

The Political and Economic Origins of Violence and Insecurity in Contemporary Latin America: Past Trajectories and Future Prospects ¹

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Not that long ago optimism flowered about prospects for democracy in Latin America. The spread of political and economic liberalization throughout the 1980s and 1990s produced a wave of hope, seen most visibly in countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. With their authoritarian past seemingly put behind and the advent a re-invigorated competitive electoral system, citizens and newly-elected officials faced their future with a sense of unlimited possibilities for positive change. But for many, dreams have steadily dimmed as problems of violence, crime, and insecurity emerge with a vengeance, having reached new heights by the mid and late-1990s, and continuing today (Bailey, 2003; Fruhling and Tulchin, 2003). As Susana Rotker so astutely chronicled in Citizens of Fear: Urban Violence in Latin America (2002), the everyday Latin American experience is now haunted by the specter of fear, violence, crime, and police impunity, all of which permeate practically every aspect of daily life.

Elected governments seem hamstrung in their capacities to control these problems, let alone reverse them, in large part because those charged with keeping order and guaranteeing the rule of law on behalf of the state, the police and/or the military, are themselves frequently implicated in abusive practices or criminality itself (Hinton, 2006; Leeds, 1996). The result is growing cynicism, social fragmentation, and a renewed sense

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of hopelessness about the future and the potential of competitive political systems to deal with the deteriorating situation. The results for democracy and citizenship are troubling.

Forget big ideas about democracy and how electoral rules of the game will lead to improvement in people's every day lives. Forget aspirations that the embrace of liberalization will finally bring the resources and institutions to address problems of economic inequality and political polarization. Instead, growing numbers of citizens in Latin America are turning their attention away from formal politics and party-led solutions, and looking for their own answers to the problems of insecurity in everyday life (Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler, 1998). The upside is that these efforts to help re-invigorate civil society can at times lead to mass mobilizations against crime and insecurity. But there also is a downside. Hopelessness has become so extreme that some citizens are turning to violence themselves – whether in the form of vigilantism, seen as a last-gasp measure for achieving some sense of citizen justice, or whether through the embrace of life of crime, so as to be on the giving rather than the receiving end of an unjust and unequal political economy – in order to recapture some control over their daily existence (Davis, 2006; Goldstein, 2003; Moser 2004).

To be sure, violence and impunity are no strangers to the countries of Latin America, where an authoritarian past produced political torture, “disappearances,” guerilla movements, and other forms of armed rebellion in prior epochs (Bodemer, Kurenbach, and Mesch, 2001; Huggins, 1998). Yet, contemporary problems of violence, daily conflict, and insecurity are much broader and perhaps more insidious and damaging to the quality of life than even the violent struggles over authoritarian rule of the past (Higgins, Haritsos-Fatouros and Zimbardo, 2002). This is partly so because the violence

in contemporary Latin appears to be a more “garden variety” type of insecurity that permeates the most routine of daily activities, and is best seen in rising homicides, accelerating crime rates (despite a decline in reportage by victims), unprecedented levels of police corruption and impunity and an inability to move freely around with fear of armed robbery, violent attack, or extortion (Davis and Alvarado, 1999). It is these conditions that push citizens (and criminals) to take matters into their own hands, either through vigilante acts (Goldstein, 2003) or, more commonly, through the standard route of hiring private security guards, thereby fueling the environment of fear, exclusion, and insecurity (Smulowitz, 2003).

One result is that in many parts of Latin America, mafias involved in all form of illegal activities (ranging from drugs and guns to knock-off designer products and CDs) are calling the shots (Bailey and Godson, 2001; Cross, 1998). Well-organized cadres involved in illicit activities often take on the functionally equivalent role of mini-states by monopolizing the means of violence and providing protection in exchange for loyalty and territorial dominion (Lupsha, 1996). More often than not, these illicit activities persist with the tacit support of the police and military, whose priorities are often protection of their own institutional sovereignty and/or involvement in these black market activities, rather than protection of citizens who suffer in this precarious environment where rule of law remains elusive. With a wide range of institutions and actors involved in crime and brutality, and with many of the key protagonists both armed and dangerous, most governments, democratic or not, have failed to keep violence and insecurity at bay.

So what accounts for this distressing state of affairs? My aim in this chapter is to answer this question with a focus on Latin America’s developmental history and its

current political and economic patterns. Three questions guide the narrative: 1) In what ways has the political, social, and economic history of Latin America laid the foundation for contemporary patterns of violence and insecurity, especially those involving the police and military? 2) Why has relatively successful political transition from authoritarian rule to democracy not produced a significant break from this coercive and violent past, and a strengthening of the rule of law? And finally, 3) what can be done about this state of affairs within a democratic and increasingly global context in which the international scale of the problem fails to match the local or national scale of the available solutions?

I answer these questions with evidence primarily drawn from the Mexican case, although I proceed under the assumption that that general developmental challenges facing Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century were quite similar to those faced by other large industrializers in Latin America. That is, despite the peculiarities of Mexican history, the story recounted here has been crafted in order to reflect larger dynamics that are relevant to many of the large countries in the Latin America continent.

The first half of this chapter examines the history of political and economic development and how it set problems of violence in motion. It focuses on three distinct but inter-related processes: contested state formation, the institutionalization of an authoritarian political apparatus and its coercive arms, and industrialization-led urbanization. It argues that the combination of these three developments led to state-sponsored violence, reflected first in growing levels of police and military impunity and the rise of “political policing” against enemies of the state, and later in a weakened rule of law. These outcomes generated an environment of violence and crime in which police

and military were routinely implicated, a state of affairs that helped institutionalized corruption within the police, the military, and the entire administration of justice system.

The second half of the chapter examines recent trends of political and economic liberalization and their impact on politics and society in the current democratic period. It argues that the recent transformations have reinforced -- rather than reversed -- past patterns of impunity and violence in such a way as to limit the capacities of formally democratic mechanisms and civil society to counter the situation of growing insecurity. It focuses on new actors empowered by global trading patterns, on the challenges facing newly democratic party systems, and on non-state developments within civil society, all of which have led to the growth of a large informal sector riddled with violence and illegality, a growing private security apparatus, and a delegitimized state. The argument is that the combination of these changes has been more likely to limit, rather than facilitate, the democratic state's efforts to stem violence and a deteriorating rule of law.

Overall, the paper not only advances the claim that continuing violence in newly democratic Latin America is traceable to the path-dependent consequences of past political decisions about economic development, state formation, and industrialization. It also suggests that the current intensification of longstanding problems of violence owes as much to the wholehearted *embrace* of liberalization, both political and economic, as to the weight of history, however paradoxical this may appear at the outset. Specifically, in the context of a slow but steady democratic transition in which there is not necessarily a clear break with the institutional structures and practices of the past, in which coercive elements implicated in authoritarian rule have remained in the picture, and in which new

global patterns of trade privilege the informal and illegal economy as much as the formal, violence and unrule of law have and will continue to persist.

