríguez Nieto. "Civil Society, the Government, and the Development of Citizen Security," in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014.

³ Conger, Lucy. "The Private Sector and Public Security: The Cases of Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey," in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014.

decided to arm themselves and create self-defense groups, while community police forces have played a similar role at the local level in Guerrero.⁴

This participatory trend is consistent with recent studies that have found that, in the aftermath of a traumatic experience such as a burglary or even an abduction, victims of violence develop a renewed sense of strength that pushes them to take action and become engaged with their community.⁵ However, as organized crime groups (OCGs) attempt to influence local elections and target political candidates and public officials, do citizens feel equally encouraged to cast ballots on election day? Elections in Mexico, as well as in other Latin American countries such as Brazil and Guatemala, have been marked by criminal violence. Voters, public officials, and candidates alike have been threatened or attacked by organized crime groups. It is, therefore, important to examine how violence shapes various forms of participation.

This paper seeks to provide a broad view of political participation in the midst of Mexico's current security crisis, with the goal of understanding the effects of violence on civic activism. In particular, I focus on how both electoral and non-electoral forms of action interact with criminal violence. Thus, this paper first examines how criminal violence shapes electoral participation, showing the destabilizing potential of criminal violence on electoral democracy. Next, I analyze how violence has stimulated non-electoral participation. Drawing on a unique dataset on protest events against crime, it demonstrates when and where nonviolent mobilization has taken place in Mexico, as well as how it has intertwined with violence. Overall, the findings herein illustrate that while violence reduces the incentives to participate in elections, it has nonetheless stimulated other forms of political action that attempt to keep government accountable through other means. Finally, I consider the prospects for Mexico's 2015 midterm elections in view of the recent trends in violence and civic protests.

Electoral Participation Amid Violence: How Does Violence Shape Electoral Behavior?

Many organized crime groups rely on protection rackets in order to operate. Such protection rackets are often made up of local police forces as well as local public officials, including mayors, who enforce the law selectively in order to benefit a given criminal organization, in exchange for profits, information, or the containment of violence.⁶ Cases of collusion between organized crime and public officials in Mexico have multiplied in recent years. From Michoacán to Tamaulipas, Mexican

⁴ Heinle, Kimberly, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk. "Citizen Security in Michoacán," in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014. Horton, Gillian. 2014. "Conflict in Michoacán: Vigilante Groups Present Challenges and Opportunities for the Mexican Government." in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014; Althaus, Dudley and Steven Dudley. "Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacán's Militias," in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014.

⁵ Blattman, Christopher. "From Violence to Voting: War and Political Participation in Uganda," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 103, No. 2, May 2009; Bateson, Regina. "Crime Victimization and Political Participation," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 106, No. 3, August 2012.

⁶ Snyder, Richard, and Adriana Durán-Martínez. "Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets." *Crime, Law and Social Change* Vol. 52, No. 3, September 2009.

authorities and police forces have provided protection to criminal groups—either voluntarily or not—across the country.⁷

Elections are key focal points through which criminal organizations attempt to alter the balance of power within informal protection arrangements. Alternation of parties in government can open new opportunities for OCGs to gain territory and establish a new set of protection arrangements with local authorities for the success of their business.⁸ Their intention is not necessarily ideological, but strategic. Violence and bribery are among the main tools available to criminal groups to push for such political reorganization. Through these means, they seek to eliminate their rivals and demobilize those opposing their electoral preferences.

Violence has in fact prevailed in many recent elections in Mexico. Since 1995, more than 100 political candidates were targets of criminal violence that ranged from threats to kidnappings and executions.⁹ For instance, in the 2010 local elections in Vicente Guerrero, Durango, Yolanda Cifuentes was forced to quit the competition for mayor due to explicit threats by organized crime.¹⁰ In the 2012 federal elections, a congressional candidate in Acapulco, Guerrero was forced to move his family out of state after a crime group told him to withdraw from the electoral competition. Similar situations were registered in Durango, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas.¹¹ However, some candidates do not get a chance to withdraw, or decide not to do so and pay the consequences. That was the case of José Mario Guajardo Varela, who ran as the National Action Party (PAN) candidate for mayor of Valle Hermoso, Tamaulipas. He had received several phone threats, which he decided to ignore, and was assassinated in his own business by an armed group.¹² Local candidates from both the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) have also been killed by organized crime.¹³

OCGs do not only target political candidates. Criminal violence is also directed against public officials and even voters. Through the targeting of public authorities, crime groups attempt to demonstrate their strength and power, get access to government information, as well as increase their negotiating power in order to gain the government's or party's cooperation in protection deals. In the Mexican case, more than 200 public officials, across the three levels of government, have been targets of criminal groups since 1995.¹⁴ Through the targeting of voters, OCGs seek to demobilize sympathizers of parties antagonistic to them. One of the most shocking events of threats

⁷ Hernández, Anabel. “Los amos de Michoacán: quiénes y cómo gobiernan.” *Proceso*. No. 1931. November 2, 2013; El Universal. “Acusan a 10 policías de nexos con narcos.” *El Universal*. May 8, 2014; Morelos, Rubicela and Gustavo Castillo. “Detienen a nueve policías de Morelos por proteger al narco.” *La Jornada*. June 11, 2009; Ángel, Arturo. “Policías protegían al narco en Zona Rosa: PGJDF.” *24 Horas*. September 25, 2013; Pedraza, Iván. “Revelan protección de policías en Sonora.” *El Universal*. October 1, 2013.

⁸ Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. “Votes, Drugs, and Violence. Subnational Democratization and the Onset of Inter-Cartel Wars in Mexico, 1995-2006.” Working Paper. University of Notre Dame and Duke University, 2013.

