Responding to criminal violence in Mexico: The role of civil society amid subnational democratisation

Yael Anahí López Torres

PhD

University of York

Politics and International Relations

January 2024

Abstract

Mexico is grappling with a crisis of insecurity after over 30 years since its transition to democracy. Its top-down and frequently militarised policies have been ineffective, leading to calls by scholars to alter the state's security paradigm that has not been able to fulfil the basic right of citizens to live in a secure country. As a response to these calls, this thesis goes beyond the common state-centric perspectives on security policies and instead it focuses on the often-overlooked subnational responses to criminal violence. In particular, I perform an analysis of bottom-up responses, considering the local dynamics of institutions and civil society. My research questions are: What is the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence? And as an extension, what are the factors that enable or constrain their responses?

To achieve these objectives, I conducted micro-level analyses and comparisons of two different case studies: Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and Monterrey, Nuevo León. These analyses explore variations in bottom-up responses, drawing on fieldwork in the form of 57 interviews with key state and societal actors and complementary documentary resources. The analysis emphasises Mexico's subnational democratisation processes, considering its effects on the (un)rule of law and violence.

My findings reveal that uneven democratisation hinders state capacity to address the security crisis, requiring organised society to intervene. In both cases, this contributed to countering and shaping the patterns of criminal violence. Local organised society pursued broader democratic goals by promoting the means for the rule of law, while high-risk collective mobilisation was fundamental in increasing political participation. The pre-existing institutions, the local actors and the alliances that enabled these changes varied between cases, and followed waves of political urgency and electoral periods that both provided opportunities for change, but also disrupted ongoing projects. This contributes to the scholarship of criminal politics by bridging the literature of democratisation and state capacity.

Table of Contents

Abstract 2
Acknowledgements 6
Declaration 8
List of Tables 8
List of Figures 10
Glossary of abbreviations 11
Chapter 1: Introduction 12
1. 1 Background 13
1. 1.1 Democratisation, decentralisation and state capabilities in Latin America 13
1.1.2 Criminal violence and responses of the Mexican security policy 14
1.1.3 What are bottom-up approaches? 17
1.2 Research objectives and questions 18
1.3 Approach 19
1.4 Contribution and originality 21
1.5 Outline of chapters 23
Chapter 2: The advent of subnational democratisation: Rethinking the local level and citizen participation amid criminal violence 26
2. 0 Introduction 26
2.1 The fallacy of democratisation and decentralisation 28
2.2 Uneven Democracy 31
2.3 The importance of state capacity and institutions 35
2.3.1 Organised crime and State (in)capacity 35
2.3.2 Limitations in institution capacity 37
2.4 The roles of bottom-up approaches in managing criminal violence 39
2.5 Conclusion 42
Chapter 3: Methodology 44
3.0 Introduction 45
3.1 Research Design 46
3.2 Evidence materials and analysis 52
3.2.1 Interviews 52
3.2.2. Fieldwork 55
3.2.3 Transcription and thematic analysis 57
3.2.4 Documentary materials 58
3.3 Limitations 59
3.4 Positionality 60
3.5 Conclusion 60
Chapter 4: Revisiting democratisation and the security policy in Mexico, from 1980 to 2022 62
4.0 Introduction 62
4.1.1 An Overview of Mexico 66
4.1.2 Key social indicators 67
4.1.3 Organised criminal violence in Mexico 68
4.2 Efforts towards Decentralisation 72
4.2.1 Initial moves towards decentralisation under the hegemonic Single-Party Rule 72

4.2.2 Continued Attempts at Decentralisation under the PAN, the First Opposition Party......................76
4.3 The Basis for a Militarised Response.. 79
4.4 A Top-Down approach of the Security policy, 2006-2022...83
4.4.1 The administration of Felipe Calderón: War against organised crime... 83
4.4.2 The administration of Enrique Peña Nieto and the continuation of violence..................................87
4.4.3 Administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The endurance of militarisation..................... 91
4.5 How and why the security policy in Mexico neglects institutions and civil mobilisation at the local level. 93
4.5.1 Limited awareness of the local societal dynamics and context..93
4.5.2 Limited capacity to navigate in an uneven democracy... 94
4.6 Conclusion..95
Chapter 5. Towards demanding the stop of violence: The case of Ciudad Juárez....................................... 98
5.0 Introduction...98
5.1 Subnational democratisation, 1992-2000s..103
5.1.1 Border zone: political alternation and the unintended consequences...104
5.1.2 Feminicides and drug violence: Exploring citizen response and collective mobilisation.............106
5.2 Activation of civil mobilisation amid criminal violence, 2004-2011...109
5.2.1 The origins of the turf war...109
5.2.2 Initial responses from society.. 112
5.2.3 Lack of coordination within the incumbent party...115
5.2.4 Established and Experienced Societal Actors..117
5.2.5 The activation of citizen mobilisation amid violence...120
5.2.6 Villas de Salvarcar massacre and public outrage against the official narrative............................124
5.2.7 Todos Somos Juárez Strategy..126
5.3 A new government: Discontinuation of alliances and collective reflection 2012-2016.........................132
5.4 Continuation of civil resistance: A novel view of political participation, 2016-2021............................135
5.4.1 Navigating a new governance of crime: Everyday resistance and communitarian efforts........... 136
5.5 Conclusion.. 139
Chapter 6: Confronting Hard Truths: Acknowledging Inadequacy and Taking Collective Action Against Criminal Violence in Monterrey, Nuevo León.. 144
6.0 Introduction...144
6.1 Overview of Monterrey.. 148
6.1.1 The inaugural political shift in Nuevo León: An initial look of the unintended consequences for bottom-up approaches (1997-2011)...149
6.1.2 Cultural and Social Context..152
6.1.3 Analysis and related work... 154
6.2 Uneven democratisation and the onset of inter-cartel violence (1990s-2005)....................................... 156
6.2.1 The impact of local (uneven) democratisation: Governance and civil society dynamics in the new PAN-ista administration...156
6.2.2 The outset of violence in the northeast: The inter-cartel war in Nuevo León.............................. 157
6.3 The security crisis in Monterrey: criminal wars and high-risk collective action (2006-2012)............... 161
6.3.1 Unravelling the criminal war in Monterrey...162
6.3.2 From shock to unprecedented collective mobilisation in high-risk contexts: 2011-2012............ 165
6.4 Navigating the decrease of violence: The continuation of collective action and the first independent governorship (2012-2016).. 176
6.4.1 Actions influenced by the private sector between 2012-2013...177
6.4.2 Feminicides and Sexual Violence...179

6.4.3 Fuerza Civil operation....180
6.5 A new government: The change of state and citizen relations....183
6.5.1 Trends and patterns of violence....184
6.5.2 Collective mobilisation for cases of disappeared persons....186
6.6 Conclusions....190
Chapter 7: The role of local civil society to curb criminal violence in Mexico....194
7.0 Introduction....194
7.1 Actors....196
7.2 Actor Pathways....199
7.2.1 Juárez Pathways....200
7.2.2 Monterrey Pathways....205
7.2.3 Pathway Commonalities and Differences....211
7.3 Factors that shape change....213
7.4 Conclusion....219
Chapter 8: Conclusions....222
8.1 Pathways for Change - What is the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence in Mexico?....225
8.2 Factors for Change - What are the factors that enable or constrain their responses?....228
8.3 Contributions and Implications for Future Research....231
Appendices....234
A. Interview materials....234
B. Participant Information Sheet....237
C. Consent form....240
D. Example of communication template....241
E. List of Websites and Sources consulted....241
F. Federal System of Mexico....242
G. Varieties of Democracy....244
H. Juárez Murals....245
I. Translation of "Ayuno y Reflexión Ciudadana" document....247
J. Monterrey Murals....248
References....249

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a product of a long journey of ups and downs, learning and personal growth. I cannot start without acknowledging the mountain of support provided by my supervisors Prof. Martin Smith and Prof. Louise Haagh. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to their dedication and patience during the most challenging steps of this process. There were countless times when I felt like I was tilting at windmills and would not reach this moment. However, their genuine interest in my work and well-being gave me hope to progress to the end. I learned an immense amount during our meetings, and I cannot be more thankful for their invaluable guidance.

A significant part of this thesis was also aided by Joao Nunes and Indrajit Roy who tested my ideas with provocative questions and valuable feedback. I also extend my thanks to my colleagues and friends whose comments and conversations helped to shape my insights at various stages of this thesis, particularly: Rodrigo Campos, Adel Al-Hawatmeh, Soraya Hamdaoui, Anna Bailie, Lauren Avery and Belén Villegas. I am particularly grateful to Walid Tijerina and Carlos Solar for their advice in the initial stages of this work. My gratitude also extends to my mentor Khemvirg Puente, and to the friends that helped me during my fieldwork and the collection of data for this study.

In academic life and collective learning I owe profound gratitude to Roxana Gutiérrez-Romero and my fellow colleagues and researches of PEACELA reading group, whose ideas and debates enriched my own. I am also very grateful to Sandra Ley, for her invaluable advice. The collaborative endeavours with my colleagues at Ventana Conference have been meaningful to me in contributing our grain of sand towards decolonising academia.

This thesis stands as a proof, not only to academic accomplishment, but also to the strength derived from enduring friendship. A wholehearted thank you to Luis, Anette, Lily, Jimena, Rocio, Eduardo, Victor, Cinthya, Michelle, Gustavo and Julio. They are my community in York that nurtured my mental health and made me laugh during the most difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Special thanks to my inspirational friend Clau Nader, who dedicated lovely hours of coffee breaks and working periods, providing mutual accountability of our progress. Also, thanks to Marianna dal Porto

for her friendship and delicious cake! My heartfelt thanks to my friend Erik Cardona for his support throughout this academic journey and for those thought-provoking chats during night-time walks and of course, eating chips and cheese. I also owe immeasurable gratitude to my friends, Rashmi Guha Ray and Cali Torres whose friendships and bonds grew ever stronger, even at a distance.

I want to express special thanks to Sherly Christivanny, who was the first person I met at York. Since then, we have maintained a close friendship. Also, to my late friend Ben Marshall-Corser, with whom I shared wonderful moments in Scotland and in my own country.

I express my sincere gratitude to the citizens of Mexico whose tax contributions have supported students, including myself, to study abroad through institutions such as the Mexican Council for Humanities, Science and Technology (Conahcyt). Without this financial support, my research would not have been possible. I also extend appreciation to the University of York for providing me with the ‘emergency fund’ during the pandemic.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work to the victims of violence perpetrated by drug prohibition. I hope this work can help to build more efforts in pursuing a path of peace and justice. To my late uncle, Juan Torres, and aunties Claudia and Martha who always supported me in my studies. To my late auntie Alicia, who inspired me to pursue my dreams and profession. To my parents, Margarita and Noé, who were always there to support me when I felt lost, and to my dear sister, Jesy, who supported me when I needed it the most. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my life companion, Michael, whose love provided me with solace, motivation and the strength to persevere.

Paris, January 2, 2024

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this university or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

List of Tables

Table 1. General activities of OCGs across key temporal periods.
Table 2. Activities at the federal level during the key temporal periods.
Table 3. Main actors in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.
Table 4. Main actors in Monterrey, Nuevo León.
Table 5. Participants for the case of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.
Table 6. Participant for both cases.
Table 7. Participants for the case of Monterrey, Nuevo León.
Table 8. Example of semi-structured interview questionnaire used during fieldwork.
Table 9. List of websites and sources consulted
Table 10. Levels of government.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of the north of Mexico showing the outlines of the municipalities of the states of Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon along with the borders of their municipalities.
Figure 2. The temporal periods considered in this thesis superimposed over the national homicide rate. These four periods are centred on the first wave of violence consisting of the temporal periods of: onset, intensity, reduction and continuity.
Figure 3. Mexico's homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants, from 1990-2020, with president start date, name, party and picture.
Figure 4. Timeline of events Juárez, Chihuahua 1992-2012.
Figure 5. Juárez Homicide Rate from 1990-2020.
Figure 6. Timeline of main events Monterrey, Nuevo León 1997-2015.
Figure 7. Mexico population projections 2005-2050.
Figure 8. Violent deaths of women, presumed to be feminicide, by year. Nuevo León: 2000-2017.
Figure 9. Population of 18+ years of age who perceive insecurity, corruption and narcotrafficking to be a problem from 2011 to 2022.
Figure 10. Participant Information Sheet 1.
Figure 11. Participant Information Sheet 2.
Figure 12. Participant Information Sheet 3.
Figure 13. Consent form.
Figure 14. Structure of the Mexican government.
Figure 15. V-Dem Democracy Indexes over time in Mexico.
Figure 16. Building community. Fear transformed into dreams for a better life.
Figure 17. The faces of feminicide".
Figure 18. Ciudad Juárez. Communitarian activity in a park.
Figure 19. Memorial to Jorge and Javier, Tec de Monterrey students.

Glossary of abbreviations

CAINTRA	*Chamber of the Transformative Industry*
CPs	*Communitarian Pathway*
COPARMEX	*Confederation of Mexican Owners*
DNP	*Dialogical nexus pathway*
DOF	*Diario Oficial de la Federación (Official Daily of the Federation)*
INEGI	*National Institute of Statistics and Geography*
ITESM	*Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (Tec de Monterrey)*
EPs	*Elite-business Pathway*
FGR	*Fiscalía General de la República de México, former Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General Office of the Republic of Mexico)*
FC	*Fuerza Civil (Civil Force)*
FP	*Policía Federal (Federal Police)*
OCGs	*Organised crime groups*
PAN	*Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)*
PEP	*Politico-elite pathway*
PRI	*Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)*
SRP	*Social resistance pathway*
SEDENA	*Ministry of National Defense*
SEMAR	*Ministry of the Navy*
SESNSP	*Executive Secretariat National Public Security System*
UANL	*Autonomous University of Nuevo León*
UNODC	*United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*
TSJ	*Todos Somos Juárez*

Chapter 1: Introduction

As part of the international movement on democratisation in the 20th century, Mexico embarked on its journey towards democracy. With the end of the 70 year one-party rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), optimism and expectations were high that Mexico would transition towards a consolidated federal democracy. However, alongside this process of democratisation, a concurrent process evolved that would continue to affect Mexico until today: the increase of organised crime violence. With this, in the last 17 years came waves of violence that have led to over 360,000 homicides, along with thousands of disappearances, numerous human rights abuses and human suffering.