Contested State Formation and the Historical Roots of Violence and Impunity

For large portions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, most Latin American countries suffered through continuous conflicts over sovereignty, seen initially in struggles for independence from Spain (or Portugal), in the form of civil wars and other similarly weighty regional conflicts, and, in a few cases, in revolution or other protracted battles leading to a major political rupture with a colonial or liberal past. Mexico is one of just a handful of Latin American countries falling into the revolutionary category. Even so, it shared a common profile with many of its southern cone counterparts: a history of center-region tensions over the mercantilist nature of the national economy and the efforts to centralize power; longstanding battles between agrarian and industrial elites about the nature of the state and the direction of the economy; pervasive social uprisings and rebellion on the part of the nation's most impoverished citizens, whose exclusion from the governing pact fueled their collective ire; and the emergence of professional military linked to the power elite (regionally, nationally, or both). All of these conflicts gave life to a single important fact about Mexico in particular, and Latin America more generally: the persistence of ongoing struggles over the nature, character, and direction of state power (Knight and Pansters, 2005; Leneno, 2002; Oszlak, 1981).

While the roots of contestation over the state may have initially traced to the colonial period, struggles persisted beyond formal independence and marked the political and economic landscape of Latin America even in the twentieth century, producing a

highly conflictive political environment in which an abusive state apparatus, untrammelled coercive power, and violence all flowered. In the case of Mexico, the 1910 Revolution and its aftermath was key historical juncture, setting these dynamics in motion. In an effort to advance and protect the revolutionary cause, the state wielded considerable coercive power against real and potential enemies (Knight, 1986). These practices, dating to the post-revolutionary era, ultimately helped institutionalize police corruption and the coercive power of an authoritarian state whose pervasive use of violence and disregard for the rule of law ultimately permeated civil society as well.

Complicating matters, during this early twentieth century period, most Latin American states -- whether newly formed in revolution, as with Mexico, or those merely struggling to hold onto power -- were also faced with the challenges of rapid economic expansion, or better said, with the goal of fostering industrialization. This meant that in addition to consolidating state power vis-à-vis political or ideological enemies, most Latin American states found it essential to manage if not control a nascent working class and/or an organized agrarian elites, both of which were relatively well mobilized to act against the wishes of industrial capitalists (See French, 1992). Having a strong military and police were essential to undermining such opposition and to achieving larger industrial development aims. In this sense, the economic development aims built on regime consolidation aims to reinforce the coercive power of the state.

Finally, and just as important for strengthening coercive aspects of the authoritarian state (while also and institutionalizing corruption and impunity), the dual challenges of consolidating state power and growing the economy frequently unfolded within the context of rapid urbanization, precisely because economies of scale and

consumer markets concentrated most industrial development in a few cities, key among them capital cities that also served as seats of political power (See Davis, 1997). In this environment, police were as significant as the military in fulfilling the state's political, economic, and even social aims, and thereby extending the coercive arm of the state into the everyday life of large portions of the nation's citizens. This was so not only because large cities served as home to much of the industrial working class and the owners of industrial establishments that the police sought to protect (Lear, 2001). Police also became central actors because the rapidly urbanizing locales of Latin America required additional forms of control and regulation – relating to the production and consumption of new goods and services, the provision and management of transportation and traffic, the inspection of markets, and the monitoring of the urban unemployed and indigent, to name but a few – that were necessary in order to grease the wheels of commerce, keep the local economy growing, and guarantee social order in an environment where rural migrants, informal sector workers, and other new social actors appeared on the scene in droves (Bliss, 2001; Picatto, 2001; Meade, 1997).

In this complicated environment of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and state formation, in which most Latin American government's longevity and successes depended on their capacities to hold onto state power, grow the economy, and manage the rapid population shift from countryside to city, the power of the police expanded by leaps and bounds, often to the point where tensions developed vis-à-vis the military. With police becoming more and more involved in everyday urban life, and the military struggling to keep its privileged position as the arm of the state used to root out enemies and defend the national interest, tensions emerged within these coercive arms of the state

as well as between them and the citizenry. Both the military and the police – as individuals and institutionally -- were given extraordinary leeway and operated with very little state-imposed discipline (Pereira, 2005; Ungar, 2002). This established the foundations for abuse of power on the part of the state's key coercive apparatuses, two legacies that persisted long beyond the successful achievement of the state's urban, political, and economic developmental goals. How this unfolded in early twentieth century Latin America is well evidenced with a more focused discussion of the Mexican experience in the decades following the 1910 Revolution.

The 1920 Mexican Revolution: Setting the Cycle of Impunity in Motion

From early on, it was clear that Mexico's police and military were drawn into ongoing tensions and political battles within and between revolutionaries, counter-revolutionaries, and later, opposition groups who sought to reform or widen the revolutionary state's project. It is probably understandable that both sets of forces were used to police counter-revolutionaries, tasks that were most intense in the period from 1910-1918, and focused in the capital, Mexico City. This was so not only because in an unstable post-revolutionary environment, the newly founded Mexican state was not yet well institutionalized, owing to internal tensions in the revolutionary family and because the military was not united behind the revolutionary leadership (which itself was divided). This situation also owed to the fact that the judiciary was dominated by political conservatives and others who remained sympathetic to the counter-revolutionary elite and had limited sympathy for the revolutionary project. Both sets of conditions drove the revolutionary leadership to create new police institutions and powers that could be used

to thwart the efforts of judges who used their power against revolutionary loyalists, as well as to keep the overwhelming power of the military at bay.¹

In addition to founding a new “judicial” police who answered directly to the federal executive despite retaining local functions, the new political leadership (in a reform introduced by Carranza and continued by Calles) also centralized control over preventative police, or “beat” cops, who prior to this reform worked mainly at the decentralized level of the municipalities (*municipios*), along with other actors more closely linked to citizens than the state, including justices of the peace (Picatto, 2001). To establish authority over the city police, the revolutionary leadership not only created a new institution and chain of command intended to integrate all local cops and justices of the peace into a single city-wide police force answering to the federal executive. Political leaders also kept centralized control by linking this new city-wide police directly to the military. This was best evidenced by the use of military personal in the upper ranks of the policing apparatus as well as by restructuring police training and responsibilities so as to inculcate and build upon military values and discipline.² These institutional transformations put a federally-controlled, militarily-linked policing apparatus into Mexico city streets, where it maintained a visible presence in everyday urban life and was able to politically threaten (and economically extort) the most humble of citizens. It also brought military personal and restructured to inculcate military values and discipline.

None of these changes occurred smoothly or without open conflict, however. The rank-and-file of preventative police did not like the military involvement in their activities, especially in the early years of post-revolutionary consolidation when they still held pro-Diaz sympathizers or non-revolutionary loyalists within their ranks. They also

frequently found themselves competing with the judicial police for the power to investigate and arrest suspected criminals – for both political and rent-seeking purposes. More important, as the internal ideological contours of the revolutionary state shifted, so too did the loyalties of the police and even the military. That is, even though in initial stages Mexico City police may have joined with the revolutionary leadership in the goal of rooting out counter-revolutionaries, the next phases of “political policing,” in which the focus shifted from policing counter-revolutionaries to policing other revolutionaries and partisan political opponents, brought much more conflict and tension within and between the Mexico City police, the military, and the state. Over time these tensions, themselves, served to further reinforce the violent and authoritarian character of the state, also leading to greater impunity and the turn to violence to solve social and political problems. In Mexico, much of this first came to a head in immediate post-revolutionary decade, as well as again in the 1930s under the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, when the democratic and class character of the state was under question.