⁹ Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. “Mexico’s Drug Wars and the Remaking of Local Order: Why Criminal Organizations Murder Local Officials.” In Agustina Giraudy, Eduardo Moncada, and Richard Snyder (eds.). *Subnational Analysis in Comparative Politics*, Manuscript under review, 2014.

¹⁰ García, Lev. “Renuncia por amenazas candidata en Durango.” *Reforma*. May 5, 2010.

¹¹ Reforma. “Impacta acoso a 13 candidatos.” *Reforma*. March 28, 2012.

¹² Reforma. “Cumplen amago: matan a candidato.” *Reforma*. May 14, 2010.

¹³ Moya, Ricardo, and Arturo Sierra. “Muere tras ser baleado ex secretario municipal.” *Reforma*. April 28, 2012; Reforma. “Matan a candidato del PRD.” *Reforma*. April 8, 2009.

¹⁴ Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. “Mexico’s Drug Wars and the Remaking of Local Order: Why Criminal Organizations Murder Local Officials.” In Agustina Giraudy, Eduardo Moncada, and Richard Snyder (eds.). *Subnational Analysis in Comparative Politics*, Manuscript under review, 2014.

against the electorate took place in the 2011 elections in Michoacán, where La Familia Michoacana explicitly ordered voters in Tuzantla to abstain from voting for the PRD—which allegedly supported the rival Caballeros Templarios—and instead support the PRI, or else be killed, along with their families. Similar experiences have been reported in local elections in Guerrero and Tamaulipas.¹⁵

These violent events necessarily transform elections and voters' overall electoral experience. How so? Take the case of the state of Durango in the 2013 elections. Due to insecurity, the PRD was unable to register candidates in the municipalities of Canelas, Tamazula, San Pedro del Gallo, Hidalgo, Otáez, and San Bernardo. Likewise, the PAN could not register candidates in San Bernardo and Indé. This means that voters living in the municipality of San Bernardo only had one option, the candidate from the coalition of the PRI, the Green Party (PVEM), and the National Alliance Party (Panal). When the results of an election are settled by default (by OCGs), voting loses any meaningful purpose. Moreover, under these conditions, democratic citizenship and electoral democracy are put at risk. When a party's sympathizers see that their preferred candidate is being threatened or unable to run for office, voters' incentives to take part in elections are greatly reduced. Such events further reveal the weakness of the state and of democracy in general. Citizens run high risks by just expressing their political preferences publicly or may simply not find a suitable candidate to vote for. In the case of San Bernardo, 54% voted in the 2013 election. This is below the average participation rate (61%) of the past five elections. It is also well below the 72% turnout in San Juan de Guadalupe, another municipality in the state of Durango, which shares demographic, social, and economic characteristics with San Bernardo, but in which political candidates did not face threats or attacks by organized crime.

This trend holds when looking at municipal elections in general. Based on the Criminal Aggression against Political Actors in Mexico (CAPAM) dataset collected by Guillermo Trejo (University of Notre Dame) and me,¹⁶ Table 1 shows that, between 2000 and 2012, elections that did not experience a single case of criminal violence against political figures exhibited higher levels of turnout than those in which such violence took place. The depressing effect of criminal activity on electoral participation appears to be much lower when looking at federal elections, when incentives to participate are likely to be higher and criminal organizations may be more limited in their actions, due to increased security and mobilization efforts by federal authorities.

¹⁵ Rea, Daniela, and Jesús Guerrero. "Entre el temor y la decepción." *Reforma*. July 6, 2009; Baranda, Antonio. "Amenaza inseguridad comicios en Tamaulipas." *Reforma*. May 15, 2010; Jiménez, Benito. "Estaban cazando a quien votaba y los intimidaban." *Reforma*. July 6, 2009.

¹⁶ The measure of violent acts against political figures is derived from the Criminal Aggression against Political Actors in Mexico (CAPAM) dataset collected by Guillermo Trejo (University of Notre Dame) and me, based on eight national newspapers, eighteen subnational newspapers, and two weekly magazines specialized in drug trafficking and organized crime. It focuses exclusively on lethal attacks (from threat and kidnapping to executions) against political activists, public officials, and party candidates. We followed a strict set of criteria that allowed us to verify the involvement of DTOs in such events. In the case of assassinations, when news reports did not include the name of the cartels involved, we relied on three indicators to include the event in the dataset: the use of assault weapons for killing; signs of torture and brutal violence (e.g., bodies wrapped in a rug or mutilated); and written messages left on the bodies. The type of assault weapons used was also a crucial variable for the inclusion of armed attacks in our dataset. Regarding threats, these were only included under the following circumstances: a) when candidates were forced to leave the electoral competition; b) when parties explicitly recognized they had been unable to place candidates for a specific position; c) when threats were explicitly accompanied by a message signed by a specific criminal group; or d) when public authorities were subsequently forced to resign or move out of their municipality. When aggressions did not meet these criteria, we did not consider them in our dataset. See Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. "Mexico's Drug Wars and the Remaking of Local Order: Why Criminal Organizations Murder Local Officials." In Agustina Giraudy, Eduardo Moncada, and Richard Snyder (eds.). *Subnational Analysis in Comparative Politics*, Manuscript under review, 2014.