Efforts to curb the activities of organised crime groups (OCGs) in Mexico have become increasingly militarised since the 1980s. However, it was with the 2006 strategy of the so-called "war on drugs" launched under President Felipe Calderón, that witnessed the first extreme outbreak of violence. This approach to curtail OCGs has been characterised by heavy-handed responses, issued from the upper echelons of the Mexican state, mainly the president (also the commander-in-chief), and implemented by nation-wide armed forces such as the military and the federal police (today National Guard). This has been a primarily centralised, top-down policy where local governments have been frequently encroached by the executive power (Flores-Macías, 2023). The deployment of the state's armed forces in local settings has continued with almost no accountability.

Though the rhetoric surrounding this policy has varied across changes of federal government, the top-down approach and its highly militarised strategy has continued until this day. On a macro-level perspective, many studies have been conducted to analyse the outcomes of this security policy, which have shown no evidence of a sustained reduction in violence but instead a dramatic human cost (International Crisis Group, 2022a; Magaloni and Razu, 2016; Chabat, 2010b). Yet, there has been high-profile, intense criminality concentrated within particular areas of Mexico. Along with the staggering degree of violence observed in these areas, civil rights, the freedom of expression and citizen participation have all faced challenges and abuses.

Thus, this thesis explores bottom-up responses to violence by society that are often neglected by top-down approaches and considers these in the context of democratisation processes, particularly at subnational level in Mexico. These responses involved various formal and informal institutions that assume complex roles to manage violence in their local contexts. This aims to provide a more complete picture of the local dimensions and the potential for civil society to play an important role in managing violence that can better inform security policies.

I have begun to lay out the complex linkages between criminal violence, democracy, state capacity and bottom-up approaches that are fundamental in this thesis. Further background information about these concepts will be described in more detail in section 1.1. I will then explain my research objectives and questions in section 1.2, followed by the approach I take to fulfilling these objectives and answering these questions in section 1.3. Section 1.4 will discuss the academic contributions and the novelty of my work and finally, I will describe the overall structure of my thesis in section 1.5.

1. 1 Background

In this section I introduce the academic conceptualisation and literature that frames the work undertaken. This unfolds in the literature on democratisation and decentralisation and in particular state capacity and legitimacy in Mexico, its security policy and finally discusses what bottom-up approaches are.

1. 1.1 Democratisation, decentralisation and state capabilities in Latin America

The traditional way in which the transition to democracy in Latin America is studied has followed a minimalist perspective, mostly focusing on electoral competition (Schumpeter, 2013; Przeworski, 1991). However, as O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) noted, these political trajectories of democracies have variations and incomplete democratic political practices. In this sense, the literature of democratisation in Latin America suggests that states with variations of democratisation within the territory, such as elite-driven patronage systems and or weak institutions, (Whitehead, 2006; O'Donnell, 1993, 2001, 2004) are prone to suffer from crime and violence. Because of the lack of

state legitimacy and limited institutional capacity, the social contract between citizens and the government is broken and, thus, the democratic rule of law is undermined.

This political variability has significant policy implications: It clearly limits the core central state's duty to implement effective strategies to tackle criminal violence, while protecting citizens' rights. Federal democracies such as Argentina, Brazil and Mexico face this situation (Bergman and Whitehead, 2009). Yet, it is not limited to federal democracies (ibid). The unevenness can also be found in unitary countries such as Colombia (Eaton and Prieto, 2017). As crime and insecurity become national issues, their consequences may go beyond what O'Donnell, (1993, p.1359) coined as a "brown area", where the state's territorial reach is uneven. At the political level, the social aspects that cope with the ineffectiveness of law and institutional capacity are at an unstable equilibrium.

In this sense, contrary to the institutions that feature in Western democracies, Latin American democracies are a common region of analysis that has been characterised as having weak institutions (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2020; Levitsky and Murillo, 2009). In this region, institutions vary in their ability for their "enforcement [of rules] and their durability" (Levitsky and Murillo, 2013, p.93). This variability results in instability, where actors frequently struggle to reliably use formal institutions to guide their expectations about the behaviours of other actors. This has significant implications on the rules that shape institutional change (Levitsky and Murillo, 2013).

1.1.2 Criminal violence and responses of the Mexican security policy

Currently, Latin America and the Caribbean is the most violent region in the world (UNODC, 2023). In the case of Mexico, not only have the number of people in OCGs grown over time, but they have changed in structure, from a limited number of dominant groups to more fragmented and aggressive groups with an expanded portfolio of illicit activities (Carbajal Glass, 2020). Countries in this region often mirror the situation in Mexico, where the transition to democracy coincided with the outbreak of criminal violence. This advancement of democracy alongside increasing violence is puzzling from the perspective of the liberal democracies of the Global North.

In Latin America security strategies to address OCGs have often taken the form of top-down, hierarchical, and militarised responses (UNODC, 2023). While the primary objective of the state's

security apparatus should be the mitigation of violence and the guarantee of citizen's safety and democratic rights, the persistence of epidemic violence in specific localised areas within these Latin American democracies suggests that the current state's security policies have proven ineffective (Colak and Pearce, 2009).

Unlike most other countries in Latin America, Mexico did not implement a reform to alter the autonomy of the military which was built up through the 20th century (Manaut, 2021a, p.9). This army is under the thumb of the president as codified in Article 89, Frac. VI, of the Constitution of Mexico as the right "to protect national security, in accordance with the applicable law, for this purpose, The President of the Republic can make use of the permanent armed forces: The Army, the Navy and the Air Force". Politically speaking, the military has been described as a pillar of support in exercising political power (Manaut and Deare, 2021, p.25) and given that the exact duties that fall under military jurisdiction are unclear, this leaves a lot of room to the imagination of the executive.

The security response in Mexico to OCGs has been heavy-handed and largely involved the deployment of military operations, with what Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2021, p.519) have coined as "the constabularization" of the army, whereby military forces assume roles similar to those of police officers. Many of the municipalities and local areas in which it has done so have long-standing problems such as corruption, human rights abuses, poor democratic order and lack of citizen participation. Likewise, some of those local jurisdictions severely affected by violence are highly resistant to federal-led initiatives (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b). Or, even worse, in others the federal government has an evidenced lack of capacity to guarantee the equal application of the law along the whole territory (O'Donnell, 1993), such as in Guerrero and Michoacan (Southwest of Mexico). One of the major problems in solving the crisis in Mexico presented by OCGs is collusion between OCGs and the state. Despite being contexts where the state can be present, OCGs manage to infiltrate security institutions and influence selectively apply the law, for example against their rivals (Trejo and Ley, 2016). So the presence of the state is not enough to guarantee that it meets its functional requirements or that policies can be implemented at a local level when in reality there are informal networks between state institutions and OCGs.

The militarised response under Felipe Calderón led to a catastrophic increase in homicides and different forms of violence such as forced disappearances and kidnappings. This militarised implementation of the 'kingpin'[1] strategy, partly as a result of the US-Mexico relationship to combat OCGs, led to a dramatic rise in homicides, calling the militarised strategy into question. Subsequent presidents have criticised this approach. However, despite homicides skyrocketing and numerous cases of human rights violations by the armed forces, subsequent presidents have continued to use militarised approaches. Violence grew to new proportions under President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), partly because of the continuation of the militarised approach and partly because of the growth, fragmentation and diversification of OCGs (Carbajal Glass, 2020; Atuesta and Ponce, 2017). This all continues despite a period when the country has been nationally (electoral) institutionalised. The interventions of the armed forces against criminal groups had significantly limited effectiveness in most places, whereas criminals demonstrated their power in the use of violence in disputed territories, demonstrating that they have the "monopoly of violence" (Correa-Cabrera et al., 2015, p. 92), defying the Weberian notions of the state.

Despite the continued adoption of militarised approaches, there have also been alternative executive approaches to insecurity based on improved democratisation. A notable example of this was Enrique Peña Nieto's National Programme for Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency (Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y el Delito, PRONAPRED) which launched in 2012. PRONAPRED focused on citizen participation in preventing violence by supporting vulnerable communities and investing in urban regeneration projects. This was one of the few initiatives that actively involved bottom-up approaches to respond to violence. However, in 2016 the executive hollowed out the funds that had been made available for the entire anti-crime socio-economic programme. Having said that, I will now explain what I mean by bottom-up approaches in this work.

[1] This strategy created by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), involves trying to decapitate drug leaders from criminal organisations (Pérez, 2019).

1.1.3 What are bottom-up approaches?

"Bottom-up approaches" is a compound concept that I adopt in this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, it places the voices of citizens at the forefront, which are often lost at a national level of analysis and in some cases, at a local level of analysis. Secondly, at a subnational level, there is greater diversity in the available local contexts, which often vary over time and which allow for more complex, nuanced interpretations of the realities and interactions of a part of society that have experienced the most intense and predatory forms of criminal violence. Finally, it allows for the consideration of state-society interactions taking into consideration that "the geographical dispersion of powers involves addressing more than one level of representation" (Bergman and Whitehead, 2009, p.3).

In line with Behrend and Whitehead (2016b), "a "bottom-up" or citizen-focused conception of democratisation helps to uncover how these variations are experienced by each local demo and what effects they have on the overall federal level of democratic performance" (p.6).

Based on the author's accounts, the macro level refers to the national level in which elected public officials respond to citizens' demands on crime and insecurity. This level adopts a top-down approach to decision-making and police and justice reforms. This level might consider that criminality poses risks to the whole democratic process (Bergman and Whitehead, 2009, p.3). However, the core nation is protected from the full impact of policies implemented over citizens as it is somewhat isolated from the direct events that occur to citizens. In the meso level, the quality of democracy is noticeable. Here, groups of municipalities of large areas of the territory can be partially or totally corrupted, and even worse, under the control of criminal networks. These are characterised by O'Donnell (1993) as so-called "brown areas", which are undemocratic subnational regimes that coexist within established democracies that are not fully controlled by the political and institutional forces that enforce the law nationally and can potentially, penetrate the institutions at national level. Finally, the micro level is where citizens judge the authority of the national political tier based on their experiences and perceptions in their local communities.

Indeed, this thesis will be particularly interested in the management of drug-related violence in a multilayer analysis. I shall pay especial attention to the horizontal level (concerning the micro level

across local communities) and how interactions are performing different sorts of formal and informal arrangements.

The lack of trust in the state tends to act against the efficiency of the policies implemented. For this reason, I will explore the practice of governance (Bevir, 2013; Levitsky and Murillo, 2005), which shall be inclusive because it considers the interaction between the local society and public bureaucracy. This shall address the difficulties and practicalities of governance, including those areas where particularly the Mexican government struggles with legitimacy and with a society that has seen its social tissue eroded over time. In contrast, some local units can gain more *know-how* in the management of violence (especially after suffering intense levels of criminal violence) through public policies, which would be more likely to improve their quality of democracy, particularly legitimacy.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

In Mexico, top-down, militarised security measures have largely dominated the security policies. These concentrate the responsibility of the situation in the lap of the President. Yet, as I depict in Chapter 4, the consequences of this strategy have led to massive eruptions of violence due to fragmentations of OCGs and human rights abuses by the state federal forces. However, at a local level, society also mobilised to address criminal violence in their localities and have shaped social change, which defies the common notion that citizens are passive and defenceless. This sub-national perspective of responses to violence have largely been neglected in the literature. This thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature by uncovering the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence in Mexico. Moreover, to lay some of the groundwork necessary to inform future policies in Mexico and Latin America that take bottom-up approaches into account.

My core research question is,

What is the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence in Mexico?

And as an extension,

What are the factors that enable or constrain their responses?

In asking my core questions, my research objective is to better understand the different bottom-up actors and institutions involved in addressing criminal violence at a sub-national level. In particular, I

aim to identify the local dimensions of violence experienced by the local actors, their political and living conditions, the actions they took and what the outcomes were of these actions. Despite focusing on the sub-national level, the general context of Mexico's federal military strategies and the situation of OCGs will be considered against the landscape of local contexts. Therefore, another research objective is to understand this context and how it resulted in the local situation of insecurity, and also how this strategy neglected the local level and the impact of this neglect.

My secondary question focuses on identifying the underlying factors that enable or constrain bottom-up approaches. The objective of this question is to lay the groundwork for future more detailed analysis. Without uncovering the diverse responses and the factors influencing them, it is not possible to conduct more targeted academic research in the future. Though it would be useful to conduct targeted exploration of, for example, causal paths, this needs to be the goal outside of this investigation, which requires a firm understanding of the existing contexts.

1.3 Approach

To meet my research questions and objectives, I take a primarily qualitative approach. To answer my research questions about the bottom-up approaches, I conducted a micro-level comparative analysis of two case studies: the city of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and Monterrey, Nuevo León (Chapters 5 and 6 respectively). These different case studies consisted of semi-structured interviews with members of local society and state authorities. This is augmented by additional documentary materials that are used for triangulation.

For my micro-level analysis, my focus is on the nature of violence, as well as the local effects of Mexico's federal security strategy. The latter led to a dramatic increase in homicidal violence in both Monterrey and Juárez, followed by a sharp decrease in a short period of time, though they never returned to previous levels. These dynamics of violence are part of a complex reality of intertwined state (in)capabilities, uneven democracy, OCGs's turf wars and the strategy of the "war on drugs", which makes both cities interesting case studies to explore. Given the temporality of this wave of violence, I identify 4 temporal periods that capture the varied dynamics of violence that are used in my

analysis within subnational democratisation processes. These are the onset, intensity, reduction and continuation periods.

To complement my micro-level analysis, I also perform a macro-level analysis of Mexico in Chapter 4. In this analysis I follow the co-evolution of OCGs and the militarised top-down strategy to combat insecurity alongside the processes of democratisation and decentralisation in Mexico from the 1980s to 2022. This serves to understand the global context of Mexico in Latina America and better contextualises the deficiencies of the federal system regarding insecurities brought about by OCGs. From this analysis, it becomes more clear what the federal strategies are and what enables or constrains the strategies they adopted. Moreover, this serves to better understand the relationships between the state and civil society regarding bottom-up approaches.

In conducting my analysis, my focus is on identifying the main actors, their actions and the outcomes of these actions. In this sense, I take a historical institutionalist approach to understand the historical dynamics of local institutional development, where institutions might be formal or informal in nature. Centering my analysis on a single extreme event of violence followed by its reduction and continuation, allows me to perform a detailed comparative analysis aided by an analysis of comparable temporal periods. This, subsequently, is also aligned with the national context of the war against OCGs.

To conceptualise the situation and events that occurred, I explore them with the support of three fundamental theoretical concepts. The primary concept underpinning this thesis is *uneven democracy. This* captures the varying degrees to which democratic (civic and social) principles have been realised between national and sub-national levels (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016a; O'Donnell, 1993), in particular the variations of democratic subnational regimes, which affect the course of action designed and implemented by public officials and political actors. The second concept is of *state capacity*, following O'Donnell's (1993, 2004), that captures the notion of the degree to which law and order can be uniformly upheld by the democratic institutions. The last theoretical concept is *legitimacy*, which relates to the degree to which citizens have equal participation in decision-making processes (Falleti and Riofrancos, 2018, p.87) and trust in the actions of the democratic institutions. These concepts

together are used to contextualise the formal and informal institutions at a subnational level in my two case studies and at a national level regarding its implications on security public policy and its implementation.