As early as 1915, we see state efforts to use Mexico City police to control “political enemies” who were not considered counter-revolutionaries, in coercive actions against striking trolley workers and other transport unions. Part of the motivation for the new revolutionary government was its concern to keep the urban economy functioning so as to facilitate urban and industrial development in the critical years after the revolution, after foreign capital had fled and the need to jumpstart the economy was extremely critical to the larger revolutionary project. Like many elements in the labor movement with communist sympathies, both these unions had actually been quite loyal to the revolutionary project, and many had fought along side the revolutionaries in the struggle

against the Diaz dictatorship. But they were not necessarily supportive of the factions in power, who were toeing a more conservative line, and thus striking workers' disruption of the local economy was considered grounds for violent reprisal. State repression of striking workers not only planted the institutional seeds of Mexico City police complicity in rooting out ideological enemies, a tradition that would persist and become institutionalized over the years. It also gave police a key role in regulating transit – something that would later come back to haunt the institution as a whole, as police control of traffic became a main source of bribery and corruption in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

Another round of intensive political policing re-emerged in the period from 1925-1928, against Labor Party members and other pro-democracy partisans in the DF who opposed the authoritarian and centralizing tendencies of the revolutionary leadership of Calles. In this particular conflict, a strong connection developed between the Mexico City police chief and President Calles around the aim of monitoring political debate among Labor Party activists, dominating public information, and breaking up opposition rallies.³ A third round emerged in the early 1930s, just before Cárdenas's rise to power, when police again were used against laborers and communist-linked worker organizations as well as *campesinos* in the countryside. Clearly, the policing of political opponents was not intended merely to silence an active civil society. It also found elective affinity with the political leadership's efforts to repress revolutionary rivals within the military and the state itself. All these trace their origins to the contested process of state formation, and the struggle to establish control and ideological contours – notably, in the Mexican case,

the relative power and inclusion of labor and peasant as opposed to industrial and agrarian elites.

In combination, these tensions pitted revolutionary against revolutionary, police against military, and President against Mayor, depending on which coercive force was most loyally attached to which faction or level of government. In this environment, mistrust and violence became the *modus operandi* of political rule, and the institutions of police became the battleground for power.

From Contested State Formation to Institutionalized Police Corruption: 1920 - 1940

Given the history of contestation over the direction of the revolutionary state, it did not take long before police as an institution began to spiral out of control. This was eminently clear by the 1930s, at a time when the Mexican government hoped to turn its full attention to industrialization. More than two decades of political policing and complicity between revolutionary leaders and police in the use of extra-legal measures to achieve their ideological or state consolidation aims had created a very corrupt police force that was increasingly hard to control.

The roots of institutionalized corruption probably trace to the period between 1910-1918 when the military, under Carranza, began usurping Mexico City policing functions in order to consolidate the revolutionary leadership's power over citizen militias and local municipalities who sought to maintain a decentralized system of policing. During this period, police became directly involved in "garden variety" corruption linked to urban regulation and servicing. This entailed taking bribes from *vendedores ambulantes* and *pulque* sellers, or negotiating prices in return for a willingness to ignore labor law regulations, market permissions, transport violations, etc.

The pressure for “rent-seeking” among the police (i.e., corruption and bribery, aka “*la mordida*”) came from a variety of sources. The police were poorly paid, in no small part because in the depressed economic environment in post-revolutionary Mexico City. Getting a job was reward enough to keep salaries low. Yet even with low salaries, the police were required to pay for their own supplies and uniforms, an obligation that pushed them to find other sources for income. The lack of formal training in police work, and a limited commitment to the communities they were policing, also greased the wheels of bribery and impunity.

Some of the petty corruption unfolded within the rank-and-file police, many of whom are ex-soldiers of humble means who get their jobs by petitioning to revolutionary leaders for police employment as payback for fighting with revolutionary cadres.⁴ But corruption was not just happening within the rank-and-file. As early as 1918 we see high level military officers requesting posting in the Mexico City police, precisely because of the money assumed to be circulating through this office via corrupt practices. The involvement of higher police officials in corruption helped regularize the practice throughout the entire system, in part because higher officials (police chiefs, military generals, and higher) expected citizen payoffs to rank-and-file officers to be channeled upward. These practices helped establish a clear set of “prices” or rates for *mordidas* (2 pesos for vending *pulque* on Sunday, etc.), which in turn helped institutionalize citizen expectations that such bribes were the officially sanctioned price for doing business.

Over time, even after the still fragile state leadership had effectively battled its counter-revolutionary opponents, corrupt practices continued, but soon become interlaced with the ascendance of political factions in ways that further entrenched the

infrastructure of corruption, despite occasional efforts by the military leadership or governing officials to call for a clean-up of the police. This was reflected in the longevity of terms for police chiefs. Prior to 1921, almost all chiefs lasted less than a year in office (Davis, 2007). Starting in the mid-1920s, terms for police chiefs begin to extend, with some remaining at the helm for three to four years,⁵ although the average tenure of Mexico City police chiefs tended to be extremely erratic. It was not until close to 1950, in fact, that the terms served by police chiefs in the capital started to coincide with mayoral and/or presidential administrations. Paradoxically, however, the increasing longevity of individual police chiefs also allowed networks of corruption to deepen and flourish (although the causality is probably two-way), not the least because the longstanding complicity of the police made it a lucrative business whose gains were seen as supporting national revolutionary projects as much as personal pocketbooks.

Owing to these dynamics, by the 1920s and early 1930s corruption had reached such heights that high level police personnel were publicly known -- and affirmed in secret police internal reports -- to be involved in criminal activities, including one infamous high profile auto theft gang known as the *Banda de Automobile Gris* that counted on Mexico City's Police Chief as a principal interlocutor.⁶ Crooks like this did not last long in their posts, to be sure, and most were recycled out of leadership positions because of undeniable corruption, the wrong political allegiances, or both. But recycled police chiefs rarely disappeared entirely. Most just found other lucrative positions elsewhere in the administration -- either in another police agency, in the military, and/or in other higher levels of the state (a favored posting was in Customs, where rent-seeking potential was great and corruption also flowered). In fact, it is not that farfetched to

suggest that the high levels of corruption that the Mexican and other Latin American states became so well known for in later decades may have traced its origins to corrupt administrators who were recycled out of police or military posts, and into other arms of the state.

From Police Corruption to Retrenched Authoritarianism: 1940 - 1960

One of the great ironies of police corruption was that it accelerated in inverse relation to the revolutionary leadership's efforts to consolidate its political hold on the state, with this dynamic reinforcing the state's authoritarianism character despite government's efforts to deepen the democratic character of the political system during the 1940s and 1950s. In Mexico, the timing of this shift corresponded with the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, the country's great populist leader and friend of the working class, who also was saddled with the aim of growing the economy through industrialization. Motivated in part by the repressive actions of corrupt and abusive police against peasants and laborers who struggled for a more inclusive and democratic state, as well as by the fact that police corruption ate into tourism revenues in ways that challenged his economic development aims,⁷ Cárdenas came to office with a commitment to purify the notoriously corrupt police apparatus in the capital city. Doing so, however, required support from other allies who could offer assistance in controlling police corruption and impunity.