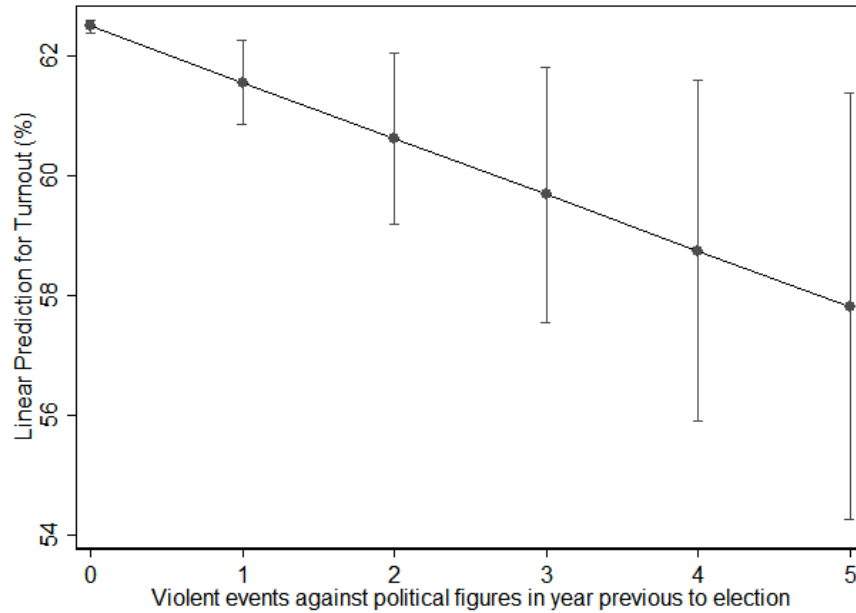
Table 1: Turnout by Type of Election and Presence of Violence against Political Leaders and Government Officials, 2000-2012

Violent attacks against political figures in year previous to election	Turnout by type of election (%)	
	Municipal	Federal
Yes	55	53
No	63	54
Difference	8	1

In order to get a better understanding of the relationship between violence and electoral participation, I ran a series cross-sectional time-series models, with fixed effects, using participation rates in municipal elections from 2000 to 2012 as the dependent variable.¹⁷ Based on this statistical analysis, Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between turnout and violence directed against political leaders and public officials. It displays the predictive margins of turnout with 95% confidence intervals. The graph shows that, holding everything else constant, each violent event against political figures—such as the ones described above—decreases turnout one percentage point. This can be particularly relevant in cases in which electoral competition is high and participation rates can even determine electoral results.

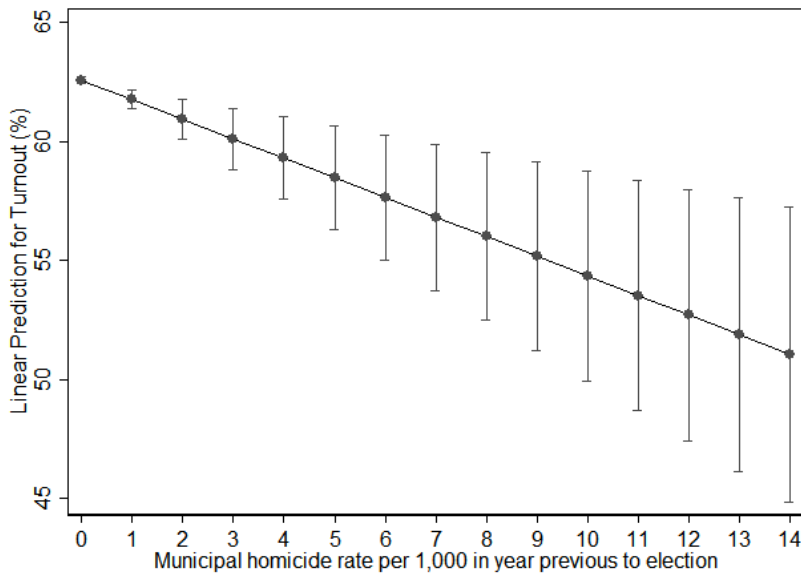
Figure 1: Turnout in Mexican Municipal Elections and Criminal Violence against Political Leaders and Government Officials, 2000-2012

¹⁷ Data on electoral participation was collected from the state electoral institutes as well as from the National Electoral Institute's (INE) records. The main independent variables are violent acts against political figures and the homicide rate per 1,000 inhabitants. The former is derived from the CAPAM dataset described in the previous footnote. The homicide rate is derived from the Mexican census (INEGI). The model also controls for political variables—such as concurrent elections, margin of victory, effective number of parties, and participation rate in the previous election—and socioeconomic variables—population size, age structure, urbanization, and poverty. For more detailed statistical analysis on how violence depresses electoral participation, see: Bravo Regidor, Carlos and Gerardo Maldonado Hernández. “Las balas y los votos: ¿qué efecto tiene la violencia sobre las elecciones?” In José Antonio Aguilar (ed.). *Las Bases Sociales del Crimen Organizado y la Violencia en México*. Mexico: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, 2012; Carreras, Miguel, and Alejandro Trelles. “Bullets and Votes: Violence and Electoral Participation in Mexico.” *Journal of Politics in Latin America* Vol. 2, No. 4, September 2012; Ley Gutiérrez, Sandra J. “Citizens in Fear: Political Participation and Voting Behavior in the Midst of Violence.” PhD thesis. Duke University. May 2014.



Violence does not necessarily have to be exclusively directed against political figures in order to impact the electorate. As noted before, in a highly insecure context, violence dictates every aspect of life, including elections. Figure 2 shows that, all else being constant, turnout decreases as the overall homicide rate increases.¹⁸

Figure 2: Turnout in Mexican Municipal Elections and Homicide Rate, 2000-2012



The case of Juárez, Chihuahua is one in which voters had to elect a new mayor in the midst of one of the most violent years the city had ever experienced. Just five months before the election, on

¹⁸ Figure 2 is also derived from the statistical analysis described in the previous footnote.