Further to these main theoretical concepts, my fieldwork brought up various additional relevant bodies of literature such as contentious politics in collective action and participation (Bateson, 2012; Tilly, 2003a; Loveman, 1998); conflict studies including civilian resistance (Arjona, 2017a; Kaplan, 2017; Kalyvas, 2015), the scholarly state-society relations (Migdal, Kohli and Shue, 1994; Migdal, 1988) and power dynamics among actors of authoritarian regimes and elite domination (O'Brien, 1996; Scott, 1990).

A final point about my approach in this thesis is that grassroots political actors and their formal and informal arrangements may be prominent in reducing violence. Only focusing on formal institutions misses out on fundamental relationships in society and so I will also attempt to account for the informal institutions, where formal refers to rules and government, while informal arrangements are based on traditions (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b; Goldstein and Arias, 2010).

1.4 Contribution and originality

My research contributes to the study of the politics of crime by examining the process of subnational democratisation within the context of insecurity. In doing so, it adopts a unique approach that focuses on the perspective of uneven democratisation and its complex connection to the capacity literature, with a specific emphasis on the dynamics and interactions between the state and society at the local level.

A further contribution is the adoption of a subnational perspective that enhances the analysis by enabling a nuanced, on-the-ground, micro-level examination of the local realities of citizens in hostile environments, beyond the Weberian (1978 [1919]) conception of the state's monopoly on the use of force. This subnational exploration is based on 57 interviews conducted during fieldwork with actors from civil society, and government from Monterrey, Nuevo León and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. This is complemented with primary sources such as documents and official statistical data and secondary sources such as reports from civil society organisations and newspaper articles.

In answering my research questions concerning the role of bottom-up approaches and the factors governing their incentives and responses (Chapter 7), I also hope that my work can serve as a stepping stone for scholars in the public policy arena, providing a more complete collection of possibilities and their constituent parts. In particular, my specific accounts of the different alliances and capacities between society and with other state institutions that converge at different layers of governance. This can also be used to better understand the intricacies for top-down measures when adopted across different localities and countries from the Latin American context.

Analysis to address organised crime violence in Mexico usually takes a national or macro-level perspective that focuses on the outcomes of the militarised security policies (*see* Guerrero, 2013; Chabat, 2010b). In particular, in state-centric accounts, violence has been attributed to the dynamics of the drug markets (Angrist and Kugler, 2008; Gambetta, 1996). As observed by Sellers, Lidström and Bae (2020, p.10) at best, those top-down studies tend to note the deficiencies at the local level and their dependency in their relations to the other supralocal or central power; at worst, the realities and historical dynamics of local institutions are ignored or totally misunderstood. Little is said about local institutions' capacities and their historical features. On the contrary, my work takes a predominantly local perspective, only referring to the top-down approach to contextualise the local contexts.

The formal literature on democracy overly assumes their implementation within states where the strength of institutional capacities are taken for granted. As such, transferring those assumptions into a Latin American context may be naive (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019; Whitehead, 2010; 2004). On the contrary, many Latin American democracies are facing low levels of legitimacy, weak institutions and poor security governance, there are important variations of these issues within the countries. In this regard, this thesis makes a contribution in advancing the literature of democracy by adapting formal literature to the case of a Latin American country in the analysis conducted.

In Mexico, local institutional (in)capacities (functional and territorial presence) hurdle effective inter-governmental relations between local and national levels. The effect of limited local capacity in implementing security policies is hardly explored in the literature. For example, is it the case that local state (in)capacity results in the authority defaulting to the national level? If this were true, this could

hinder the effective delivery of service to citizens that could be accomplished by appropriate inter-governmental relations. My research fills this gap by describing the state (in)capacity at the local level and details the ways in which bottom-up approaches are found to circumvent this, noting the different actors and institutions involved in these interactions at a subnational level. As well as this, I provide an account of the militarised strategy and why this has been the default security strategy with respect to local incapacity.

1.5 Outline of chapters

This thesis is organised into 8 chapters including this introductory first chapter. In **Chapter 2**, I explore the relevant literature that underpins my research. The overarching concept utilised in my thesis is that of democratisation and its unevenness and incompleteness. In this regard, this chapter analyses the quality of democracy in Latin America and Mexico, unveiling that one of the main constraining factors of security policies is the uneven distribution of the rule of law. The links between democratisation, decentralisation and state (in)capacity are also identified. To better understand the actors involved in the thesis, I also provide a conceptualisation of organised criminal violence, how power and actors are distributed, and the formal and informal institutions in Mexico. Finally, this chapter covers literature that supports my analysis of bottom-up approaches in responding to violence. It does so by finding the interactions between various concepts across different bodies of work related to the constraints at the local level regarding democratic rights, citizens' participation in decision-making, lack of accountability and low legitimacy.

In **Chapter 3**, I detail the methodology used in this thesis. This consists of detailing the research design used to explain how processes unfold in different periods, at a subnational level. The chapter depicts the use of interviews and the type of primary and secondary sources. It also explains the rationale for using reflexive thematic analysis as the encoding approach to answer my research questions. I also use a historical institutionalist approach that will provide a greater nuanced approach to the nature of local dynamics. Finally, I state my positionality in approaching my research topic.

Chapter 4 adopts a macro-level perspective to develop the historical and analytical background related to the traditional approaches to security in Mexico since its period of democratisation in the

1980s. The section depicts how the decentralisation processes in Mexico brought a series of dilemmas in state capabilities. With regards to the security strategy, this chapter also examines the use of the military by the executive branch and the launch in Mexico of the so-called "war on drugs" implemented by President Felipe Calderón in 2006. A trend of violence is provided, including the transformation of the OCGs over time. Finally, I examine the analytical factors that the security policy has neglected at the local level before concluding the chapter.

Chapter 5 and **6** includes the findings from my fieldwork. **Chapter 5** concerns the subnational case of Ciudad Juárez. This chapter analyses the quality of democracy and the political-historical processes that shaped the adoption of the initiative Todos Somos Juárez (We are All Juárez) and the Mesas (working groups). It covers the historical context and nature of violence in the city. I consider the formal or informal arrangements that, in particular, local elite actors performed in reaction and response to the escalating levels of violence and their vertical dynamics to other agents and institutions. This chapter sheds light on the alliances between state and society, as well as within the society in massive collective mobilisation, in the view of the Mesas de Juárez as mechanisms of local civic capacity and accountability. General actor pathways are then identified for further discussion in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 6, the case of Monterrey, is analysed as an example of the disruption of violence after the gubernatorial political alternation that marked the transition from the authoritarian regime to an uneven democracy with limited political participation. Following this, the social and historical dynamics and different citizen initiatives for local institutional change are explored. In the case of Monterrey, the business-elite was an important factor that activated collective action for the creation of a new police force, but this was grounded in political and business interests. General actor pathways are then identified for further discussion in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 is my discussion chapter, in which I respond to my research questions using the findings of my two case studies in Chapter 5 and 6. In doing so, I compare pathways of actors and mechanisms for change. The chapter also examines common patterns and differences of the role of various groups and sets of actions that may have assisted change. It elucidates the way in which

bottom up approaches responded to violence and identifies the factors that enabled or constrained their responses.

Finally, in **Chapter 8** I summarise my research and revisit my findings. It sheds light on policy implications and new avenues for future research, particularly for Latin American democracies that have struggled with high levels of violence.

Chapter 2: The advent of subnational democratisation: Rethinking the local level and citizen participation amid criminal violence

2. 0 Introduction

In Chapter 1, a snapshot of the problem of criminal violence in Latin America and Mexico was addressed. In particular, related to the crises of insecurity and the often top-down militarised and heavy-handed responses used to combat it. I introduced the macro-level aspect of democratisation along with the fundamental theoretical concepts that underpin this thesis including uneven democratisation, state capacity and legitimacy. Following this, the notion of *bottom-up approaches* was introduced to explore the potential roles of local society and communities in responding to criminal violence, which are often neglected. Building upon Chapter 1, I will now focus on positioning the theoretical concepts used in this thesis within existing academic literature and note where my research complements and extends existing approaches.

Three decades ago, Guillermo O'Donnell (1996) challenged scholars by claiming that the model of democracies of the Global North[2] pursued by Latin American states, had not achieved the aspirations of democratic rights and citizenship. His accounts remain available until our present days. Despite the transitions to democracy in Latin America many citizens do not enact their basic political rights and the rule is not evenly enforced, while trust in state institutions tends to be low as O'Donnell (2010, 2001, 1996) noted. Thus, the contrasting reality in this chapter shows a distinct path from the ideal of a "consolidated" liberal democracy (*See* Whitehead, 2010, p.75). This serves to unfold the broader theoretical foundations that set the grounds for this work and the gaps that are aimed to address. I hope that this historical and conceptual line of frameworks convey the intricacies of Latin American democracies and, perhaps, elsewhere.

[2] In O'Donnell's (1996, p.1) seminal work he refers at that time to the relatively reduced number of democracies located in the "northwestern quarter of the word". In this thesis I will refer to the so-called "Global North" to include the US and Western Europe.

In this regard, the overarching theoretical underpinnings used to investigate contexts of democratisation processes in this thesis concern untangling uneven and incomplete democracies. These are considered regarding their implications on policy-making and implementation in security policies and crime prevention. Furthermore, they relate to the reality, social interactions and informal constraints faced by citizens in various local contexts (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016). Thus, inspired by Behrend and Whitehead's work, (2016b) I borrow the term of "uneven democracy" as the main concept throughout this thesis, in which despite transitioning to a democracy, the "democracy's spread within nation-states remains uneven" (p.155). In other words, there was a process of national democracy, but where remain internal variations of political democratic rights.

Related to uneven democracy, I also use here the concepts of "state capacity" and "legitimacy". In the state capacity, I draw on O'Donnell's (1993, p.1358) observation of the heterogeneity "across the territory and the functional relations" among society and with it, the varying capacity of the state to enforce the law. State legitimacy commonly refers to the perceived trustworthiness and competence of the state, à la Weber (1978). This has been closely related to capacity when it comes to public policy, as it heavily influences how actors place their faith in state institutions. In the case of Mexico, systematic corruption has weakened if not shattered the legitimacy of various state institutions. This is particularly evidenced in the context of OCGs that have infiltrated various institutions, referred to as "state capture" (Sánchez and Hernández, 2021; Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2012). This lack of legitimacy disables institutional mechanisms to address violence and, moreover, the "illiberal structures and practices" (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b, p.155) persist over time and can creep up from the subnational level to the national level. It is the state capture by OCGs that hinders the institution's capacity to apply the democratic rule of law that reduces citizen's trust in institutions and state.

The forms in which individuals and communities adapt and live have significant effects on the way of evolution and shape of conflict in different settings (Justino, 2009). In this sense, as Evans and Heller notes, the ability to bring about human development requires "democratic deepening" with diversely structured networks from a broad section of civil society (Evans and Heller, 2015), and so

the participation of civil society may ultimately strengthen national development. As referred in Chapter 1, bottom-up approaches place the voices of individuals, groups and communities collectively at the forefront of discussion, which are frequently hard to explain at a macro-level of analysis. This necessarily encompasses actors and institutions, and the consideration of multiple layers of governance. Parallel scholarship has shown that the universalistic ideals and claims raised by traditional liberal democratic accounts have not been implemented amongst societies in Latin America, and there has been increased pressure raised for increased political citizenship and inclusiveness (Kapiszewski et al., 2021; Chenoweth, 2021; O'Donnell, 2010). Thus, this thesis contends that the bottom-up approaches focus on the likelihood that formal and (particularly) informal arrangements rooted in society can also shape political behaviour and outcomes of violence (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b; Migdal, 2001).

One of the primary goals of this chapter is to show that narratives of democratisation based on macro-level perspectives alone are not enough to explain dynamics that occur in policy implementation involving a larger cross-section of political actors at different levels of governance (shown in sections 2.1 and 2.2). Existing literature ultimately misses details that occur at the meso and micro levels, making any macro-level narrative incomplete when the micro-level is of significance in explaining phenomena. This then lays the ground to explore how the local level has been neglected by the top-down security policies and where bottom-up approaches might serve a role in responding to criminal violence (shown in section 2.3).

2.1 The fallacy of democratisation and decentralisation

An important direction of my research is to better understand micro-level political dynamics in the broader processes of democratisation. To this end, this section critiques the state of democratisation in Mexico, where democratic principles are often limited and where I argue that micro-level dynamics are frequently disregarded. Unlike formal accounts of democratisation that focus on formal institutions and actors, this thesis also looks at democratisation via informal routes and atypical actors in the form

of civil society. As I will explore in later chapters, these actors must often take actions to enforce democratic principles themselves.

As part of the international transition in the 20th century towards democratisation, Latin American and Eastern European countries started their journey towards national "consolidated" electoral democracies. Following a period marked by authoritarian regimes and dictatorships in Latin America, the 1980s ushered in a wave of democratisation alongside decentralisation processes. With these regime changes, elections emerged as the central focus of democratic reforms (Sørensen, 2018, pp.56–57) and often democracy is studied at this level of political-electoral participation (Kaase, 2010; Van Deth, 2001). To some extent, the electoral democracies that were born are still the crowning achievements of this period of democratisation, but unfortunately also the limit of it. As Levitsky (2018) notes, "Latin American democracies may be surviving, but few are thriving" (p.102).

This transition also introduced a toolkit of paradoxical elements that characterise the quality of democracy in the Latin American region. O'Donnell further elaborated the concept of democracy beyond its "minimalist" electoral conceptualisation noted by Adam Przeworski (1999), by expanding on the rule of law that "ensures political rights, civil liberties, and mechanisms of accountability which in turn affirm the political equality of all citizens and constrain potential abuses of state power" (O'Donnell, 2004, p.32). This is where Mexico falls flat in its democratisation. In particular, the subnational variations in democratic (and not so democratic) practices, and challenges in state institution capacity (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016).

Notably, these outcomes do not match with the experiences of the Global North. In the case of other countries of the South Cone, the democratic transformation led to what O'Donnell (1973; 2013) coined the "bureaucratic-authoritarian state", as was also the case of hegemonic rule of the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) in Mexico. As O'Donnell (2010) observed, the expectation of "consolidation" in Latin American democracies frequently involved universalistic ideals that were applied in Western liberal democracies, but that fell short in the Latin American context. This is what the thesis calls as the fallacy of democratisation in the 20th century.