Perhaps the only force with the coercive capacity or political power to aid in this task was the military. And therein lay the conundrum. Indeed, Cárdenas's reliance on the military to deal with the problems of police corruption – even if done for progressive, populist purposes -- only further institutionalized the state's authoritarian character, and by so doing undermined the larger democratic aims that pushed Cárdenas to support

police reforms in the first place. It also reintroduced a military mentality into the policing apparatus, in much the same ways as occurred in the initial post-revolutionary period, when military involvement in policing had empowered the police power sufficiently to plant the seeds of police corruption in the first place. To his credit, Cárdenas did not turn to the military immediately, seeking instead other institutional reforms that might purify the police through changes from within its own ranks. But even his efforts to keep the coercive arms of the state “clean” and under his control could not achieve their stated aims.

The first of these reforms entailed an expansion of the city’s police force to include semi-private security forces that had been operating parallel to the preventative police. With a new infusion of non-state security forces in the public police ranks, Cárdenas had a greater chance of limiting the overall relative institutional influence of the highly corrupted officer corps. At minimum, he hoped to offer the city’s residents a renovated new police force many of whose members were relatively unconstrained by old networks of corruption, and who had a reputation of being responsive to the citizenry. Most important, by bringing private police into the city’s public policing services as an auxiliary force, he strengthened his own ideological position within the conflictive revolutionary family at large. These new police officers, now called *Policia Auxiliar*, were known to be extremely loyal to Cárdenas and his political ideals, and they were both organized and self-identified as part of his larger working class movement.

The second major change in policing services was a reorganization of police to reflect their class or employment and or state worker status, putting them in sync with all others employed by the state. The roots of this shift traced to a 1936 legislation that

divided state workers into two categories, *de base* and *de confianza*. This legislation, also crafted by Cárdenas, helped reinforce the working class consciousness of his new and politically loyal Auxiliary police, bringing them in sync with other working class forces who sought to limit the state's industrialization project. With this legislation, police could identify themselves as just another form of state worker. This was a very popular move, and many police wrote Cárdenas with the request for full inclusion into state work legislation so as to guarantee job stability and access to social security.⁸ However, both reforms met serious political limits, primarily because they gave the new rank-and-file police powerful tools to expose the corrupt hiring and firing practices used by the existent cadres of police officials.

The higher-level officers had grown accustomed to a hierarchy of unquestioned authority that allowed them to extort lower rank officers for kick-backs and payoffs collected during the course of duty. With the state worker legislation, lower-rank officers were now able to hold their superiors accountable, and they would not have to be drawn into the circle of corruption and impunity that was built around the arbitrary threat of dismissal by their bosses. Further adding to the dissatisfaction were the class consciousness "effects." By making organizational connections – around state worker identities – between the rank-and-file police and the working class, police leadership would not readily continue their "political policing" of class enemies or continue using coercive force against rebellious citizens, especially those involved in the labor movement, who had long been on the receiving end of police brutality. In short, Cárdenas's police reforms were highly controversial. They created tensions within the police, especially between the "new" auxiliary and the "old" preventative police, and

between some elements of the police and the military. And although Cárdenas himself held great prestige and considerable power within the military, as an organization it too was divided over these changes.⁹ As a result, Cárdenas soon backed down on his plans to extend state worker legislation to the police, despite its clear potential to move forward his agenda on both the class and police corruption fronts.

The police did not remain as is, however. To compensate for this failed reform and to repair the damage inflicted on police-military relations by the state worker debate, in 1939 Cárdenas introduced a third and final reform of the police: its “militarization.” Militarization meant organizationally subordinating the police to the military once again, as had been the case during the revolutionary struggles. In the words of then Police Chief Nuñez, militarization was a means for “incorporate[ing] the administration of the police force within the army, so that it will become subject to military law and discipline.”¹⁰ Militarization undermined the radical aims of the state worker legislation, because it endowed all police with the same juridical status as military personnel (who were neither allowed to strike nor hold superiors accountable for employment decisions). It also helped assuage the fears of the conservative factions of the military, who worried about the inclusion of left-leaning cadres of private security forces into the police. Finally, militarization made it easier to control conflict between preventative and auxiliary police, who were struggling over power, influence, and control corruption networks.

But it was the militarization of the police that most harmed the nation in the long term by establishing conditions in which *greater* corruption and more unconstrained political policing might flower and increasing the military’s control over politics and society. First, this reform, like the inclusion of semi-private firms into the police, added a

further layer of fragmentation to the personnel and institutions of policing, which already were divided between judicial and preventative police. The problem was not merely the proliferation of distinct coercive forces, but the co-existence of different police who answered to different local and federal levels of government. Having so many police with the authority to coerce citizens upped the ante and widened the extent of corrupt practices, as each separate cadre of police were expected to use their distinct institutional vantage points to capture a piece of the rent-seeking pie. As citizens suffered the brunt of this, they pressured the state for reforms.¹¹ This in turn spurred the formation of new police forces who might act more efficiently or conscientiously, including the formation of a secret police corp to deal with internal corruption¹², further driving the fragmentation of police into new local and national agencies.¹³

Fragmentation only made it difficult to coordinate police services, as the rank-and-file answered to their own sub-leadership, with each set of complementary forces then communicating horizontally with the Mexico City police department. This arrangement also fueled the wheels of extortion and corruption both within these organizations and between them and the Mexico City police chief.¹⁴ Further complicating matters, because of the history of adding new police services in response to shifting political dilemmas or requisites associated with revolutionary or state consolidation, police services had become organized around just about every functional basis *but* territory. This in turn reduced accountability between citizens and the police. And while much of this owed to the declining democratic potential of the political system at large, itself a consequence of the militarization of policing, it also owed fragmented structure of policing, and the fact that the increasingly complex network of distinctive and semi-

autonomous police services, offered very little scope for citizens to hold individual police or their leaders to task for their abuses. Without unity within the police force more generally, there was no single police authority to whom citizens could turn to make complaints about general servicing in the city. Likewise the leaders of police sub-operations were kept partially protected from the formal channels of complaints managed by the *Inspección General de Policía* because of their semi-autonomous status.

Still, perhaps the greatest obstacle to accountability was the militarization of the police. The decision to subordinate Mexico City police to the military meant that, institutionally speaking, the party was bypassed almost all together; and to a great degree, so too was the *Departamento del Distrito Federal*, or Mexico City Mayor, who could have served as a natural point person in terms of citizen accountability for complaints about police corruption or impunity. This was not such a major problem early on when the PRM counted on a special sector for representing the military, which also meant that there was some connection between the military, the party, and the state. But after the successful campaign to demilitarize the Mexican state in the early to mid-1940s, and the creation of the CNOP in 1943, the military was completely isolated from the party's deliberations, at least as a formal body with sectoral representation. With the military controlling the police, but absent in representative political institutions, over the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, there was limited scope for citizen demand-making to either the military or the police with respect to police accountability.