January 31, 2010, the massacre of sixteen innocent civilians shook the city. Gunmen from the organized crime group *La Línea* killed eleven teenagers and four young adults when they were gathered at a party in a private house. When election day arrived, the municipality's homicide rate was well over 20 per 100,000 inhabitants. Consistent with the above description, only 30% of the electorate went out to vote, compared with an average turnout rate of 55% in the rest of Chihuahua. Interestingly, during that same year, protests against insecurity increased sharply in the city. Seventy-eight mobilizations against crime took place, compared with thirty-four that were organized in the previous year. At one point, these events were even organized on a weekly basis. Does criminal violence have a differentiated effect on non-electoral participation? The next section addresses this question.

Beyond Elections: Protest against Crime and Insecurity

The evidence shown on the previous section on electoral participation and violence suggests that electoral accountability may be hard to achieve in contexts of high crime and insecurity. However, we must take into account that punishing authorities for rising insecurity or demanding a change in security policy through elections has limitations. First, through elections, voters only have one shot at punishing or rewarding numerous governmental or policy issues. Nevertheless, along with insecurity concerns, they have to weigh other issues, such as the economy, when deciding how to vote. Second, voting is a decentralized strategic action, i.e., citizens cannot collectively coordinate the orientation of their votes, and therefore achieving one's goal is almost impossible.¹⁹

Social protest is an alternative tool for citizens to expose governmental wrongdoing or bring attention to social and political issues. Therefore, in order to get a better understanding of accountability in the midst of violence, one must also look into civil society's efforts to hold government in check.²⁰ Social mobilization is a plausible strategy to at least bring the issue of crime and insecurity into the political agenda and to hopefully achieve peace and justice. Such has been the goal of various victims' movements in Mexico over the past couple of decades.

Some of the first citizen mobilization efforts occurred in the northern state of Chihuahua, where a combination of cultural, economic, and political changes in the region resulted in increased violence since the 1990s, particularly that directed against women. Femicides have mobilized hundreds of mothers who untiringly demand justice for the unsolved murders of their daughters and search for the many more who have been abducted.²¹ In fact, some of them have founded nongovernmental organizations to provide psychological and legal help to other mothers and relatives of victims of femicides.²² Their activism is not limited to marches, sit-ins, and demonstrations. They have also taken an active role in the investigation of their daughters' disappearances and murders, ultimately pushing authorities to conduct thorough probes for the resolution of their cases.

¹⁹ Smulovitz, Catalina, and Enrique Peruzzotti. "Societal Accountability in Latin America." *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 11, No. 4, October 2000.

²⁰ Smulovitz, Catalina, and Enrique Peruzzotti. "Societal Accountability in Latin America." *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 11, No. 4, October 2000.

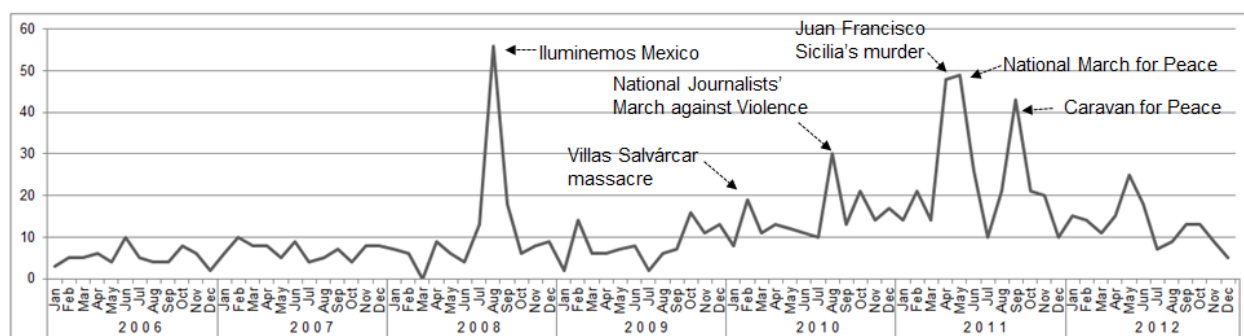
²¹ Bejarano, Cynthia L. "Las Super Madres de Latino America: Transforming Motherhood by Challenging Violence in Mexico, Argentina, and El Salvador." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* Vol. 23, No. 1, 2002.

²² Two cases stand out: *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* and *Justicia para Nuestras Hijas*, founded by Norma Andrade and Norma Ledezma, respectively, after their daughters disappeared in 2001 and 2002.

Shortly after President Felipe Calderon began a militarized strategy against organized crime, violence increased significantly across the country. The battle between drug cartels, their private armies, and government security forces resulted in over 50,000 deaths in the 2006-2012 period,²³ over 5,000 disappearances,²⁴ and approximately 200,000 were displaced from their place of residence as a result of violence.²⁵ In addition, the deployment of more than 50,000 soldiers for counter-narcotics operations was associated with increased human rights violations.²⁶ Affected by such violence, either directly or indirectly, citizens have reacted and mobilized accordingly.

In order to understand how citizen mobilization against crime and insecurity took place in Mexico during the Calderón administration, and based on the Mexican Protest against Crime (MPC) Dataset,²⁷ Figure 3 shows the monthly frequency of protest events against insecurity organized by Mexican citizens²⁸ throughout thirty-one states during the most violent time period in recent Mexican history. Acts of protest include: marches, demonstrations, road blockages, community meetings with authorities, labor strikes, collective public prayers, sit-ins, collective press conferences and releases, hunger strikes, distribution of fliers, collection of signatures, and occupation of government buildings.

Figure 3: Monthly Frequency of Protest Events against Crime and Insecurity in Mexico, 2006-2012



²³ Reforma. “Reporta Osorio Chong 70 mil muertos con FCH.” *Reforma*, Nacional, February 16, 2013.