The Case of Democratisation in the Mexican State

I will now explain how the international movement towards democratisation in the 20th century uncovered the gaps of democracy. This means that it evidenced the level of territorial institutional presence and institution capacity within countries (O'Donnell, 2004, 1996) or what is explained by the scholarship of uneven democracy (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b). I will also identify the links between democratisation and violence (Colak and Pearce, 2009). This will allow me to then explore the relations between multilevel governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2001) and democratisation, garnering insights from the strategies to curb violence, as opposed to typical analysis which has focused on national (macro-level) responses.

In comparison with the Latin American revolts during the 20th century, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) was "unique in terms of being a prolonged and bloody but successful social revolution, which achieved substantial —and in some senses 'progressive'— socio-political change" (Knight, 2013, p.28). However, since its birth as an independent nation Mexico was a fragmented state that preserved the control of the territory based on its informal practices (sometimes illegal pacts) with regional men adept at using force. Knight's (2013) has suggested that the political disorder at a micro-level in the country (the holes in the "Swiss cheese" in his metaphor) might have been the price paid for the macro-political stability that brought the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

The alternation of political power at federal level from the PRI to the PAN party (*Partido Acción Nacional*) in 2000 brought about a redistribution of influences, favouring the political elite and their supporters. The transition to an electoral competition has been considered a successful shift toward a "minimalist" democracy (Przeworski, 1999), yet the distribution of political engagement remained unequal (O'Donnell, 2001). Deficiencies within Mexico can be illustrated in Knight's (1990, p.95) metaphor as a Mexican "Swiss cheese", a state with holes that invites an in depth examination in which way the local level has been neglected when regards to policy implementation.

The elements (patronage, access of media, control of elections, public works and apparatus of repression) that underpinned the monopoly of power of the PRI, forged a paradigm of culture of political power in Mexico. This paradigm relies on jealousy of the central government, occasionally

playing as "engine of reform and distribution" (Knight, 1998, p.72), whereas local politics were run by provincial elites and bosses known as "caciques" that exerted force and the distribution of favours. Many of these caciques were powerful men serving as army officers. The ideology and practice (repression was used discretionary, frequently in rural places) of the hegemonic party established a particular way of governing that some scholars attribute to the inhibition of extreme violence (Knight, 2013, p.28). Herein, the Mexican state had interest in public order (as the Weberian notion of the monopoly use of force), in tandem with clientelism. Consequently, for many years the PRI was more than a party as it conveyed a crucible of interests that made it rule the country for more than 70 years.

This period coincided with the modern expressions of violence related to drug trafficking, essentially motivated by the burgeoning US demand on drugs during the 1980's and after. As Luis Astorga (2003) explains, this followed a regional dynamic in which trends were different from the centre. Herein, it is important to note that crime and violence increased during the economic crisis between 1980's and 1990's, and after 1995 when the economy recovered crime incidence went down. Nevertheless, this was not the case with the upsurge of narco-violence, which seemed to follow its own pattern (Knight, 2013, p.28). The gruesome violence by OCGs has been more related to the battle for territorial control along with the (in)effective law enforcement by the state authority. Hence, in the case of Mexico with the onset of democratisation and then with the passing on of power (alternancia política), broke with the control of the territory under the clientelistic and centralised practices of the monopolistic PRI. The next section will delve into how and why recent democratised countries resulted in territorial unevenness.

2.2 Uneven Democracy

As O'Donnell (1993) stated, the institutionalised democracies that emerged in Latin America from authoritarian systems saw the effectiveness of the rule of law extended irregularly along its territory. In particular, O'Donnell (Ibid.) noted that the periphery of these democracies usually inherited weaker bureaucracies than the centre, also suffering more from social and economic crises and arbitrary violations. This effect was observed in the emergent democracies of authoritarian regimes in Latin America and Eastern Europe. This state of uneven democracy is partially caused by the growing pains

of developing countries in Latin America where there are conflicting needs for economic development alongside democratic advances. Adrian Leftwich (2005, p.688) captures this concept in what he calls "institutional incompatibility" where democratic and economic institutions cannot necessarily grow simultaneously. As he notes, the path to democracy is not always in developing democratic institutions, when, for example, economic development can lift many out of poverty as a necessary precursor to further democratisation. From this process perspective, it is unsurprising that until this process is complete, institutions will remain uneven and moreover, it offers a perspective for why temporary undemocratic objectives might be justified in the minds of even well-intentioned politicians. The question is whether accepting actions that conflict with democracy can enhance democracy in the long run, or whether this contradiction fundamentally weakens democracy or worse, directs it back to authoritarianism.

This context of economic development in democratising countries, during the 1980s and early 1990s, produced an outcome that O'Donnell (1994) named "delegative democracy", in which in the myth of delegation "the president isolates himself from most political institutions and organised interests, and bears the sole responsibility for the successes and failures of 'his' policies" (p.61). In other words, the role of citizens in decision making stops at the ballot, and further participation is not incorporated into the executive decision making. This has authoritarian undertones and indeed might be a natural extension of pre-existing authoritarian experiences, where individual participation in decision making is not considered, perhaps among the population itself. Somehow, the executive is supposed to overcome the incapacity of weak institutions, juggling institutional incompatibilities, potentially through crises, towards some kind of prosperity. In this type of delegative democracy, vertical accountability exists for elected echelons, but horizontal accountability is hindered behind weak local democracy, thus, networks of agents that exert power (whether elected or not) in this layer (including other institutions) remain fuzzy. While delegative democracies might make sense in crisis situations (similar to martial law), their continued existence suggests their incapability at resolving crises. In a sense, their perpetuity might even indicate that they are part of the crisis itself.

In more recent times, most of the Latin American democracies have become more representative -albeit with certain challenges- and political-electoral participation is spread nationwide, but citizen participation still struggles as part of democratic decisions[3] particularly in this research which concerns security policy implementation. Here, O'Donnell (1993, p.1361) presents the concept of "low intensity citizenship", where citizens can not exercise their democratic rights due to weak rule of law, or choose not to exercise them out of generalised apathy about the political system. It is here where Brazil and Mexico are considered cases of high heterogeneity in functionality and territoriality, where the rule of law disappears (or vanishes in some parts of the territory). This impacts severely on legitimacy and hence can lead to apathy. Particularly, O'Donnell (1993) characterised different states of Latin America based on their democratic elements. For the case of Mexico he characterised it in the so-called "brown areas", which are undemocratic subnational regimes that coexist within established democracies that are not fully controlled by the political and institutional forces that enforce the law nationally and that potentially penetrate the institutions at a national level.

The so-called third wave of democratisation in the twentieth century (Huntington, 1993), brought decentralisation of governance structures that paradoxically (at least in the case of Mexico) seem to have resulted in the centralised provision of policy. This contradicts the formal theories of decentralisation (Faguet, 2014), in which the assumption that decentralisation improves the effectiveness of the strength of the state in accountability and capacity fades away with the lack of response to its citizens. In this vein, the subnational context is blurred in the local participation (Ibid.).

As Piattoni (2009, p.173) depicted in the challenges of the state, "what makes the sub-national units strong vis-à-vis the centre are both formal attributes (legislative and fiscal competences, for example) as well as less formal, but nevertheless crucial, characteristics (such as cultural distinctiveness, administrative capacities, proactive political classes, etc)". Piattoni supports that the state is persuaded to provide more public power to different civil society components, which would make indistinct the division between the public and private (or the division state-society).

[3] Perhaps this situation can be seen in current international examples such as Brexit, the riots in Chile and the different health national responses to COVID-19 around the world.

Decentralisation reforms in the 1990's in Latin America provides a useful reference for the expansion of multilevel governance, with especial emphasis on the micro-horizontal level. For instance, with the gruesome consequences of the reactive central policies to violent conflict, based on counter narcotics and counter insurgency, that by the end of the 1980s, the national government of Colombia exerted a decentralisation project that shifted the orientation of the security policy. The decentralisation plan implicated a change in political powers and responsibilities to municipal governments on various policy areas, such as citizen security (Moncada, 2013). In Colombia, decentralisation broke with the traditional centrality nature of politics hitherto in the country (Bejarano and Pizarro, 2005) and this process was developed in line with the national economic liberalisation (Moncada, 2013). In this vein, the 1991 Constitutional changes re-oriented the focus to the cities by empowering mayors with a proactive role in monitoring and guiding innovative citizen security policy.

Thus, subnational democratic processes would be important in examining the citizens' interests and the inclination of states to decentralised decision-making. Especially, when the spread of democracy inside the nation-states remains (territorially) uneven (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b). This is little explored in the scholarship that overwhelmingly focuses on national elections. Indeed, O'Donnell (2004) states that the ineffective democratic rule of law *(Estado de derecho*, in Spanish) hampers justice because of inequalities in population and a widespread impunity in the region. In his own words, the rule of law should be considered as the "legally based rule of a democratic state" (O'Donnell, 2004, p.36). In reality, the Latin America experience has revealed an exclusive and fragmented population weakly linked to their state that upholds loosely in — or is unable to do — its main duties. This situation is also linked to the bureaucratic crisis of Latin America countries as the public policies that are on paper fail in the implementation, which is at the same time a crisis in legitimacy. Thus, the role that different actors play and the policy responses within a country (Giraudy, Moncada and Snyder, 2019) are important. The next section will expand on this and the importance of institutions and their capacity.

2.3 The importance of state capacity and institutions.

When it comes to researching the state there is a need to look at the various institutions and actors that interact in diverse forms and issues (Migdal, Kohli and Shue, 1994). In this sense, the concept of state capacity is usually related to its fundamental ability to uphold order and the rule of law, which can be a consequence of many factors including: limited resources, lack of professionalism and lack of autonomy. Then, the role of state capacity in the exploration of uneven democracy is unavoidable as it lies at the very heart of the state's capacity to uniformly uphold democratic institutions. These institutions refer to rules, norms and conventions (March and Olsen, 1989) that are maintained without force, sanctions or other forms of direct imposition. Of course, institutional capacity fundamentally affects how policy implementation is managed in particular regions of the country, even within subnational settings.

In Latin America, the fragmentation of the states between the centre (or national) and the periphery (or local) provoked the lack of effective dominance across their territory. To address this gap, a theoretical bridge might be found between democratisation and historical institutionalism. In established political-electoral democracies in Latin America, such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Colombia, there is a constant struggle over the restructuring of democratic institutions and over the contraction of democratic rights for the citizens. This framework shall underpin the consequences of the Mexican state's institutional incapacity, particularly at local and/or municipal level, to contend violence by organised crime groups.

2.3.1 Organised crime and State (in)capacity

In recent years there have been a plethora of interdisciplinary scholarship providing a fresh view on how organised crime in the Global South is approached. The seminal work of Trejo and Ley (2020) provides a significant ontological review on how organised crime is studied in the Mexican case. In a macro-level perspective, the authors (2020, pp.37–40) claim that OCGs can only exist if they have some degree of informal protection by the state authorities, which are key in the reproduction of

political power within the "gray area". Thus, the borders between organised crime violence and the state become blurred.

This informal crime-state nexus has far-reaching consequences and seems deeply rooted in the case of MexicoThus, what complicates the narrative on state capacity, is the role of OCGs in influencing the state. There are contexts where the state is present, yet OCGs that have infiltrated security institutions can selectively apply the law, for example against their rivals (Trejo and Ley, 2016, p.51). So the presence of the state is not enough to guarantee state capacity. Here, some studies have used the concept of what is known in political science as "state capture" of the government institutions by criminals through penetration, collusion or systemic corruption (Smith, 2021; Grillo, 2012; Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2012). These informal arrangements can be horizontally dispersed, across public servants at the same level or vertically, upwards towards high ranking-officials of security and military institutions. This introduces the risk that "drug cartels require the complicity of law enforcement agents charged with policing the streets, the highways, private airports, ports and border exit points, and customs" (Trejo and Ley, 2018, p.909).

Scholars have tried to understand what type of conflict has emerged in Mexico with respect to OCGs. In particular, the violence that erupted in the north of Mexico, partially covered in Chapters 5 and 6. This may manifest as political violence, where OCGs try to influence the outcomes of political elections and seats of power. In other comparisons, the internal and widespread extent of the criminal violence (mainly as turf wars) have the characteristics of a civil war, however these do not match with the typical definitions of civil war (Kalyvas, 2015; Grillo, 2012), as OCGs do not have ideological positions on the whole[4].

Simplistic narratives about OCGs, especially from the Global North, are unrepresentative of the context in Latin America. However, these simplistic notions are often the official us-vs-them narratives that are used to justify violent state mobilisations against OCGs that are often militarised and repressive (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021; Benítez et al, 2009). Contrary to these narratives, it has been evidenced that some OCGs are deeply ingrained in their local communities and perform

[4] Perhaps one exception could be La Familia OCG, and then its splinter group the Knights Templar.

aspects of state building that give them some degree of local legitimacy beyond what would normally be considered by criminal organisations (Barnes, 2017). However, the precise motivations for this are unclear, as there are strong incentives for recruitment that require OCGs to have some degree of integration within their communities. That said, the following section will expand on the issues of limitations of institutional strength and (lack of) legitimacy to address violence, particularly at the local level.

2.3.2 Limitations in institution capacity

There have been numerous studies on how violence affects democratisation (Colak and Pearce, 2009), but little has been said about how the process of democratisation has neglected the local level and, therefore, the effect on the implementation of policies to manage drug-related violence. One of the main barriers to overcome in the analysis of the micro-level dynamics in the management of violence is to move away from the focus on traditional security studies of state capacity, which are from the macro-level. Micro-level evidence from nearly a decade has allowed researchers to examine the relationship between the dynamics in the management of violence and local institution transformation. Yet, this perspective remains limited and usually adjusted to the view of the classic notions of democratisation and public policy.

When it comes to the scholarship in capacity, various scholars have commented on the peculiarity of Latin American institutions, often characterised as 'weak' or low (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019; Helmke, 2017; Levitsky and Murillo, 2013), and the uneven reach of state's institutions across territory and society, particularly in poor-quality democracies (Munck, 2023; Soifer, 2012). Notwithstanding the situation of low state capacity and uneven democracy that is common in Latin America (Levitsky and Murillo, 2013, 2009; Helmke and Levitsky, 2006), some subnational units facing similar levels of crime violence (such as Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey, in Mexico and Medellin, Colombia) have managed to gradually reduce criminal violence. In the case of Medellin, the capital of the Department of Antioquia, was branded in 1991 with the label of the "most violent city in the world" with a homicide rate of 381 per 100,000 inhabitants (Doyle, 2019; Muggah, 2014). The

Colombian city is a classic example that underscores the potential for subnational actors to influence policy outcomes (Moncada, 2016).