The dilemma was not merely that citizens had no clear democratic or institutional mechanisms for complaining about abusive or corrupted police or military. Equally problematic was the fact that militarization of police reinforced a centralizing tendency in

the state, linking a more unified military to the Mexico City police in ways that allowed for greater corruption and a more direct connection between local and national repression of the country's citizens. Combined with the fragmentation of policing and the overlaps of local and national coercive apparatuses, these legacies set the stage for the repressive political policing and abuses of power that materialized in the 1960s, leading to the 1968 student crisis, the emergence of an active and mobilized civil society in the 1970s and 1980s, and ultimately, struggles for democratization of the Mexican political system by the 1990s.

Democratization: A Break with the Past or More of the Same?

So did the successful democratization of the political system put an end to the problems of police corruption, impunity, and violence? Sadly, the answer was no. By 1994, just around the time Mexico City residents were granted rights to democratically elect a mayor, the country found itself awash in robberies, kidnappings, stolen car rings, extortion, and other forms of violent and non-violent crime, including rape and homicide, much of it concentrated in the capital city (Davis and Alvarado 1999). Between 1995 and 1998, alone, the overall crime rate in Mexico City nearly tripled (*Fundación Mexicana Para la Salud* 1997, 16), much of which was fueled by police participation in criminal gangs and military involvement in drug trafficking. The question is why?

The answer has a lot to do with how hard it has been to change institutions and practices on the ground, given the weight of political history noted above, despite the advent of formal democratization. For one, the long *durée* and institutionalization of police corruption in Mexico, leading to the police's own proclivities to harass the state's political enemies and operate above the law, have made citizens understandably

distrustful of police motives and legal institutions, giving additional incentive to citizens themselves to resolve violations of the law at the “street level” through coercive bribery rather than through juridical procedures guaranteed by the formal system of justice. These informal practices have not only kept a system of bribery and police corruption afloat, they have fueled an even more vicious cycle of police corruption-judicial weakness that served to legitimize an alternative or unofficial system of “everyday justice” while also undermining the courts and the rule of law (*Reforma*, May 19, 2003; Picatto 2004). Thus, even though a different party may now be in power, many citizens continue to rely on old practices.

Similarly, it is important to recognize that regime democratization — in Mexico and elsewhere — will not necessarily eliminate all prior institutions and practices, police related or otherwise. Even after democratic transition, many late developers still face their neo-liberal political and economic future with the same old coercive networks intact, especially in the rank-and-file in the police and military. After years of working without effective institutional constraints—as part of the bargain with the elite to police the nation’s political and economic “enemies” so as to guarantee state power and economic progress—the coercive arms of the late developmental state became well-ensconced in a networked world of impunity, corruption, and crime. This is the institutional legacy bequeathed to many countries of Latin America, not just Mexico, and democracy has done little to reverse it.

In the case of Mexico City, in particular, democratization of governance was part of the problem of accelerating violence and security, not the solution, for precisely these reasons. Indeed, without the PRI at the helm in the capital, and with the party weakened

by electoral defeat, neither police nor citizens counted on the same informal practices of patronage that in prior decades kept the whole system of social and political order functioning and under control, albeit imperfectly. Still, the rapidly deteriorating situation owed not just to the disruption of old institutional networks. It also resulted from the creation of alternative practices, including a call by the city's last PRI-appointed mayor to "militarize" the city's police force, using the army to purge the corps of its most corrupt elements (López Montiel 2003).¹⁵ Such measures only created new conflicts within and between the police and the military, which further fueled an environment of insecurity as these two sets of forces struggled over dominion and singular control of illegal networks that in the past they jointly shared. With military-police competition for control over the rights to "police" an expanding big money network of drug and gun-related criminal activities, violence and conflict accelerated -- within and between the police, the military, and drug-linked mafias -- as each of these overlapping forces sought to carve out the greatest possible influence. This situation, eerily if not ironically, replicated many of the problems of the post-revolutionary past.

This is not to say that democratically elected officials gave up. When democratic elections in Mexico City brought Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the PRD (son of Lázaro Cárdenas) into the mayor's office in 1997, citizens were drunk with democracy's potential, and expectations about cleaning up the police force and reducing corruption rose dramatically. Cárdenas, like his father, was committed to democracy and reform, so as to respond to the concerns of the country's most humble populations. One of his first objectives was to mount a capable and trustworthy police force, purged of old and corrupted elements and replaced with those loyal to the PRD rather than the PRI. Wisely,

Cárdenas' insisted that he would not bring in the military to reform the police – although some of his most loyal allies were in the military (owing to his father's legacy) his appointment of a retired military man as the first police chief. This generated considerable skepticism about the veracity of his claim, bursting the bubble of euphoria about real change in a newly democratic city. However, the subsequent appointments of civilians Alejandro Gertz Manero (as DF police chief) and Samuel del Villar (Attorney General for the DF) soon reinforced his commitment to a new strategy of reform. Shortly thereafter, Cárdenas introduced new structures for hiring and formulated alternative mechanisms for oversight of the police. These changes included the introduction of lie detector tests for new and returning police personnel, forced resignations among the judicial police (those empowered with bringing criminals to court), and a new system of tracking preventative police (i.e. beat cops, or those entrusted with guaranteeing social order) by neighborhood. Yet unfortunately, the reform's ineffectiveness was visible almost immediately, owing in no small part to the institutional legacies created by his father's reforms fifty years prior.

First, came opposition from leading police officials, one of whom went directly to the press to vigorously defend the “moral quality” of the city's police [despite their surprising public acknowledgement of the “occasional” problem of “judicial police...linkages with mafia dedicated to the robbery and reselling of automobiles and autoparts.”]¹⁶ Second, beat cops also protested against the new government's anti-corruption measures by “withdrawing” their services completely in such a way as to facilitate the commission of crime in the city. With foot-dragging from both the police leadership and rank-and-file, crime rates immediately went through the roof, a direct

product of police inaction -- and perhaps even concerted action, seen in the form of blatant involvement of police in criminal acts as a form of retribution.¹⁷

This situation of open rebellion owed not merely to the unparalleled power of police and police institutions reinforced through their strong connections to the military over close to half a century. It also was made possible by the fact that reform efforts did not touch the heart of the problem, which was government incapacity to legally indict criminal elements so as to get to the source of violent disorder and criminality. And this owed not just to the fact that most beat cops refused to cooperate with the state in investigating drug and other gang-related crime, as an act of protest in response to reform-fueled threats to their own livelihood. It also owed to the fact that the strong-armed efforts to purify the Judicial Police had alienated key elements in that next stage of the administration of justice, the courts. In short, there was even less cooperation between different crime fighting elements in the administration of justice system after democratization than before. This problem was acknowledged publicly by then Police Chief Gertz Manero, who lamented a lack of institutional or legal “coordination which [could] link [crime] prevention with investigation” or “articulate civil, business, and penal codes” (*La Jornada*, March 9, 1999).