²⁴ ACNUR. “Informe de Misión a México. Grupo de Trabajo de la ONU sobre las Desapariciones Forzadas o Involuntarias.” *Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados*. Mexico, D.F., 2012.

²⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. “Mexico: Displacement due to Criminal and Communal Violence.” IDMC, November 2011.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch. “Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico’s War on Drugs.” Human rights report on Mexico, 2011.

²⁷ Based on a systematic review of fifty local newspapers and one national newspaper, and together with a team of research assistants, I constructed the Mexican Protest Against Crime (MPC) Database. It provides detailed information on 1,014 protest events against crime and insecurity that occurred during the 2006-2012 period, across the 31 Mexican states. Through the use of multiple local sources, event coverage is maximized while at the same time minimizing the geographical and temporal biases of newspaper-generated data. For more information, see Ley Gutiérrez, Sandra J. “Citizens in Fear: Political Participation and Voting Behavior in the Midst of Violence.” PhD thesis. Duke University. May 2014.

²⁸ The MPC dataset focuses exclusively on mobilization events organized by citizens as a means of expressing their opposition to a particular violent event or general insecurity, as well as a way to demand specific changes to security policies. This implies that protest events organized by criminal organizations against a particular branch of government, a security policy, the police, or the army were not considered in this analysis. Protests by police forces demanding greater security for their working conditions were not included either.

Two critical points stand out immediately: August 2008 and the year 2011.²⁹ On August 30, 2008, hundreds of thousands of citizens in more than fifty cities participated in the national march “Iluminemos Mexico,” organized by the Martí family and civil society groups across the country. Participants demanded an end to violence, insecurity, and impunity. The triggering event was the kidnapping and assassination of Fernando Martí, son of the entrepreneur Alejandro Martí. The public exposure of the case right when the federal government was trying to convince public opinion of the effectiveness of its strategy against organized crime, despite rising levels of violence, outraged citizens across the country—particularly middle-class citizens who were often the targets of kidnappings.

Three years later, Juan Francisco Sicilia, the son of renowned poet Javier Sicilia, was brutally killed along with six friends in Temixco, Morelos by members of the Pacífico Sur Cartel. Sicilia made a call for massive mobilization against crime. Civil society responded to that call and organized marches for peace throughout the country. This marked the beginning of a national victims' movement, the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD). It quickly organized a series of “Caravans for Peace” that traveled across fourteen states and from the U.S.-Mexico border to Washington, D.C., exposing cases of civilian victimization—ranging from extortion to massacres—that the government had silenced or where the government had even labeled victims as criminals.

Despite the relevance of these two critical junctures, mobilization against crime in Mexico is a lot more varied, both in terms of its organizers and its geography. First, as shown in Figure 3, journalists and other civil society organizations have also reacted to the increasing violence and generated massive mobilizations. Table 2 further shows that citizens across a wide range of occupations and with very diverse profiles took action against rising insecurity. More than a third of protests against insecurity in Mexico were organized by civil society organizations. Victims and their relatives organized 11% of these events. Together, community groups in schools, neighborhoods, and churches promoted a third of the protests occurring during the Calderón administration. Close to 17% of demonstrations were organized by professionals and workers from various sectors: media, health services, transportation, and education, among others. In general, these groups were heavily affected by organize crime’s extortion threats and other forms of direct violence, such as kidnappings and murders. This initial examination of the data suggests that social networks play a fundamental role in the successful organization of protests against crime and insecurity. It also reveals that there are certain types of networks that are particularly helpful in the promotion of such events.

Table 2: Organizers of Protest Events against Insecurity, 2006-2012

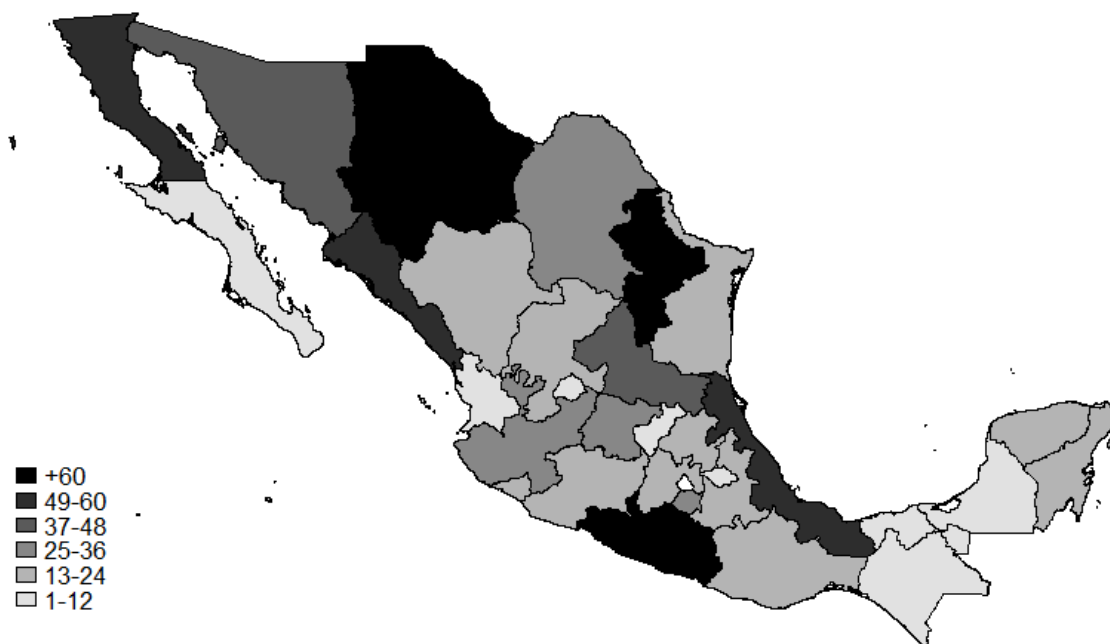
Organizer	Frequency	Percent
Civil society organizations	373	36.79
Churches	118	11.64
Victims and relatives	112	11.05
Schools/colleges	104	10.26
Neighborhood associations	102	10.06

²⁹ For a more detailed analysis of the victims’ movement, see Villagrán, Lauren. “The Victims’ Movement in Mexico,” in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014.