The exact usage of the term "legitimacy" is varied in describing institutions and their role in the management of violence. Generally, legitimacy relates to the perceived level of trust in democratic institutions. On the one hand, opaque institutions that are believed to be infiltrated by OCGs are illegitimate and on the other, transparent institutions in which citizens have equal participation in decision-making processes are regarded as more legitimate (Falleti and Riofrancos, 2018, p.87). Trust in the motivations of the institutions are a fundamental component of legitimacy, but legitimacy is also related to the competency (and hence capacity) of an institution. Legitimacy of institutions has a complex relationship with violence, as noted by the World Bank (2011) "countries and subnational areas with the weakest institutional legitimacy and governance are the most vulnerable to violence and instability and the least able to respond to internal and external stresses" (p.7). In simple words, there is a chicken and egg problem, where illegitimate institutions do not function well and poor functioning institutions are regarded as illegitimate[5]. Having said that, this crisis of violence originating from OCGs and their effect on legitimacy is a widely experienced problem in Latin America (Ley, 2022; Moncada, 2021).

Lack of legitimacy has wide reaching consequences when it comes to the compliance of civil society to public policies. When institutions and their rules are not regarded as legitimate there is no compulsion to do what they decree outside of law enforcement (Falleti and Riofrancos, 2018). Here, legitimacy is a useful concept as it allows for explanations of poor compliance outside of weak capacity and weak governance. As Basu (2018) notes, compliance goes beyond enforcement and it

[5] Although citizens' confidence in government institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean is low, opinion surveys show that there is a stable public support for having a democratic regime, particularly when regards to the topics of rights and citizenship. This is evidenced according to the latest 2023 Latin America Public Opinion Project (Castorena et al., 2023), in which 59% of citizens in the region support democracy as their preferred system.

may be worth rethinking compliance in terms of whether new laws change beliefs. In other words, new laws have to come with the legitimacy to change the beliefs of society.

As noted thus far, one way to build legitimacy is to involve different structures of civil society in decision making processes. For instance, in the case of Medellin, Colombia, the policy responses came from grassroots actors involved in the local context. From 2004, the local government of Mayor Sergio Fajardo implemented city-wide policies under the banner known as "social urbanism", which provided significant physical infrastructure for the poor and marginalised areas of the city (Doyle, 2019; Echeverri and Orsini, 2011). Further insights into micro-level perspectives can help fill the gaps in traditional approaches that tend to overlook the commitment (a possible indicator of the expression of trust) by local agencies and networks in the implementation of policy with respect to the perceived legitimacy of institutions and in resolving conflicts (See Falleti and Riofrancos, 2018, p.91; Arjona, 2017b, p.130). That being said, the following section explores the theoretical underpinnings for the role of bottom up approaches.

2.4 The roles of bottom-up approaches in managing criminal violence

This thesis aims to address the gaps in the literature concerning society's responses to criminal violence by drawing on various silos of literature. O'Donnell's work sets precedents for democratic decision-making involving citizen participation beyond national political-electoral democracies (Levitsky, 2018; O'Donnell, 2010). In this sense, Chenoweth (2021) emphasises democratic consolidation through new citizen habits, investment in independent institutions, separation of powers, security force reform, and a constitution respecting citizens' rights. Furthermore, Chenoweth (Ibid.) contends that collective action is likely essential for countries transitioning to political democracy, challenging the notion that mass action destabilised such transitions, in particular that mobilisation of civil society is "probably a necessary condition for countries to transition to political democracy" and that "contrary to the view that mass action destabilised democratic transitions, mobilisation typically accelerates and solidifies them" (p.243).

The majority of the literature on participation in democracy focuses on a minimalist democratic perspective — in terms of voting in electoral processes. However, my research concerning democratic

(political) participation is more aligned with broader, non-electoral forms of participation. In these cases, citizens mobilise to develop political participation with the state, or horizontally at the local level. Following deLeon and deLeon (2002, pp.482-483), citizen participation in policy implementation from a bottom-up approach can be fundamentally more democratic than top-down approaches. Here, the experiences of street level officials (such as police officers) in their work at the front line of society in the implementation of policies are highlighted (Lipsky, 2010, 1980). A concrete and popular example of participation literature in Latin America has focused on participatory budgeting in Brazil and Colombia, which directly involves the society in budget decisions (Souza, 2001; Wampler, 2010). This participatory budgeting has several outcomes including: more inclusive decision making by including marginalised and underrepresented groups; improved transparency and accountability; empowered communities with a greater sense of civic ownership and responsibility; and also had the potential to improve governance by tapping into the collective wisdom of the community.

Though there are some existing studies that focus on civilian participation to violence from the perspective of formal means of engagement with the government and participatory budgeting (Avritzer, 2009; Wampler, 2010), my research also explores informal methods of collective action and community-level agency, supplementing the existing literature of participation in violent settings. Another area of research to complement is the existing literature on collective mobilisation in response to criminal violence (Moncada, 2021, 2013; Ley, Mattiace and Trejo, 2019; Bateson, 2012), as well as collective action in high-risk processes (Ley, 2022; Petersen, 2001; Loveman, 1998) (See Chapters 5 and 6).

Another important body of literature is the governance network research. In a nutshell, governance networks are a means to implement policies via governing processes that are no longer fully controlled by the government. Yet, they are subject to negotiations between a broad array of public, semi-public and private actors, whose interactions give rise to a relatively stable pattern of policy making that constitutes a specific form of regulation, or mode of coordination (Mayntz, 1993). It is this pluricentric mode of coordination that in the literature is dubbed as governance networks.

Milward and Provan (2000, p.362) named the concept of the "hollow state" to illustrate the growing reliance on third parties, often nonprofits and companies, for delivering social services and acting in the name of the state. They highlight the diverse structures, incentives, and mechanisms involved in this transformation. With a related perspective, Sørensen and Torfin (2009) argue that the effective surge of networks of governance, comprising both public and private actors, has more possibilities to address complex issues and enhance democratic participation in public policy-making. This is because it creates more horizontal interactions, and involves more strategic alliances that break with the traditional borders between state and society (Ibid. pp. 235-236). However, the authors caution that such networks may not be exempt from having challenges in making public governance more democratic, in terms of transparency and accountability. In reinforcing the literature on bottom-up participation and state legitimacy, it is important to note that these studies of relations between the state and communities tend to generate networks of trust and interactions that blur the boundaries between public and private, and tie the state and civil society together.

While I recognise that there may be other forms of societal reactions and responses to violence in the region such as vigilantes[6] and armed responses that could be explored, that is beyond the scope and focus of my research. Instead, my focus is to provide an explanation of how different approaches of collective action eventually had an impact on criminal violence in various respects that applied to the particular cases through illustrative examples present in two subnational settings of the north of Mexico. My focus also deviates from the narrative of assumed unidirectional improvements following democratisation that is often made when considering the Global North model (See Tilly, 2004, pp.245–246). This linear improvement did not happen in Mexico with respect to criminal violence.

Finally, there is the state-in-society relations literature. In this research, Migdal (2001) contrasts the Weberian approach of the hierarchical state. Weber defines that the state has the monopoly of the use of force and the capacity to make the rules as tools for the order in a defined political unit (Lassman and Speirs, 1994). In contrast, Migdal undertakes a disaggregated focus when analysing its

[6] In Mexico the literature on vigilantism has been developed on the emergence of the *autodefensas* or self defence forces (See Moncada, 2021; Phillips, 2015).

relations with society, going beyond the classical state-centric notions of capacity. Migdal's ground-breaking work (2001) has been valuable to understand the political interactions between both local communities and the state; as well as local non-state armed actors and state. These insights, for instance, are used by Evans (1996) and Tendler (1997) to explain that community coalitions in Medellin, Colombia created a powerful force with the capacity to build resilience and to negotiate with the state and non-state armed actors that controlled certain territory of the city. I will delve more into these theoretical frameworks in the following chapters.

2.5 Conclusion

I have shown that the crisis of insecurity in Latin America, and the security policies to respond to it, are closely related to the process of democratisation and the quality of democracy. Based on an ample scholarship (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 2013; O'Donnell, 2004, p.36; 1998, 1993), these processes involve (political) democratic elements, such as the rule of law, institution capacity and democratic rights. Furthermore, I explained the importance of focusing on the specific case of Latin America rather than transferring notions of democracy from the Global North, in which strong institutional capacities are usually taken for granted. In the Latin American context, the uneven democracy brought asymmetric power relations between the state and society, particularly within bureaucratic authoritarian regimes (O'Donnell, 1993, 1973). The unevenness of subnational democracy can be a reason why the literature on the dominant national narratives fails to explain the dynamics of criminal violence in the Latin American context. In particular, the role that a collection of actors play (i.e. mayors, governors, police agents, local institutions, local civil society) and the policy responses inside the country (Giraudy, Moncada and Snyder, 2019). Thus, adopting the subnational approach allows me to consider this level of detail, that can uncover the overlapping scales in territory and institutions.

Following this, I considered the importance of state capacity and legitimacy and the role of institutions. The low capacity of the state to curb violence can weaken the rule of law (Koonings and Kruijt, 2006) and legitimacy tends to act against the efficiency of the policies implemented. A fundamental problem in Latina America is the existence of the informal crime-state nexus that has far

reaching consequences. These nexus are deeply rooted in the case of Mexico, where OCGs have developed alongside democratisation processes and grown in power amidst widespread corruption and/or collusion. Through state capture, OCGs have managed to co-opt state agents and institutions (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2012) and present a fundamental point of incapacity of the state to respond to insecurity crises.

The lack of legitimacy, partially related to the state capture by OCGs has wide reaching consequences when it comes to the compliance of civil society to public policies. As noted above, one way to build legitimacy could be to involve civil society in decision making processes. On this front, there are clear gaps in the literature concerning micro-level perspectives. In particular, traditional approaches tend to overlook the commitment (a possible indicator of the expression of trust) by local agencies and networks in the implementation of policy with respect to the perceived legitimacy of institutions.

In addressing the potential role that bottom-up approaches, the literature on governance has shown that the relations between the state and communities can generate networks of trust and interactions that span the multiple actors including public and private actors that have the potential to address complex problems and enhance democratic participation. This is a pluricentric mode of coordination in the literature of governance networks, where Milward and Provan (2000) involve diverse structures, incentives, and mechanisms. These structures can fill the “hollow state” driven by low institution capacity and legitimacy. It also goes a way toward the "Swiss cheese" metaphor of Knight (1990, p.95). On this front, there is still limited research examining the networks between private and public at different levels (national, state and municipal), as well as the formal and informal institutional arrangements in the local level sphere that interact and possibly influence the policy implementation to manage criminal violence.

In the last decades, the security crisis in some places of Latin America have gained the attention of policy-makers, researchers and pundits as a yardstick when considering policies that combat and prevent OCGs’ violence. This leads the thesis to adopt a shifting focus on considering micro-level perspectives that usually are not considered in the framework of democratisation, public policy and

security. A bottom-up view is adopted to policy implementation and multi-level governance frameworks, which emphasises the activity of the different geographical levels of governance. The complex actors and their relationships in the governance actors also further require detailed analysis that is only found at the micro-level.

In analysing the different responses of actors and institutions, I use the literature on collective mobilisation in response to criminal violence (Moncada, 2021, 2013; Ley, Mattiace and Trejo, 2019; Bateson, 2012), and collective action in high-risk processes (Ley, 2022; Petersen, 2001; Loveman, 1998). Moreover, a recent assertion about the role of civil society is that societal mobilisation is "probably a necessary condition for countries to transition to political democracy" and that "mobilisation typically accelerates and solidifies them" (Chenoweth, 2021, p. 243). Thus, this study also provides compelling stories to further expand and provide evidence for these assertions

Overall, this chapter covers the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used in this thesis. It also identifies places where this research has the opportunity to fill in gaps, tie together or extend the existing bodies of literature. The macro-level concepts related to uneven democracy, state capacity, state legitimacy and state capture go a long way to supporting the macro-level analysis of the democratisation and decentralisation of Mexico in Chapter 4. The major contributions of this thesis are clearly related to the role of bottom-up approaches, as this is openly stated in my research questions. In this regard, the importance of formal and informal institutions and the complex interactions between various actors are considered in my micro-level analysis with the case of Ciudad Juárez (Chapter 5) and Monterrey, Nuevo León (Chapter 6).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I identified how my research expands and bridges various bodies of literature. In this Chapter I now describe and justify the multi-methods adopted by this thesis to answer my research questions and meet my research objectives. The primary approach taken to answer my research questions is qualitative research to examine the role of bottom up approaches to respond to criminal violence, amid the context of subnational democratisation. New data is acquired to answer my research questions in the form of field work consisting of semi-structured interviews conducted across two primary locations: Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua and Monterrey (including its Metropolitan Area) in Nuevo León (See Figure 1). The case studies form the bases of my micro-level analysis of bottom-up approaches towards understanding the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to violence and the factors involved in enabling and constraining them.

Figure 1. Map of the north of Mexico showing the outlines of the municipalities of the states of Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon along with the borders of their municipalities. The regions covered by my two case studies are also highlighted: The case of Ciudad Juárez (corresponding to Chapter 5) and the case of Monterrrey and more generally the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey (corresponding to Chapter 6). Source: Own elaboration.

By exploring the trajectory of these two cases, the thesis hopes to make a contribution to the literature on capacity and the politics of violence in Latin America at subnational level. It also provides empirical insights to understand the power dynamics that play in the activation (or not) of societal structures and communities to counter violence, as well as their evolution over space and time (Soifer, 2012).

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: Firstly I describe my research design in section 3.1 This defines my research questions, methods and the rationale for adopting the research methodology. Following this, in the next section I reflect on the fieldwork undertaken, in particular, the unique circumstances and challenges of undertaking fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic. I then provide more details about the evidence materials used to support my analysis in answering my research questions. Finally, I state my personal positionality before concluding the chapter.

3.1 Research Design

As stated in Chapter 1, my core research question is: "*What is the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence in Mexico?"* and as an extension to this *"What are the factors that enable or constrain their responses?"*. I will now describe how I design my research approach to answering these questions.

Historical Institutionalist Approach

I adopted the historical institutionalist approach to direct my research efforts in the formulation and analysis of my case studies at a micro-level, and also in my macro-level analysis. This approach places historical context at the foreground along with the temporal aspects of the phenomena being explored. This approach allows that the research takes special emphasis on time (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002; Pierson, 2000). The institutions are regarded as the primary actors in shaping societal responses to violence in various forms. I am inclusive in the institutions considered, accounting for both formal and informal institutions with very different levels of capacity and maturity (Levitsky and Murillo, 2009). This perspective focuses on the evolution of institutions over time at the local level, how they interact

and how they result in political and social outcomes related to responding to violence. These can take many forms and methods of civil action (Chenoweth, 2021) including large-scale public protests, support groups, pushing for changes in laws, pursuing justice and many others. This temporal aspect is largely captured by framing the national and local historical contexts chronologically in my core chapters, along with the identification of actor pathways across temporal periods.