But since intransigence and a corrupted legal system were only part of the problem, democratic transition also created a new environment in which political competition reached such heights that it was difficult to reach congressional compromise on legislation or policy to enable police or military reform. Mexico’s democratization produced a country governed by a National Congress divided almost equally between the three parties vying for national power (PRI, PAN, PRD), with one or the other in power

on the level of the city, the region, and the nation, set further limits on the types of reforms. The absence of successful reform, moreover, had its impact on civil society. With years passing and democratic governments failing to make headway on crime because of past legacies, civil society started to take matters in its own hands, although traditional recourses, like citizen protest, hardly mattered. In Mexico City, a 2004 mobilization of 200,000 citizens marching in the name of public security brought almost no response from then Mexico City Mayor López Obrador, for many of the political reasons noted earlier having to do with his key political bases. The Mayor's failure to accommodate a highly mobilized citizenry further disenfranchised them from the state, while also making them cynical about the possibilities of true reform "from above" and diminishing their enthusiasm for standard routes of political claim-making.

To some extent, this was a vicious circle: without citizens organized and struggling for change, elected officials did not go the extra mile on rooting out police corruption, continuing instead to let themselves be hamstrung by their own party rivalries and the sheer magnitude of the organizational reform at hand so as to merely muddle along. Yet, in the absence of concrete gains in police reform or rooting out corruption, citizens became further alienated from the government, driving them to alternative means – ranging from the privatization of policing to vigilantism – to address security problems. By 2002, the number of private security firms operating in Mexico City neared 1000, and these companies together employed approximately 22,500 private security guards.¹⁸

Citizens cannot be faulted for turning to the private sector to solve problems that the newly democratic government proved itself incapable of tackling. Yet the decision to bypass public police in favor of one's own private security forces has its darker side,

especially for democracy. Such actions not only let corrupted police off the hook, by taking citizen pressure away from the state; they also sometimes generate more violence and insecurity, even as they raise troubling questions about democracy, equality, and the rule of law more generally. When ever more individuals start bearing arms as a condition of their employment in private security services, and citizens themselves start to carry guns for self-protection from criminals and police alike, violent “resolutions” to questions of public insecurity become the norm, thereby fueling the vicious circle of violence and insecurity.¹⁹ The fact that private police frequently are comprised of ex-military or ex-police further helps account for some of the “transference” in impunity and frequent human rights abuses to within the ranks of private police,²⁰ with the recourse to lynchings and the emergence of vigilante attitudes the logical extension of this mentality to privatize security and rule of law.

Of course, to their credit, not all citizens resort to such questionable tactics. Many grassroots groups take the problems of police corruption and public insecurity to heart, seeking alternative solutions and new community practices at the neighborhood level. In this sense, citizens are both building on and reinforcing the democratic practices and advances that resulted from many years of struggle against authoritarianism. The Mexico City government has supported citizen security meetings at the level of the delegation, with the goal of bringing residents and police together in democratic dialogue about how to best guarantee public security. The results have been limited, however. Citizens do not speak frankly about police corruption and impunity in their neighborhood when those very same police are sitting across the table, armed with their note pads and badges (identifying citizens by face, street, etc.). As such, a certain degree of police reform must

already been in place before grassroots citizen participation can make a serious difference.

In short, the power to change endemic police corruption and a downward spiraling situation of insecurity -- in Mexico and elsewhere -- rests partly in civil society's institutional capacity to transform the system of policing and the overall administration of justice, and this requires, among other things, legislative and policy actions in which the state and political parties also are key players in the battle. But again, the paradox of democracy looms large: such goals are difficult to realize in a virulently competitive democratic context when the vying political parties are unwilling to cooperate among with each other and in which citizens routinely bypass formal political routes for evoking change. In the meantime, as police remain relatively unaccountable to just about everyone, except perhaps their direct superiors and in many cases, not even them, the sense of alienation, fear, and generalized feelings of defenselessness become a *modus operandi* for daily life in cities like Mexico City.

Will a Vibrant Democracy Matter in a Globalized World?

The final question that remains is whether a sufficiently strengthened democracy and re-legitimized political system involving cooperation between civil society and the state could really make a difference in alleviating violence and insecurity, if for some reason it were actually to materialize? As in earlier historical periods, evidence from Mexico suggests that economic dynamics also pose obstacles, especially those that work at the level of the city and that build on the trends toward globalization.

Two factors linked to prior economic development models are key: the extent of informality in the national economy, and the extent of income and social polarization. And like the problems of corruption, impunity, and unruly law, both trace their roots to past patterns and historical trajectories of political and economic development.

In prior decades, late developers tread a very rocky economic road in which formal employment in industry paled in comparison to informal employment in small-scale commerce and other petty services, with government employment generally taking up the slack. These sectoral imbalances have long plagued Mexico, with the capital city an employment magnet for service workers in government and commerce. With the neo-liberal turn bringing a downsized state, and with expectations of greater global competitiveness driving many countries to reduce traditional sources of manufacturing and agriculture, these sectoral imbalances – and the burgeoning growth of services and informality -- have become more extreme. Growing income polarization and a failure to recover from more than a decade of recession have also meant that real wages remained stagnant and under and unemployment have been on the rise; and these problems have been particularly severe in Mexico City, a locale hit especially hard by the collapse of the ISI model.

The city's industrial sector has been mortally wounded by the opening of the economy and the re-location of Mexico City factories to the border areas closer to new markets favored by the export-led model that the government prioritizes. As a result, many previously employed in the city's industrial sector have looked elsewhere for income. Youth unemployment has been an especially big concern, owing to Mexico's age

structure, a demographic problem that has fueled the rise of youth gang activities and further contributed to criminality and public insecurity.

Similarly, the economic crisis and global pressures to liberalize the economy by cutting public expenditures and advocating for greater privatization of public services have contributed to the problem. In an economically-squeezed environment state downsizing has made it difficult for democratically elected authorities to raise public sector salaries, tempting police to further engage in crime. It is not uncommon to find police who act as front men for criminal gangs, or who routinely extort criminals for kickbacks whether they do or don't arrest them.²¹ Pressures for collusion with criminals accelerated in the 1990s, especially when the Drug Enforcement Agency of the United States achieved considerable success in cutting off direct supplies between Colombia and the U.S., thereby inadvertently shifting much of the drug trade moved its operations into Mexico (Andreas 1998). Slowly but surely, drug money began to infiltrate a variety of agencies of the state and society, including the military and police (Piñeyro 2004; Pimentel 2000; González Ruiz, López Portillo V., and Yáñez 1994; Kaplan 1991).²²

However, the lure of employment in the illegal trade of drugs (and guns) is just as likely to entrap citizens as the police, owing to the sectoral changes associated with neo-liberal economic restructuring. With fewer available job prospects in manufacturing and many new employment opportunities beyond the educational reach of those laid off from factories in the drive to develop a more globally competitive IT service sector, ever more citizens in Mexico are being thrown into the informal sector than before. In the historical central district of Mexico City, alone, the number of street vendors is estimated to be 50,000, a number that has more than quadrupled since the pre-NAFTA date of 1991.