Journalists	49	4.83
Physicians	30	2.96
Taxi and bus drivers	30	2.96
Merchants/vendors	24	2.37
Teachers	18	1.78
Entrepreneurs	17	1.68
Political parties	16	1.58
Local government authorities	16	1.58
Peasants	5	0.49
Total	1,014	100

In terms of geography, the intensity of protest against violence varied widely across states. Chihuahua exhibited the highest levels of protest: 224 events (22%) were organized between 2006 and 2012. Citizens in Guerrero organized 9.6% (97 events) of the protests occurring during that period. Sixty-six demonstrations took place in Nuevo León (6.5%). It must be noted that these three states exhibited the highest levels of violence during the Calderón administration. Baja California, Sinaloa, and Veracruz registered moderate levels of protest, with over fifty events in each. The remaining states exhibited much lower levels of protest.

Figure 4: Geographical Distribution of Protest against Crime in Mexico, 2006-2012

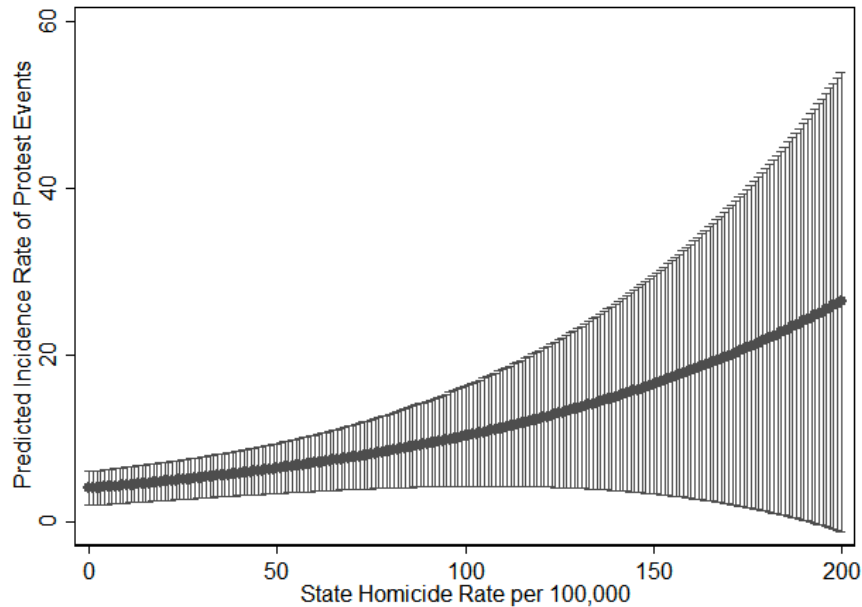


To examine the relationship between violence and protest against insecurity with greater detail, I ran a series of random effects and fixed effects (FE) negative binomial regression models, using protest events at the state level as the dependent variable.³⁰ Based on this statistical analysis, Figure 5 shows

³⁰ Negative binomial models are the most appropriate estimation technique for studying protest against crime because, like other protest cycles, this phenomenon exhibits over-dispersion (variance greater than the mean) and the events are not independent. Regression models also included measures on the presence of social networks through various

that violence, measured through the homicide rate, is a strong predictor of citizen mobilization against crime. All else being equal, for every one-unit increase in the homicide rate, the incidence of protest increased 1%.

Figure 5: Protest against Insecurity and Violence in Mexico, 2006-2012



While these findings suggest that societal accountability mechanisms can be effective despite ongoing violence, one must be careful when interpreting these results. First, due to corruption and impunity in the judicial system, as well as the collusion between government authorities and criminals, the probability of resolving cases of victimization is low. Demands for case resolution and subsequent justice have remained largely unattended. Second, citizens who take part of these efforts are further exposed to violence and retaliation by criminals and colluded officials. The risks associated with this kind of political action are high. Just in the state of Chihuahua, between 2009 and 2011, seventeen human rights activists were killed.³¹ Many more have been threatened and murdered in the rest of the country. It is here that social networks examined in Table 2 become crucial. Along with violence, the organization of these kinds of protests and individual decisions to participate in them are deeply intertwined with the level of development and strength of civil society

indicators. First, I used the Interior Ministry's register of civil associations and calculated the number of associations per 100,000 inhabitants. Second, based on data from the Public Education Ministry, I used the percentage of college students as a proxy of the density of networks among the education sector. Finally, relying on census data, I estimate the number of labor unions and professional associations, as well as the number of religious associations per 100,000. For purposes of analysis, these variables were lagged one time period. I also control for the states' economic development as measured by the marginality index generated by the National Population Council (CONAPO). I also control for the number of recommendations directed to state authorities by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). Finally, I include the number of prosecutor offices per 100,000 population, as a proxy of state capacity. For a detailed analysis on how violence, together with social networks, shape protest against crime, see Ley Gutiérrez, Sandra J. "Citizens in Fear: Political Participation and Voting Behavior in the Midst of Violence." PhD thesis. Duke University. May 2014.

³¹ Villalpando, Rubén. "En tres años han sido asesinados 17 activistas en el estado de Chihuahua." *La Jornada*, February 28, 2011.

networks, which to some extent can help overcome some of the risks associated with protest behavior in a violent context.³²

Coming together as a group can raise the costs to violent actors who seek to silence individual groups.³³ In addition, dense interpersonal networks tend to insulate activists. This contributes to their intensified commitment to the cause. Interactions with network participants show not only that there is a chance to take action, but that collective action can also potentially help resolve their cases or at least get the government's attention.