The historical institutionalist approach often involves historical process tracing as mentioned by Steinmo (2008, p.135), which involves identifying causality (Collier, 2011). I did not rely on this approach within this thesis for various reasons. Tracing the trajectory of institutions with respect to their plans and outcomes is complex in the context of violence in Mexico. Not only because of a lack of official data that explains the causes of the reduction of violence (2012-2015), but also because of the risks involved in doing this, as it often involves interviewing former perpetrators of violence or "security specialists" (Tilly, 2003) that would have required further ethical considerations. There are also few official quality indicators of plans and outcomes and these vary dramatically across the very heterogeneous formal and informal institutions that I consider. Thus, in explaining change, the historical institutionalist literature is ideal for observing the "critical junctures" (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010, p.7) in which institutional norms are relaxed as a consequence of the need to respond to extreme events. Following Yashar et al (2021, pp.117–118), I wanted to be inclusive of different institutions which introduced considerable heterogeneity, and that have various participatory institutions and structures to address violence over time, space and tiers of government. Having said that, I strive to capture the dynamics and interactions of institutions with the perceptions of outcomes and important events from documentary analysis and materials. I hope that my analysis could provide a map of the broad institutions involved for more detailed process tracing in the future.

As explained in Chapter 2, when it comes to democratisation, the case of Mexico is puzzling. As in other Latin American countries, the process of democratisation came with minimalist institutional requirements, arriving at an electoral democracy. Yet, with the transition from the authoritarian regime (O'Donnell, 1993, 2004) Mexico inherited at its periphery an irregular rule of law and weaker bureaucracies than the centre. Although Mexico celebrates fair and competitive elections and complies

with most of the indicators of a democracy (Freedom House, 2019), its democratisation model (and thus, the implementation of policies within it) poses theoretical challenges that explain why we have the dismal situation of violence within some areas of the territory. The processes of national and subnational democratisation are fundamental in framing the context of Mexico, and institutional processes towards democratisation are essential in understanding this process. In Mexico, there is a struggle towards building democratic institutions that guarantee democratic rights. These struggles often involve problems of uneven democracy along with the realities of political alternations and changing (policy and political) objectives. This is also evidenced at the subnational level, where the interactions of formal and informal institutions have implications for democracy. The details of both of these processes are explained in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.

One of my main arguments is that, in the absence of effective state responses, local civil groups in those areas carry out formal and informal responses to violence. Their efforts have been shown to be supported by local actors by making commitments to cooperate in ways that were previously thought unlikely (at least before the "war on drugs"). A preliminary assumption is that macro (traditional) interpretations of democratisation evades these issues, dynamics and realities of actors at the local level, as well as the role that these local communities play to tackle violence at the local level. In this case, evidence suggests that local-level actors and institutions can fill the gap left by limited state capacity and the state's inability to implement and sustain policies.

Justification of the selection of case study

The analysis of my case studies adopt models in comparative politics that focus on the subnational level (Giraudy, Moncada and Snyder, 2019; Snyder, 2001). In particular, by conducting a comparative case-study between two municipalities in Mexico. Adopting this perspective allows me to contrast subnational contexts, to tease apart the fundamental features of both cases and compare them, including a temporal comparison from the historical institutionalist approach. As a research method, using case studies has proved credibility for two reasons. First to enrich the knowledge on particular situations and groups; and second, to complement the knowledge with various sources used in triangulation (Campbell et al., 2020; Yin, 2009). Having said that, the two subnational cases display

very similar characteristics in terms of changing homicides rates corresponding to the federal security policy. In particular, a sharp peak corresponds to a dramatic increase in homicides followed by a rapid decrease to near normal levels (more on this is Chapters 5 and 6).

The temporal periods considered in this thesis are based on events observed in the official Mexican homicide rates statistics from INEGI, related to the so-called "war on drugs". The dynamics vary across locations, but the same principal periods can be observed across the national and municipal levels considered in my case studies. These periods are shown for the case of the national homicide rates in Figure 2. These time-frames are centred around the first wave of violence that corresponds to the security strategy launched by President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). The precise years that define these temporal periods vary a little across contexts, but the patterns in homicidal violence tend to be clear.

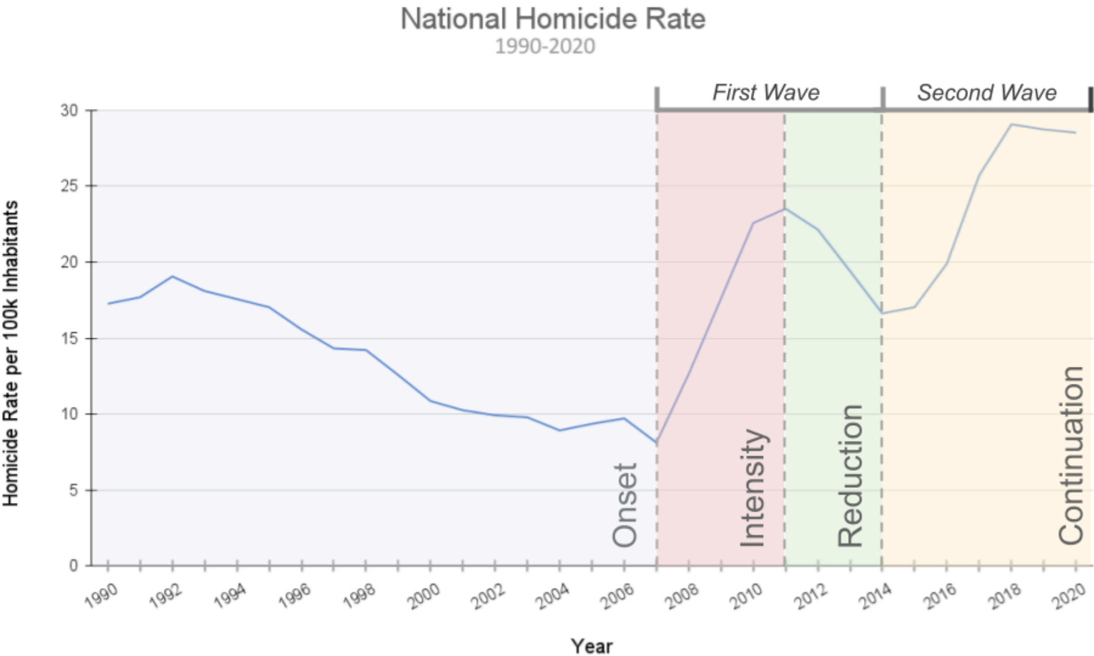

Figure 2. The temporal periods considered in this thesis superimposed over the national homicide rate. These four periods are centred on the first wave of violence consisting of the temporal periods of: onset, intensity, reduction and continuity. Source: Own elaboration with data from INEGI, 2023.

These periods serve the purpose of broad temporal comparative analysis. First, the onset serves to capture the factors or local circumstances (interactions and realities) before the peak in violence such

as pre-existing institutions and local political and historical context. Second, the intensity period captures the violent competition of OCGs and the state's militarised response to them. This temporal period is used to capture the various and massive responses of society to violence. Third, the reduction period serves to capture the outcomes of different responses in the form of societal and state-society alliances in striving to curb violence. Finally, the continuation period helps to understand the more long term effects and/or continuity of bottom-up approaches that were implemented.

I chose the comparative method as it proved to be effective in giving a more nuanced knowledge of "historical processes and individual motivations" (della Porta, 2008, p.202) beyond descriptive statistics. In this case, the *method of agreement* is selected for this study (Ibid, p.204). Though both municipalities of Chihuahua and Monterrey have some important differences, there are enough commonalities that I feel that drawing comparative conclusions about the role of bottom-up responses to violence is possible. Both cases experienced historical levels of violence, particularly during 2008-2011 that were named among the most dangerous cities nation-wide. At the meso-level, the states of Nuevo León and Chihuahua can qualify as cases of "subnational democratisation" (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b; Giraudy, 2012, p.4) following the decentralisation processes and political alternations from late 1980's. These two states in the north of Mexico experienced the transition in electoral process, had major cartel presence and are part of the major smuggling routes (Trejo and Ley, 2020). Among the differences, Nuevo León has been known for being a progressive economic state with one of the highest index scores for human development in Latin America. In contrast, Chihuahua is known for dealing with phenomena such as feminicides, drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, among others.

Ciudad Juárez was founded in 1659, originally in what is today the city of El Paso in Texas. It is located in the northern state of Chihuahua and it borders El Paso. The population tripled from 1970, reaching about 1.2 million in the last decade putting it in the 10 largest cities in Mexico. The rapid expansion of the "maquiladoras" (industrial companies) in the city attracted migrations of disadvantaged workers, mostly women and young people from the south of the country (Conger, 2014). It has been documented since 1980's its social disorganisation because of "income

vulnerability, repeated economic recessions and weak family structures" (Vilalta and Muggah, 2014, p. 9). Moreover, in 1993 the city started to document the atrocious feminicide phenomenon.

Chihuahua state experienced the transition to democracy with the alternation from the hegemonic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) in 1992; even before this was experienced at the federal level in 2000. Decentralisation brought political power to local communities, but the access to power by different local civil groups was marginalised (Topal, 2012). There have been numerous signs of tensions on the part of the central state and local institutions (e.g. the fiscal pact), as well as strained relationships between the municipal and state governments. This has deepened citizen dissatisfaction with the local authorities. Furthermore, there have been numerous journalistic and human rights reports on local agents involved in human rights violations, including threats to journalists and activists.

The state of Nuevo León experienced political alternation later in 1997 when the PAN defeated the PRI in the elections. Its capital, Monterrey has been recognised for its industrial development in Mexico (Conger, 2014). As with the case of Ciudad Juárez, Monterrey experienced a rapid growth in the last 50 years where migrants from small towns and rural areas of the country flocked to the city. The city is the headquarters of the conglomerate group known as “Monterrey Group” (Ibid.). Many links between the heads of those companies are familial or intimate (Ibid.). Moreover, Monterrey executives and the President in turn or federal incumbents are normally well known related to each other.

After being among the most affected cities by the "war on drugs", Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey experienced a gradual decrease in violence with minor fluctuations up until 2019. Both cases have fair and competitive elections and experienced the electoral transition from the dominant party, even before this happened at the federal level in 2000. However, deficiencies within these areas suggest that democracy is not consolidated. My interest is the differentiated factors, processes and advances as a result of the engagement of local communities in policies to curb violence. These subnational cases are among the most characteristic examples of subnational units that managed to significantly

decrease violence. Additional research is needed to further examine and contrast various subnational processes in Mexico to manage violence and involve the participation of local communities.

3.2 Evidence materials and analysis

3.2.1 Interviews

The selection of using interviews for this study allows me to take a more holistic and interpretivist reading from the cases (della Porta and Keating, 2008, p.30). The interviews aim to better understand the factors involved in sets of actions to address criminal violence within the context of uneven democratisation. Following Wood (2006), my focus was on the nature of organisation, variations in social networks, historical factors of violence, political trajectory and possible alliances. In agreement with Wood (Wood, 2003, pp.51–86), the adoption of this approach did not have a linear process. For example, during my fieldwork, I adapted my approach according to the data acquired from the perceptions of participants, taking into account that their perspectives could not be captured through newspaper articles or policy documents.

There were two main periods during which I conducted my interviews. The first period was during fieldwork in Mexico, from February to May 2021 where I conducted face-to-face interviews and, the second, was a longer period where I conducted remote interviews while I was in the UK. These online interviews supplemented my existing interviews and I conducted them remotely due to the complexity of reaching saturation while I was in Mexico during the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section explains the selection criteria of participants.

Sampling (selection criteria)

My participant selection was conducted in two forms: purposive and snowball sampling. The severity of disruption of COVID-19 in Mexico caused some interviews to be postponed as a consequence of personal or family illnesses. In consideration of these and other limitations with snowball sampling (Della Porta and Keating, 2008), I complemented the search with purposive sampling. The initial sample consisted of a strategic selection of actors directly involved in policies and their implementation related to the reduction and prevention of violence or those that are well-versed in the topic. In doing so, I made an extensive search of documents published by the US and Mexican

governments[7], civil society organisations and newspaper articles. The recruitment was made through personal and professional contacts in Mexico who acted as gatekeepers with the local people involved in those policies. The following section illustrates the subgroups of participants for this research.

Participant Characterisation

There are clear subgroups among my participants that characterise their roles and status in society. These consist of various state and society actors:

Elite actors: This subgroup involves traditional economic elites, and public officials, whose knowledge and experience contributed significantly to illuminate the realities, actors, interests and practices in play in policy design and/or implementing measures to violence at the local level.

Street level officials: This subgroup presents experiences and dilemmas on the field, and are highlighted as part of the policy decision-making bottom up scholarship (Lipsky, 2010), and public servants that have worked and interacted with the society in the implementation of policies, such as police agents. I considered interviewees from the three levels of government.

Local society: organisations, social movements and/or members, academics, that can include local community leaders, human rights defenders and journalists. In line with security and legal concerns for this research and in the host country, former perpetrators of violence were considered as they are also part of the civil society.

I identified key elite participants and public officials depending on their level of experience and participation in decision making and implementation of security policies, particularly during and after the second period related to the intensity of violence (see Chapters 5 and 6). This last category of participants took longer to reach and is the least represented in the sample. In order to complement this gap, I explored reports from their organisations, declarations to the press and local newspapers.

[7] As illustrated in Chapter 5 and 6, Juárez and Monterrey became the centre of attention of US-Mexico binational policy-makers, especially during the shift of priorities of the Merida Initiative and the participation of the Agency for International Development, USAID (Olson, 2017).

The initial contact was made through a personalised email sent from my official email-account (*See* Appendix D). In that electronic communication, I introduced myself and presented the aims and objectives of my research. The same process was made when participants decided to establish initial contact through WhatsApp. In all the initial forms of interaction, I attached a "Participant Information Sheet" and a "Consent Form" (*See* Appendices B and C). These documents contained the details of the study, the interview information and the data privacy declaration.

From a total list of around 70 participants, and the necessary adjustments to fit in the selection criteria, the final number of interviews considered for this research was 57. These included two collective interviews, where either 2 or 3 members of an organisation attended the interview at the same time. The majority of interviewees were or had been part of a network or an organised society. Due to their profile and experiences, sometimes it was difficult to place participants in one single participant category (*See* Appendix A). After interviews, I applied the snowballing technique by asking participants for recommendations for further participants for the study. This is usually helpful as it can reveal an ample number of acquaintances from the elite interviewee's own network (Tansey, 2007). This research also considered digital tools for participant selection, such as X (formerly Twitter) or Facebook, as they have become well-accepted tools used by social organisations.