(Baroni, 2007, p. 207) Such employment, which barely meets subsistence needs for many stuck within it, is becoming ever more “illegal” as protectionist barriers drop, as fewer domestic goods for sale are produced, and as the globalization of illicit goods trade picks up the slack. As a result, much informal employment is physically and sectorally situated within an illicit world of violence and impunity, not just because of the sheer illegality of many of the goods traded, but also because big-money trade in guns, drugs, and other internationally-sold contraband products generally necessitates its own “armed forces” for protection. The result is often the development of clandestine connections between local police, internationally-linked mafias, and the informal sector, as well as the isolation of certain territorial areas as locations for these activities. (Davis, 2006a)

This illicit network of reciprocities, much of it unfolding on a global scale, and the territorial concentration of dangerous illegal activities in highly circumscribed neighborhoods of Mexico City that function as “no man’s lands” outside state control, further drives the problems of impunity, insecurity and violence. These dangerous areas often sit nestled against old CBDs (central business districts) where local chambers of commerce face a declining manufacturing base and are especially desperate to attract high-end corporate investors and financial services. This leads to a clash of forces and development models – and growing problems of insecurity – that can thwart the developmental aims of wannabe global cities as well as a national investor class desperate for a new way of generating global capital and visibility. In Mexico, these clashes have even spilled over into the electoral arena, as pro-liberalizers on the national scale want to turn the capital city into a global mecca for foreign investors, while local authorities try to balance their concerns with those of middle classes fearful of the

declining security conditions and the urban poor (informally employed and otherwise) who are caught in between.

The Paradox of Democratization: Or, Full Circle from Cárdenas to Cárdenas

Many of the tensions over insecurity and the future of Mexico City first hit the public agenda in the mid-1990s, just when the city and nation were fully embracing political and economic liberalization. In Mexico City, most observers cite 1994 as the year that criminality and public insecurity burst out of control. This was the year NAFTA changed several key aspects of the macro-economy, directly hurting the more protected industries located in the capital. The 1990s also was the decade that hosted the democratization of Mexico City governance, with a series of constitutional changes introduced to empower a local consultative body with legislative power (through the *Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal*, or ALDF), followed by a move to allow direct election of the mayor for the first time since 1928.

So far, little progress has been made in the political arena at least, in balancing these conflicting forces. Many streets remain dangerous and daily excursions from home to work can be volatile, with murders and assassinations relatively unchecked, and with even Mexico City police remaining fearful at times of entering certain neighborhoods. A steady inflow of street vendors and other under-employed service workers fills most of the city's streets beyond capacity, reproducing the old-style informality and a mix of rich and poor more associated with past epochs and "traditional" third world cities than a modern, globalizing metropolis. In other words, old problems of insecurity sit side by side the new urban mega-projects and other new urban infrastructural developments fomented by global capitalists, intent on transforming the city into yet another world-

recognized global city. We could identify these two distinct global networks as “liberal” and “illiberal” rather than legal and illegal, because the former are defined as a “legitimate” in the eyes of economic liberalization proponents, primarily because they are constituted by legally accountable network of corporate and property investors who operate in a global world of regulations, property rights, and formal contract law. The latter are defined as illiberal because they are considered “illegitimate” partakers of the global economy, given that they are constituted by networks of illicit (and often small scale) investors whose global supply chain revolves around black market, undercover, clandestine, or violence-prone activities where the rule of law remains elusive (i.e. those involved in the marketing and global distribution of drugs, guns, and other forms of contraband).

Neither set of forces are peculiar to Mexico (See Wallace and Latcheva, 2006). Both are present in cities and nations all over the developing world, which continues to be caught in the orbit of global trade and capital flows, licit and illicit. But they are now the key protagonists in Mexico City. It is further worth noting that these conflicts and struggles are usually as much about control over space as they are about the direction, or globalization, of the economy. To the extent that these struggles over space are linked to economic livelihoods and the potential for huge profits, the stakes are quite high. Yet precisely because the conflict involves “illiberal” forces who shun the rule of law, it can be quite violent and dangerous, with such battles are not easily remedied by urban politics, democratic or otherwise. For all these reasons, Mexico and its capital city continue to be plagued by violence, and its citizens face a downward spiral in the security situation that leads them towards near anarchy.

Conclusion

In light of these developments, it is hard to be optimistic about a way forward toward peace and security in the region, despite the clear democratic gains in Mexico and elsewhere.²³ What is clear is that given the political and economic history bequeathed by late industrialization, many Latin American cities and countries are in for a rough time. Democratic institutions and global market practices that seem to bring civic engagement and rising standards of living in the advanced capitalist world have not been powerful or resilient enough to catapult Mexico and its Latin American neighbors out of the treacherous stranglehold associated with its developmental past. To do so would require a complete break with the global economic connections and local social or spatial practices that sustain violence. It also will entail a rethinking of prior assumptions about the scale of political and economic decision-making, as well as the importance of linking previously antagonistic actors together in search of common solutions -- whether they be civil society actors linked to the state, or informal sector advocates linked to high-end investors in services or real estate development.

To achieve any or all of these ends will take a new type of politics, one that may even jettison old democratic structures, practices, and discourses. At minimum, we must stop thinking that the mere existence of democracy will do much to reverse the violence spreading across the continent. Only then can citizens and politicians begin mobilizing to do something different.

ENDNOTES

¹ This was best exemplified in the 1917 constitutional reform, crafted by Venustiano Carranza, that created two distinct police forces who existed side by side: the Judicial Police (*policia judicial*) and the Preventative Police (*policia preventiva*). The purpose of this reform was to take the power of arrest out of the hands of the beat cops, many of whom traced their positions and loyalties to the Porfiriato (remember that Felix Díaz was the Mexico City police chief in the years leading up to the Revolution), and to give

those police who were closer to the executive branch – that is, judicial police -- more powers of investigation and arrest vis-a- vis preventative police.

² In fact, a little discussed but well documented fact is that almost all Mexico City police after 1915, with the exception of a handful in a span of close to 60 years, were high level military generals rotating back and forth between the police and the military, and some taking side trips to congress or other major posts in the executive branch.

³ Almada sought and received funds from Calles to buy a key Mexico City daily for the purposes of generating pro-Calles political propaganda and keeping other political discourses out of the public sphere.

⁴ Many of these new rank-and-file police are from the regions, not Mexico City, and many from the north, because they fought with Carranza, Calles, or Obregon. Thus they had little allegiance to the citizens or population they were policing, which translated into fewer social constraints on extorting revenues from local citizens. The fact that large numbers of redeployed military veterans and other revolutionary loyalists joined the police just at the time when the post-revolutionary government began imposing a wide variety of urban regulations on use of paper money, price gouging, etc.-- in order to reverse some of the urban economic anarchy that accompanied the revolution – further placed the police in a prime position for soliciting *mordidas*.

⁵ Before the 1940s the average tenure of police chiefs tended to be extremely erratic, shifting between relatively long reigns in office (of 3-4 years) to extraordinarily short stints (some lasting a few weeks; see Table 1). It was not until close to 1950, in fact, that the terms served by police chiefs started to get in sync with mayoral and/or presidential administrations. This itself, tells us something important about the volatility and institutional instability of police servicing, which was both cause and effect of infighting and political instability within the revolutionary state and its leadership, and correlated with changing political conditions more generally.

⁶ Among the police chiefs involved in this gang was Valente Quintana, a former “private detective” who was appointed police chief in 1929 and who, perhaps because of his involvement with criminal gangs, was the first and last civilian police chief for decades. In addition to serving as a conduit to large sources of money that could potentially be redistributed among revolutionary leaders, he was known to have been involved in dirty tricks against revolutionary competitors.