While still limited, these high-risk protest efforts have brought about important achievements, among which the creation of the General Law of Victims and Províctima—a new agency helping victims deal with their legal, social, medical, and psychological problems—stands out. While both still need a more effective response from the state in terms of financial, human, and institutional resources, they represent a major step forward in the state's recognition of victims and their rights. This is particularly important after a period in which the government had largely ignored or even denied civilian victimization.³⁴

Towards the 2015 Midterm Mexican Elections

In addition to the federal legislative elections, seventeen Mexican states will hold local elections in 2015. Two of these states—Guerrero and Michoacán—have particularly violent profiles. Various groups are currently fighting for control of territory in these two states. Consequently, their homicide rates are well above the national average.³⁵ Moreover, politicians in both states have been direct targets of criminal violence. Given that local elections across different levels of government are concurrent with federal elections in both states, it is possible that the tendency of violence to depress participation will be tamed. Concurrent elections tend to encourage voters to participate in elections because there is more at stake. However, this should not relieve electoral authorities from paying close attention to local violence. If criminal activity continues to rise and threaten local candidates, campaigning and mobilization efforts for federal-level elections are not likely to be enough to keep citizens motivated to vote.³⁶

³² For more information on the role of social networks in protest amid violence, see Ley Gutiérrez, Sandra J. "Citizens in Fear: Political Participation and Voting Behavior in the Midst of Violence." PhD thesis. Duke University. May 2014.

³³ Arias, Enrique D. "Faith in our Neighbors: Networks and Social Order in three Brazilian Favelas." *Latin American Politics and Society* Vol. 46, No. 1, Spring 2004.

³⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the victims' movement achievements, see Villagrán, Lauren. "The Victims' Movement in Mexico," in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014.

³⁵ According to data reported by the National System of Public Security (SNSP), the national homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in September 2014 was 9.89.

³⁶ Statistical evidence not shown here reveals that there is an interactive effect between violence and concurrent elections. Concurrent elections appear to have a positive effect on turnout levels. However, as aggressions against party members and public authorities continue to increase, such a positive effect disappears.

Table 3: States with Local Elections in 2015 and General Violence Profile

State	Governor	State Legislature	Mayor	Homicide rate per 100,000 (2014)*	Violent attacks against political figures (2014)**
Baja California Sur	•	•	•	4.72	0
Campeche	•	•	•	4.47	0
Colima	•	•	•	10.69	0
Chiapas		•	•	6.23	0
Distrito Federal		•	•	5.93	0
Guanajuato		•	•	8.94	2
Guerrero	•	•	•	32.42	10
Jalisco		•	•	8.22	2
México		•	•	8.95	2
Michoacán	•	•	•	16.67	5
Morelos		•	•	17.39	1
Nuevo León	•	•	•	7.54	2
Querétaro	•	•	•	3.80	0
San Luis Potosí	•	•	•	6.34	0
Sonora	•	•	•	14.83	0
Tabasco		•	•	5.38	0
Yucatán		•		1.39	0

* Preliminary accumulative figures, until September 2014, according to the National System of Public Security (SNSP).

** Lethal attacks against political figures in 2014. Data from CAPAM Dataset by Trejo and Ley (Updated: October 2014).

The elections in Michoacán are going to be a crucial test for the Peña Nieto administration. The elections will take place a year and a half after the federal intervention in Michoacán to regain control in the state and the creation of a rural police force from former self-defense groups. Despite these attempts to bring violence under control, the political-electoral landscape is particularly complicated in Michoacán. Members of the rural police force continue to be investigated for their linkages with criminal groups.³⁷ Current and former mayors are also under investigation for their collusion with organized crime.³⁸ It will be especially important for electoral authorities to pay close attention to the parties' campaign financing and candidates' backgrounds, *as well as* protect voters, public authorities, and candidates from the kinds of threats that prevailed during the 2011 election.

Guerrero is the state with the most attacks against political figures in 2014. Ten party leaders and government officials have been targets of criminal violence this year. The case of Guerrero has further revealed the linkage between local authorities and police forces with organized crime. Such collusion resulted in the election of a “narco-candidate” in Iguala, Guerrero and the recent

³⁷ García, Adán. “Indagan por narco a mando de Rural.” *Reforma*. August 28, 2014; Reforma. “Ligan a ‘Papá Pitufo’ con grupo criminal.” *Reforma*. August 30, 2014.

³⁸ García, Adán. “Extorsiona Alcaldesa para los templarios.” *Reforma*. August 15, 2014; Reforma. “Sigue el show de ‘La Tuta’.” *Reforma*. August 19, 2014.

disappearance of 43 students.³⁹ Given the depressing effect of this kind of events on electoral participation, it is fundamental to identify the regions where citizens cannot vote freely and begin to develop short- and long-term solutions now. Political parties and local government officials must work closely and in coordination with electoral authorities regarding the security challenges they face during their electoral campaigns. Electoral authorities must also monitor political candidates and violent trends closely. One would hope that the centralization of the administration of elections in the recently created *Instituto Nacional Electoral* (INE) would facilitate such coordination and monitoring processes.