Interviews were semi-structured for the two cases study (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). These include civil society organisations, communitarian leaders, members of the business sector, academics, and faith leaders, police agents (*See* Appendix A). During the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were conducted under multiple modalities: when possible, face to face, online (Zoom) and by phone (Whatsapp call). The interviews had a duration of approximately 45 minutes per participant, the longest being 2 hours. Follow-up communication was made with 2 participants, in search for details of the intense period of violence. The interviews began with semi-structured, open-ended questions, allowing the participants to elaborate upon details they considered important. At least half of the conversation was improvised in accordance with the initial questions of my *aide memoire*. There was no payment involved. Furthermore, I stated these interviews were for academic purposes.

Before the interview, I provided to all participants a "Participant Information Sheet" and a "Consent Form" (*See* Appendices B and C), in which explained what my research project was, and I also asked them for their consent to participate and requested for consent about recording the interview. I made sure to keep all the data anonymised and pseudonymised (Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015), by removing all personal information that could lead to the identification of my participants. The next section provides a reflection of the fieldwork.

3.2.2. Fieldwork

Working in places with problems of security has always been critical. For this reason, Concerning the ethical aspects of this approach, I sought and was granted clearance to conduct my fieldwork. When conducting research in situations of conflict, one important element to gain access is trust (Moncada, 2021; Celestina, 2018; Wood, 2006). In this case, the interaction with local residents and the contact of participants through intermediaries (gatekeepers) was core, given the sensitiveness of the topic. Another strategy was to build a good rapport with my interviewees while implementing the snowball sampling strategy to eventually reach participants from elite positions.

Given the sensibility and risk of the research field, I took extra precautions for maintaining my own safety and the safety of my participants. I was aware of the challenges of collecting data in violent contexts and the vulnerabilities given the condition of the researcher's gender, class and ethnicity (Gill, Barbour and Dean, 2014; Punch, 2012). For my own safety, I implemented a "check in" system, whereby a person who I had regular communication about my personal safety, would implement a protocol in case of missed communication. Through fieldwork I used all my notes and digital recordings with pseudonyms and anonymised possible identifiers. This included when participants shared with me their Whatsapp (the app has end-to-end encrypted backup), as in Mexico is a common practice that helps to build bonds of trust. This situation is mentioned in Moncada (2021, p.202)

Fieldwork was helpful for developing a deep knowledge of the space, contexts and the complexities in which societal organisations engaged in collective action. When I was travelling to conduct my face to face interviews in Juárez, I noticed that the urban scenery of the city was itself an

important expression of their actions of resistance. During all the process of collection of data, I was mindful of the power imbalances and inequalities that may be in place. When face-to-face interviews were possible, they took place in different places, such as public or personal offices, parks and cafés. During the course of fieldwork, I noticed the capacity of social actors to adapt to the uncertain circumstances. For example, women's advocates did not stop running refugee centres or offices during lockdown. Another example was when I arrived at the appointment for an interview in a hotel in Juárez, where I realised that the entire place had been converted into an improvised shelter for migrants and asylum seekers to treat people with COVID-19. This occurred in the context when the Trump administration issued the "Title 42" policy.

During the interviews, I tried to make them feel comfortable by explaining to them that they could pause, avoid or withdraw anytime. I noticed that I generated sympathy with my participants as a researcher sponsored by the National Council of Humanities, Science and Technology, CONAHCyT (former CONACyT) in Spanish. Interviews with street-level bureaucrats enriched a bigger picture of their experiences in the implementation of the field and their closer contact with the society. While in some cases it was easier to share the pitfalls of the security policies implemented, in others it was reticence due to fear of retaliation by their hierarchies. The participants in both cases noted a historical political disengagement between the state government and the central-federal, which is an element that I took into consideration in the study.

As the literature asserts, it is common among early stage researchers to find that talking to people about sensitive issues can result in strong emotional reactions (Schulz and Kreft, 2021). Even when it was not the focus of this study, people were open in their difficult experiences with violence. I could not avoid having periods in the UK of negative thoughts, which were treated with psychological therapy. It also came to my attention that given the context, participants omitted some evidence of the situation itself, such as avoiding certain details of facts. These were later complemented with the rest of the interviews and the collection and triangulation of data.

3.2.3 Transcription and thematic analysis

Most of my interviews (except for one in English) were conducted in Spanish. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were created in Spanish and I translated the specific information that would be used into the English language. Given regional expressions that are characteristic in the north of Mexico, sometimes the translation was a challenge. I am a native Spanish speaker and I am familiar with the overall context. However, I had to ensure that meanings and interpretations were properly conveyed, taking into consideration their perceptions, experiences and contexts. Finally, I used the software package NVivo to transcribe and analyse the documents and field notes.

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method used in qualitative studies for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In the work of Braun and Clarke (2019; 2017; 2006), thematic analysis involves the following phases: 1. Familiarise yourself with your data; 2. Generate initial codes; 3. Search for themes; 4. Review the themes; 5. Define and name the themes; and, 6. Produce a report. Reflexive thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible and organic approach, in which the development of themes can evolve throughout the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

In using TA, the analysis conducted in this thesis took both an inductive and deductive approach. During the first phase, "Familiarise yourself with your data", I got familiar with the interviews dataset during the transcriptions, listening, translating, and extracting initial notes. In the second phase, "generate initial codes", I was initially generating codes from a deductive approach, for example some initial codes were "proactive citizen behaviour". One of the ways of linking the different set of local society collective actions examined in this thesis was through the identification of recurring themes.

The third phase, "search for themes", took longer, as the codebook was generated once all the codes were in place and then followed a process of revision. From a universe of codes, I only selected those concepts that mostly adapted to the ends of this thesis in generating themes. In the fourth and fifth phases, the decision to add temporality as an important factor, facilitated the process to identify themes. For example, in the literature on contentious politics, different social mobilisations with common characteristics were renamed as "Actor Pathways". Then, I Identified the different

sub-themes. In the final phase, I reported the results in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 7 offers a further analysis using the selected themes.

3.2.4 Documentary materials

As noted by Bowen (2009), "documents contain text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention" (p.27). Documentary materials are useful for this study given that an important part of it is based on historical facts. Moreover, given the complexities involved in the study and measurements of violence, a combination of different sources is necessary. The triangulation of these primary and secondary sources enabled me to develop data's reliability and interpretation (Yin, 2009). Both the analytical discussions and interpretations for the context and the power interactions within those violent areas, were underpinned from the theoretical frameworks and secondary data. There is important literature on democratisation, institution capacity, policy implementation and organised crime violence in Mexico and Latin America. Thus, digital repositories containing policy documents, theses, books, journal articles, were available on some libraries' websites.

This thesis mostly engages with primary data. In statistical figures, my search also consisted of gathering data on international organisations, such as the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Bank. In Mexico, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI, in Spanish) is the official and main repository on crime and criminal justice statistics. An important quantitative value is the homicide rate statistics. This is used to define a clear set of temporal periods that coincide with changes in the extent of violence (in terms of lethality) over time. Although the statistical homicide rate does not reflect the overall reality of violence within a territory, it is still the most accepted unit of analysis by policy makers (Doyle, 2019) and it provides a rough estimation of the changing intensity of violence.

Secondary data includes analysis of policy documents, daily newspapers, journals and publications on relevant websites. When data was not available publicly, I used different sources. I made requests to the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data

Protection (INAI) to access official data that is non available online. This included policy documents of the historical period (1983-2005), such as the State Development Plan (*Plan Estatal de Desarrollo*) for the cases of Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon; and the Municipal Development Plan Nacional (*Plan Municipal de Desarrollo*) for Juárez and Chihuahua. When the sanitary restrictions relaxed, I had access to the National Newspaper Archive of Mexico (*Hemeroteca Nacional de México*). There, I revised several journal articles from both places, particularly from the historic period 1983-1998. The journals revised for this period were El Porvenir, El Diario de Juárez and El Norte. For more recent periods, I complemented the search with El Diario de Juárez, El Norte, as well as national and international journal articles. I regularly checked the website of the official institutions and organisations of the two cases of study. (See Appendix E). Finally, I used visualisations to facilitate the representation of the data.

3.3 Limitations

Though homicide statistics are the most accepted evidence to measure crime among policy-makers, I am mindful of the concerns about the need for improving evidence-based measures to violence. Among the problems of crime statistics in Latin America are the lack of government capacities to capture data and the high number of crimes that go unreported due to impunity (Rocha, Rodgers and Weegels, 2023; MUCD, 2021). For this reason, I complement the analysis with further secondary sources, such as reports from civil society organisations of the places of study.

I encountered a lack of information at the local level on different themes and periods of time. Beyond the data obtained from official sources such as the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, in Spanish), the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP), as well as media coverage, information that reflects the local realities of criminal governance remains limited. Along with these shortcomings, the official data at a national level has gone through different methodologies and are based on crimes reported to the Fiscalias (state prosecutors) when more than 90% of crimes in the country were under-reported (INEGI, 2020).

3.4 Positionality

In order to better place my research and analysis, I should state my background. I am a Mexican woman of colour, whose native language is Spanish. I was born and raised in Mexico City, coming from a family of migrants from the southern state of Guerrero, one of the poorest states in Mexico. I studied International Relations in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and worked around five years in the Attorney General's Office (then PGR, now FGR) in Mexico City. Thus, I have lived the experiences and multiple institutional changes within the federal law enforcement and security institutions, during the mandates of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). I pursued my Masters degree in the same subject in a Western European university. Thus, I developed this thesis with a political analysis informed and supervised from the University of York. Therefore, I am conscious of the biases and preconception standards that that implies in the research design and knowledge production in my study. In this sense, I would say that in my interactions with my participants, I fall within the notions highlighted in Chavez (2008) in which I deal with the insider/outsider. That is, I am Mexican and speak the same language as my participants as a native, but I come from a different region of the country, with an academic viewpoint, an institutional environment and preconception of beliefs that various interviewees may not identify with.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the methods used in this thesis to address my research questions and objectives. My qualitative research combines micro-level and macro-level analyses of primary and secondary documents, with a particular emphasis on the micro-level analysis of fieldwork conducted in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey. In these locations I conducted semi-structured interviews with a broad range of participants using the snowball sampling method for participant selection.

The research design uses a comparative case-study framework, that allows for a nuanced exploration of subnational contexts. I use the historical institutionalist approach that serves as the theoretical foundation for my analysis, focusing on the evolution of formal and informal institutions

over time and their role in responding to criminal violence. The diverse range of participants, including elite actors, street-level officials, and civil society representatives provided a diverse and heterogeneous set of experiences to base my analysis on. In particular, these interview responses along with secondary documentations allow me to better identify the dynamics of formal and informal institutions in response to violence based on historical, political, and social factors that shaped these responses. This is given additional structure by the temporal analysis of distinct periods, centering around the "war on drugs", that are used across all analyses to aid in comparing subnational responses.

By combining theoretical frameworks and empirical fieldwork, my methodology allows me to contribute valuable insights into the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence and consider factors enabling or constraining these responses. The outcome of this will be shown over the following chapters where over my macro-level analysis of the process of democratisation in Mexico, followed by my case studies of Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey, providing a complex exploration of the historical, institutional, and societal dynamics that shape the local responses to criminal violence.

Chapter 4: Revisiting democratisation and the security policy in Mexico, from 1980 to 2022

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I considered the theoretical foundations of democratisation within the broader context of Latin America before shifting the narrative to the enigmatic case of Mexico, a nation that appears to be characterised by well-established democratic institutions, but that is suffering from a crisis of criminal violence. In that chapter, I asserted that one explanation for this might be the lack of awareness of the subnational (local) level in the implementation of the security policy. In particular, the role that institutions, civil society and communities at the local level might play to counter violence. Additionally, Chapter 2 illuminated a common feature of Latin America, that the boundaries between organised crime and the state often become indistinct.

This chapter follows in a similar vein by exploring the trajectory of democratisation in Mexico alongside organised crime violence. Given this landscape, this chapter aims to understand the capabilities of the Mexican state in the implementation of security policies. In looking solely at the macro-level perspective of democratisation, I argue that the capabilities and dynamics of the different institutions, civil society and the state, particularly at the local level, have been overlooked in the dominant to Mexico's policy to curtail violence. The groundwork that is laid here paves the way for my subsequent exploration of bottom-up approaches to respond to violence in my two cases studies of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, in Chapter 5, and Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, in Chapter 6. In those chapters, the overarching goal is to comprehend how civil society and communities activated collectively to address the deficiencies in the subnational capacity to curb violence.

Following the political alternation from the PRI to PAN party, Mexico took its first steps as an electoral democracy. However, the form of democratisation that took place was not a unilinear development. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, recent scholarship has evidenced that most Latin American countries have subnational variations across and within countries (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b, p.6; Moncada, 2013; O'Donnell, 1993), which in this thesis I call uneven democracy. The

nature of political fragmentation within an uneven democracy is crucial when considering the ability to understand Mexico's state capacities in territorial control and protection of its citizens. The fundamental structure of the democracy that unfolded goes a long way towards explaining limited state capacity and to understanding and addressing issues involved in their repressive measures. Hence, I use state capacity as an analytical approach. As stated in Chapter 2, I draw on O'Donnell's (O'Donnell, 1993, p.1358) observation of the heterogeneity "across the territory and the functional relations" among society and with it. What complicates the narrative on state capacity, is the role of OCGs in infiltrating the state through state capture, collusion or systemic corruption (Grillo, 2012; Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2012).

Besides the political alternation, drug traffickers and more generally, OCGs became more diverse, fragmented and became more violent (Carbajal Glass, 2020). During the times of the PRI's monopoly of violence, OCGs had established a form of "impunity tax" with state authorities as an exchange for turning a blind eye in their distribution of drugs. When those informal networks were disrupted, OCGs had strong incentives to capture the state, particularly local level territories, and infiltrate security institutions, reaching agents in high-ranked positions[8]. As a consequence of these informal arrangements by various OCGs, multiple criminal representatives can have an influence in certain political and bureaucratic positions of their interest, which is usually security and law enforcement areas. This infiltration of the security apparatus of Mexico is deeply problematic for the effectiveness of the legal system. As O'Donnell (2004, p.32) well depicted, rule of law is core for the quality of democracy. Without a robust rule of law upheld by an impartial judiciary, individual rights remain vulnerable, posing a threat to the well-being and dignity of all citizens.