⁷ Observers reported that the “inefficiency of the police in the capital [meant that] automobiles of tourists in front of the Embassy (as well cars belong to members of the staff) have repeatedly been broken into,” while reports of stolen items from foreign tourists were reaching new heights. See AGN, Ramo Gobernación, 812.105/16, letter from Pierre de L. Boal, Charge d’Affaires ad interim, to the Honorable Secretary of State, Washington, October 17, 1939. For more on development of tourism as an industry, why Cardenas supported it, and how he balanced the need to “sell” Mexican culture with his administration’s nationalist ethos is well discussed in Dina Berger’s The Development of the Mexican Tourist Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night.

⁸ AGN, Ramo Presidentes (Cárdenas); 544.211 (Empleados Públicos).

⁹ For more discussion of the class and military over Cárdena’s efforts to restructure state worker legislation, see my Discipline and Development, Chapter Five.

¹⁰ AGN, Ramo Gobernación, 812.105/16, letter from Pierre de L. Boal, Charge d’Affaires ad interim, to the Honorable Secretary of State, Washington, October 17, 1939.

¹¹ Citizens were quite aware of the problem of growing corruption, as were party leaders, and the president himself. As early as 1959 citizens began organizing themselves as advocates for police reform, writing letters to the authorities with extensive documentation of police corruption and abuses of power. One of the most high profile organizations of this sort was the “Coalición Defensora de los Derechos Ciudadanos,” located in the Colonia Moctezuma in the Distrito Federal, which started a massive campaign lasting from 1959 until 1962 to inform the president and the local citizenry about the corruption, extortion, and “sickness” among the police of all ranks. Yet their efforts hardly made a dent in the situation. After 1959, practically every police chief who came to office identified himself as beginning a new (and “final”) campaign for the “moralization” of the police. But over the years, the conditions worsened, with corruption growing out of control, and many of the same police chiefs who initiated moralization campaigns later were identified as among the worst culprits. “Poco ha logrado ya que los policías por su incultura y malos antecedentes siguen creyendo que para ellos no hay autoridad capaz de garantizar a la ciudadanía la tranquilidad procedente de policía consciente y honorable,” they lamented. Reams of letters from the Coalición Defensora to President López Mateos, with photos and documentation of police corruption and

abuse at all levels show the magnitude of the problems of corruption between 1959 and 1962. See AGN, Galería de Presidentes (Adolfo López Mateos) vol. 652 exp. 542.1/104.

¹² That is, the secret police (*Policía Secreta*) were initially formed in the 1920s to “police the police.” The same logic manifested itself again in the 1930s, with the newly created *Dirección de Investigación y Seguridad Política* in the Distrito Federal, a new organizational force for investigating of corrupted police as much as political enemies. And finally, these same aims lay behind the creation of a new force of federal police in 1946, called the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS), who worked directly for the president (and thereby bypassing the corrupted Mexico City police department) and took over the job of investigating corrupted city police. With city and agency police so involved in corruption, the DFS soon became the principal arm of political policing for the entire party-state, a function well represented by the role the DFS played years later in investigating and attacking student leaders and political dissidents during the 1968 uprisings. As such the formation of secret police, and their fragmentation and expansion over time, strengthened the authoritarian ethos within the Mexican state apparatus.

¹³ In the late 1960s, one newspaper listed the following combination of local and federal police forces as active in the capital: “En la actualidad, además de la policía preventiva y represiva –uniformada y judicial, respetivamente- existen los siguientes cuerpos de ‘seguridad’ en el país: Dirección Federal de Seguridad, Judicial Federal, de Narcóticos, Servicio Secreto, de Recursos Hidráulicos, Judicial Militar, de Aeronautica Civil, Federal de Caminos, Forestal, Fiscal Federal de Investigaciones Políticas, de Migración, de Guerra, de Petróleos Mexicanos, de Ferrocarriles, de Correos, del Banco de Mexico, de la Bancaria Industrial, Policía Auxiliar, Policía Industrial, Policía Bancaria, etcetera, sin contra con los bufetes privados de policía.” See Carlos Ravelo, *Excelsior*, 31 October 1968.

¹⁴ By the early 1960s, the system of kickbacks was in full swing. Internal documents registered in the Secretary of National Defense indicate that going monthly payments (bribes) from the PBI leadership to Mexico City’s police chief were thought to be 75,000 pesos monthly, with the Auxiliary Police head receiving 125,000 pesos monthly in direct bribes, and the DF Police Chief taking 75,000 pesos from them as well. These monies came in addition to the 400,000 pesos extracted from the police lieutenants of each company under the Police Chief’s jurisdiction, and a reported payment of close to 500,000 pesos monthly from the head of the Army’s 2nd, 9th, and 27th Divisions. See the SEDENA Archives, personnel file on Gral. Luis Cueto Ramírez, expediente XI/III/1-543. Cited from November 15, 1968 letter to President Díaz Ordaz from Lázaro Cárdenas.

¹⁵ This response came partly in reaction to social movements clamoring for the revitalization of democratic structures and practices in the city, which to see the fruits of their labor realized in legislation passed to fully democratize Mexico City governance starting in 1997. . With crime rates skyrocketing after 1994, and with popular elections for a democratically elected mayor to be held in a scant two years, it seemed evident to Mayor Villareal and the PRI leadership that the party that had the most to offer in crime-fighting or guaranteeing public security might have the best shot at winning the city once democratic rights were established (González Ruiz 1998, 90)

¹⁶ See *La Jornada*, August 25, 1999.

¹⁷ The level of calculated impunity in the first several weeks after the reform was introduced was so extreme that Police Chief Gertz Manero was compelled to publicly acknowledge that Mexico City’s “40,000 member force [wa]s out of control” (Gregory 1999, 4).

¹⁸ Data on private police drawn from interviews and documentation provided by the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública (Police Chief) in Mexico City during summer 2002.

¹⁹ In 2002, when statistics were first compiled, Mexico City governing officials saw more than a four-fold rise (from 5 to 22) in monthly complaints against private police between May and November of that year.

²⁰ Statistics from the Registration Office suggested that one-third of the personnel (30%) in private security forces came from the military and police ranks. In personal interviews with several representatives from private security firms, the numbers were closer to 50%. Interview with Adriana Robles Zapata, SOMESCA.

²¹ One reason police become directly involved in criminal operations is these activities will net much greater remuneration than does the measly recompense for police officers. This helps explain why foreign consultants uniformly suggest that raising police salaries is an essential first step in professionalizing police and gaining control of impunity. But such policies have not been seriously pursued, partly owing to the fact that macro-economic policy constraints associated with the economic liberalization of the country have limited public sector investment capacities.

²² While international drug trafficking and the sale of illegal drugs in Mexico has existed for decades, and some say since the 1940s (Sadler 2000), it has stayed a relatively low-profile sector of the national economy until recently (Astorga 2000; Benítez 2000).

²³ Although there are grounds for pessimism, this is not to say that scholars and practitioners have given up hope, or that there are no new ideas out there that might lead to more optimism about the future. For further discussion of possible policy options and new political strategies that seek to reverse conditions of urban violence, see Davis (2008) and Davis (in press).

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