There are other states that are also important to follow closely. Nuevo León, together with Jalisco, the State of Mexico, and Morelos, have regions where criminal groups have made an explicit attempt to influence politics and elections in recent years. In the case of Nuevo León, due to threats by organized crime, the PRD was unable to run mayoral candidates in the municipalities of Anáhuac, China, Hualahuises, Lampazos, Ocampo, Parás, Vallecillo, and Villaldama during the 2012 election.⁴⁰ Such experiences should put electoral authorities and political parties on alert and force them to look for protection mechanisms, work closer with the electorate in those communities, increase security measures, and strengthen and safeguard local political institutions. Otherwise, electoral participation, along with local governance, will continue to suffer greatly.

As a result of the disappearance of the 43 students in Iguala, massive mobilizations have taken place across and outside of Mexico. Just in the month of October 2014, more than one hundred protests against violence were organized throughout Mexico. These mobilization efforts have significantly increased the pressure on the Mexican government to solve this case, as well as explain the many mass graves that have been found throughout this process. Protests also forced Governor Ángel Aguirre to resign. In the face of the upcoming elections and given the prevailing weaknesses of the instruments so far created for the attention of victims—the General Law of Victims and *Províctima*—it will be important for these new citizen mobilization efforts to monitor electoral processes closely and demand the commitment of political candidates and future elected authorities to effectively attend to victims and work for the fair resolution of their cases. Civil society is a fundamental element for the achievement of political accountability, particularly in a violent context such as the one many Mexican citizens currently live under.

Conclusion

Mexican democracy is currently being challenged by organized crime groups. This paper has attempted to offer an assessment of the effects that violence perpetrated by these organizations can have for democratic development. By examining both electoral and non-electoral forms of participation, this analysis demonstrates that violence has differentiated effects on citizen involvement in politics. It highlights the importance of distinguishing between types of participation and understanding the distinct impact of violent experiences on political behavior. While criminal violence and victimization depresses turnout, it also stimulates protest participation. Therefore, although violence may reduce the chances for electoral accountability, societal accountability

³⁹ Archibold, Randal C. “43 Missing Students, a Mass Grave and a Suspect: Mexico’s Police.” *New York Times*, October 6, 2014; Goldman, Francisco. “Crisis in Mexico: The Disappearance of Forty-Three.” *The New Yorker*, October 24, 2014.

⁴⁰ La Razón. “Por miedo al crimen, PRD-NL sin candidatos a alcaldías.” *La Razón*. February 29, 2012.

mechanisms remain viable and able to bring new issues onto the public agenda. Still, if violence demobilizes voters while at the same time pushing them to the streets *and* risking their lives while doing so, in the long run, support for democracy may even collapse in some regions. The key to making societal accountability work effectively, despite ongoing violence, is likely to be the development of a strong and vibrant civil society. The 2008 and 2011 mobilization efforts made important achievements, but much more remains to be done. The recent wave of massive peaceful mobilizations around the massacre in Iguala, Guerrero has the potential to make this happen.

As Mexico prepares for the 2015 midterm elections, government officials, political parties, and electoral authorities must pay great attention to the development of violence in the coming months, with a particular focus on Guerrero, Jalisco, the State of Mexico, Michoacán, Morelos, and Nuevo León. Criminal groups have previously attempted to influence politics and elections in these states, having profound consequences for democratic citizenship. It is essential for voters to be able to exercise their right to vote freely and it is the authorities' responsibility to generate the conditions for voters to do so. How can such goal be achieved?

- Voter safety on election day: The patrolling of elections by the army—beyond its traditional role of carrying the ballots to and from the polling station—has been a strategy frequently used in recent elections, particularly in northern Mexico, to help assure citizens about their safety when going out to vote. However, this *cannot* be a long-term solution. It only continues to expand the role of the army in a context in which human rights violations by members of this institution have risen substantially over the past years.
- Security measures for candidates and public authorities: During the 2012 presidential election, the Mexican Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB) and the national electoral authority signed agreements to provide protection for candidates at risk. This is definitely a necessary measure that must be effectively offered and accessible to *all* parties, *as well as* to *all* local public authorities that require security measures due to threats by organized crime, both during electoral and non-electoral periods. However, the effectiveness of this policy greatly depends on: (1) the willingness of candidates and public officials to report the alleged threats, and (2) the ability and readiness of upper level authorities and armed forces to adequately protect them. Furthermore, this policy assumes that reporting does not put candidates and public officials at greater risk of violence and retaliation. Also, it does not address the fact that some others may be already colluding with organized crime.
- Stronger political institutions: It is impunity and the weakness of Mexican political institutions that continue to drive voters away from polling stations. Electoral participation will only rise if Mexico is able to build stronger institutions that are capable to control violence and exercise justice, particularly at the local level. It is not enough to screen and monitor candidates' backgrounds and financing sources. It is also important that any indication of linkages between organized crime and candidates or public officials is investigated thoroughly *and* punished accordingly. The strengthening of political institutions is a long-term process, of course, but it is one Mexico urgently needs to invest in before violence continues to erode its incipient democracy.

This article focuses on nonviolent political responses to criminal violence. It does not address, however, another form of political participation greatly affected by violence: vigilantism. When and why do individuals support violent resistance as a viable method for improving their security? How does armed civilian response to crime and insecurity affect the dynamics of ongoing violence? How

does the inclusion of armed civilians into the state forces transform violence? The answers to these questions are crucial for Mexico today, as is made clear by a recent working paper on self-defense groups in Michoacán authored by Heinle, Molzahn, and Shirk⁴¹ as part of this same series. As self-defense groups continue to proliferate in Mexico and are even incorporated into the state police forces, it is vital to understand their causes and consequences. Just as not addressing the impact of criminal violence on elections could have great implications for democratic development, not attending to the origins and outcomes of violent responses to crime could further contribute to the spiral of violence in Mexico.

⁴¹ Heinle, Kimberly, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk. “Citizen Security in Michoacán: “Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence: Briefing Paper Series,” a continuation of the series by Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014.

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