[8] One infamous case is the conviction in February 2023, in the US of Genaro Garcia Luna, former Secretary of the Federal Police during the "war on drugs". (See Chapter 5).

Through the process of democratisation, Mexico did not undergo comprehensive security sector reform[9], nor did it establish effective mechanisms of accountability. Here, Tiscornia's (2023) research suggests that post-conflict countries that successfully implemented extensive security sector reforms and established robust accountability mechanisms, while maintaining low militarisation in their police forces, tend to experience lower levels of violence. This correlation lies in the fact that reduced militarisation curtails the inclination of the police to use force, thereby changing its operational logic and organisational dynamics. Up until the present day, Mexico has failed in providing security to its citizens.

Since the 1990s, lethal violence in Mexico has fluctuated. At the beginning of the period of analysis one can observe that, according to INEGI's statistics, there had been a general decline in homicides from the 1990s to early 2000s, but this number began to rise again dramatically (*See* Figure 3). From a homicide rate of 8.19 per 100,000 in 2007, the rate increased to 23.84 per 100,000 inhabitant in 2011. Numerous studies have claimed that this violent outbreak was driven by the increased activity of OCGs and the state crackdowns (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Schedler, 2014; Castellanos, 2013; Grillo, 2012; Chabat, 2010b). The unprecedented levels of violence were more evident when President Felipe Calderón launched the so-called "war on drugs" in December 2006. This is a top-down security policy measure that took a heavy-handed militarised approach to decapitate OCGs. Following this, there was a fragmentation and diversification of OCGs that led to increased violence during the presidency of Peña Nieto, though I do not explore the security policy in detail.

This chapter aims to characterise Mexico's democracy that unfolded following the political alternation from the PRI to PAN and how the "war on drugs" was implemented and received in this newly democratised Mexico. To do this I take a macro level perspective of democracy and the top-down security strategy, which is then complemented in Chapters 5 and 6 with a micro level

[9] The Security Sector Reform (SSR) is aimed at countries impacted by conflict and violence, normally encompassing a comprehensive approach that addresses disarmament, the military, police, the judiciary, as well as accountability mechanisms. (Sedra, 2017; OECD, 2005)

analysis of two case studies. The benefit of exploring both perspectives is that I can observe potential compatibilities and incompatibilities that could exist between both perspectives with regards to various features such as, for example, resources, political and public support and political objectives. This is also an opportunity to revisit what it seems a fragmented state, which can provide alternative perspectives to the dominant security responses, which are frequently militarised and heavy handed.

This chapter explains the paradox of why Mexico both pursued democratisation but counterintuitively became increasingly militarised. An explanation suggested in this work is that democratisation required tackling the OCGs, however the state was too limited to handle this at a local level and so relied on the military to fill gaps of state (in)capacity. Hence, the militarisation has been the Mexican government's solution within a democracy (Osorio Reyes, 2022). Following this, I argue that the top-down security policy did not consider two analytical approaches that shape the local level and the civil society landscape in Mexico: awareness of the local societal dynamics, and the fragmentation of actors and institutions caused by uneven and incomplete democratisation and their capacity to navigate within this space. Both of these require the participation of the local level. As we will see in chapters 5 and 6 these were mechanisms considered by bottom-up approaches in enforcing democratic rights.

Though my focus in this chapter is on the macro level, it is important to bear in mind how I intend to relate this to the micro level in later chapters. From the macro level, the top-down official narrative is often on eradicating or dismantling OCGs using coercive force, however this has not been translated into more safety for citizens. On the contrary, there have been local communities that have resorted to defend themselves and some have used extralegal violence to resist criminal violence[10]. I take the broader view of how OCGs have subverted Mexico's process of democratisation. With this view in mind, my focus will be on how bottom-up approaches fill in the gaps that result from low state capacity to support democratic rights of justice and security to people affected by OCGs.

[10] There are some cases of the organisation of local communitarian forms of security regulated by indigenous systems (traditions and customs), as well as self-defence forces to resist criminal violence (Herrera and Martinez-Alvarez, 2022; Moncada, 2021; Ley, et al., 2019).

Having elucidated the state fragmentation and the implications of democratisation, this chapter is organised as follows:

In section 4.1, I provide a very broad overview of Mexico to better characterise it in terms of its social, political and security context. I present it against the backdrop of Latin America by using key indicators that allow for relative comparison based on societal factors such as inequality and corruption before briefly detailing the history of organised crime groups. Then, in section 4.2, I analyse the administration of the first opposition party after the demise of the hegemonic PRI, portraying national exposure of further fragmentation. In particular, the attempts at decentralisation and the initial increase in the use of the military.

In section 4.3, I explore the role of the military in Mexico as the bases for understanding why they have been used to combat OCGs and insecurity in general. This then leads to section 4.4, in which I explore the strategy to respond to OCGs from 2006-2022 largely focusing on the so-called "War on Drugs" of President Felipe Calderón but also the continuation of militarised responses under the Presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024). It is during this time-span that violence grew to unprecedented levels as the policy inadvertently contributed to the further fragmentation of OCGs, diversifying them and making them predatory towards citizens. In Section 4.5, I analyse two analytical elements that the security policy has neglected at the local level before finally concluding the chapter in section 4.6.

4.1.1 An Overview of Mexico

This section provides a snapshot of Mexico and its context in Latin America. In particular, its social and political landscape, relevant social indicators and an account of the magnitude of organised crime violence. This provides the relevant general background information to support the analysis of democracy and the security situation as well as providing a reasonable expectation of the general conditions of civil society and institutions in Mexico.

Mexico is at a unique position in Latin America, connecting Central and South America to the rest of North America. The nation is home to a diverse population of 126 million people (INEGI, 2020), the majority of which reside in fairly large urban centres. The most populous of these is

Mexico City, with a population of over 8 million inhabitants. However, there are many other large urban centres with populations ranging between 1 and 2 million people such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey. Geographically speaking, Mexico has a wide array of climates, spanning from arid deserts in the northern regions, where it shares 3000 km of border with the United States, to tropical jungles in the south along its boundary with Guatemala. Mixed into these different climates numerous mountain ranges covering much of the country, and is positioned on the Ring of Fire, having many active volcanoes.

It shares a 3,000 km border with the United States, the major consumer for most illicit drugs that originate and flow from and through Mexico. In addition, Mexico is a source, transit and in more recent years a destination for asylum seekers and migrants searching for safety and a better life (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). While the intricate relationship between Mexico and the US is not a primary focus of this thesis, it undeniably forms an integral part of the broader transnational context of this thesis relating to OCGs.

4.1.2 Key social indicators

To better capture a broad view of the context of Mexico, it is worth positioning Mexico in its regional and global context using quantitative indicators. Mexico is categorised as "high" in the Human Development Index[11] in which Mexico scored 0.758 in 2021, coming somewhere in the middle among Latin American countries. This changes when looking at inequality in particular. Here, Latin America as a whole ranks second worst in inequality worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2014). Mexico still stands out as one of the most unequal countries. To get an impression of what this inequality looks like, Chancel et al. (2022) show that the income of the top 10% of earners is 30 times greater than that of the bottom 50%. Moreover, they note that this inequality has been a longstanding problem in Mexico, not having shown a strong reduction in inequality during the 20th century.

Along with inequality, poverty has been an ongoing problem in Mexico. In terms of income inequality, Mexico had a poverty rate of 69% in 1996 and spent much of the 2000s and 2010s around

[11] The Human Development Index is a measure that tries to capture quality and duration of life, literacy and standard of living.

40-50% where it recently reduced dramatically to 36.3% in 2022 (CONEVAL, 2022, 2010). The consequence of inequality and poverty is that there are many individuals with a low standard of living and insecurity that would struggle to improve their situation in their lifetime. Inequality also leads to power dynamics where economic elites hold a disproportionate amount of power in the economy and politics by diverting political and economical decisions towards their interests (Esquivel Hernandez, 2015; Sorensen, 2008, p.70).

4.1.3 Organised criminal violence in Mexico

According to the Global Organised Crime Index 2023, Mexico was the third country with the highest criminality rate in the world (GITOC, 2023). Moreover, the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023) gives a ballpark figure for the degree to which a country is peaceful both internally and on the global stage. In the last few years the GPI for Mexico has been around 2.6, increasing from around 2.1 since their records began in 2008. It is also important to note that insecurity issues are not evenly distributed in Mexico. The highest (worst) MPI (Mexican Peace Index) score is the state of Colima with a score of 4.5 in 2022, while the lowest is Yucatan with a score of 1.449.

In Latina America, Mexico has a similar profile and GPI scores to Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela in 2023 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023) while other Latina American countries rank lower in their GPI. Another interesting pattern that the report notes is the very low Mexico's expenditure percentage of its GDP (as of 2022) on its security and justice system (0.6 percent). This is the lowest among (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) OECD Latin American countries, with only 4.4 judges and magistrates per 100,000 people. This presents an important general gauge of Mexico, a country with high concentrations of violence in some states and with low spending on security and justice. Moreover, crime victimisation is a significant problem among the Mexican population. The 2023 AmericasBarometer revealed that around 26% of citizens in the country have been a victim of a crime, above the average in the region (23%) (Castorena et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Mexico recorded the highest levels of corruption among the OECD countries according to Transparency International (2023) , with a score of 31 points in the corruption perceptions index[12]. This places it at 126 out of 180 evaluated countries. Corruption hampers the legitimacy of public figures and institutions, wastes public finances and more generally hampers the ability of policies to be passed and adequately implemented. Corruption and inequality go hand in hand to create a wide plethora of problems in terms of security and politics. Those at the lower extreme of the inequality divide are more vulnerable to serve as the prime recruitment ground for OGCs, as they provide one of the few escape routes out of poverty towards an idealised life.

The Global Impunity Index (GII)[13] placed Mexico at 65/67 in 2017 and 60/69 in 2020 which places it among the most impune countries in the Americas in those times. More generally, the GII trend approximately follows the homicide rate trend for Mexico as a whole. The GII-2020 report attributes this impunity to a low number of security at 1.05 vs 1.8 officers per 100,000 which is the international minimum. While judges are at half of the average of Latin America at 2.17 per 100,000. They put all of this down to “high crime and homicide rates and institutional collapse” in Mexico (Le Clercq and Rodriguez Sanchez Lara, 2021, pp.22–23). This strongly indicates the problem of impunity in the country.

In a more political and historical overview, one of the main factors of insecurity surrounding OCGs in Latin America was in the 1980s, when the US closed the Caribbean drug route. At this point, Mexico became the landbridge for cocaine shipments from Colombia (Grillo, 2012). This had major implications on the increase of flow of money and began to shape drug trafficking and the relationship of the traffickers with the state (Smith, 2021, pp.338–339). Besides cocaine, marijuana has been a major product, since 2010 the more dominant drugs shipped have been methamphetamine, opium and more recently fentanyl. In the 1980s there were only two main networks of traffickers, the Gulf Cartel and the Guadalajara Cartel, which grew to dozens of significant regional groups in the 2000s and

[12] Out of a scale of highly corrupt (0) to 100 (not corrupt).

[13] The Global Impunity Index is based on unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of a country's population.

2010s (Calderón et al., 2021). These prominent groups include the Sinaloa cartel, Juárez cartel, Beltran Leyva, Arellano Félix, the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, La Familia and, more recently, the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) and their multiple diversification and fragmented cells (Kloppe-Santamaría and Cruz, 2023).

Scholars have noted that the fragmentation of the OCGs came from multiple factors including: the influence US "kingpin" strategy to take out high-profile leaders of criminal groups, resulting in power vacuums; the changing nature of the criminal markets; and political alternation also led to changes in informal allegiances between state-protection and criminals leading to further fracturing (Calderón et al., 2021; Durán-Martínez, 2018; Astorga, 2009). Soon after the federal militarised intervention, their reconfiguration has led them to violent competition for their territory (turf) against other OCGs and state authorities (Phillips, 2015). Criminal groups diversified their activities including extortion, kidnapping, human smuggling, firearms trafficking, illegal mining and various forms of theft (Carbajal Glass, 2020; Durán-Martínez, 2018). Since then, no security strategy has significantly diminished organised crime, and in fact, a recent quantitative study estimated the number of OCG recruitments to range between 160,000 and 185,000 strong (Prieto-Curiel, Campedelli and Hope, 2023). Overall, the organised crime landscape has changed drastically leaving devastating human consequences.

The security crisis landscape in Mexico is notably contributed by the high homicidal violence associated with criminal groups (International Crisis Group, 2022b) Dating back to 2006 when President Felipe Calderón introduced the strategy to counter OCGs, the nation has witnessed a staggering number of over 250,000 homicides, with some estimates of OCG related homicides at one to two thirds of all homicides (Calderón et al., 2021). As well as homicides, there is also a crisis of disappearances totalling 85,000 individuals which of course may be unsolved homicides, as the result of human trafficking or other crimes (Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas, 2021). Lethal violence has extended beyond inter-cartel violence, the police and the military, to special targets such

as government officials, political candidates and journalists[14] (Calderón et al., 2021). The attacks on journalists drive people towards self-censorship while the attacks on political officials also damages the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. These later attacks include former and current mayors, city councillors, and legislators and are likely directed at swaying the power of informal relationships between OCGs and the state (Ibid.).

The security response in Mexico to OCGs has involved the deployment of military operations, alongside what Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2021, p.519) describe as "the constabularization" of the army, whereby military forces assume roles similar to those of police officers, fundamentally altering the role and function of the armed forces in drug enforcement (Chabat, 2010b, p.5). This process of constabularization happened gradually since the 1980s and has continued to today[15]. This approach aligns with a broader trend in Latin America to use the military for crime control[16] and it has been shown that this approach enjoys popular public support, despite not being very effective and despite evidence that it leads to an increase in violence (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021; Castellanos, 2013; Chabat, 2010b).

I show below the relationship between militarised responses and presidencies clearly in Figure 3. Especially after Felipe Calderón launched the so-called 'War on Drugs' and from 2008 there was a dramatic increase in homicides. Initially under Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI) there was a clear reduction, before increasing mid-presidency and reaching new heights by the end of his presidency. This has been attributed to fragmentation of various criminal groups and diversification of their activities along with a continued reliance on the militarised response (International Crisis Group, 2022b). The subsequent session will explore the process of decentralisation, shedding light on the strategy's implications and intricacies.

[14] Mexico has appeared in the ranking of the 12 deadliest countries for journalists in the world for the past 13 years running (Calderón et al, 2021).

[15] A substantial body of 67,000 troops has been engaged in extensive policing operations since 2006. (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021, p. 519)

[16] For example, Fiona Macaulay's (2017, p. 250) work highlights how after the democratisation of Brazil there remained strong influence of militarisation in the police and in the enactment and delivery of law enforcement policies.

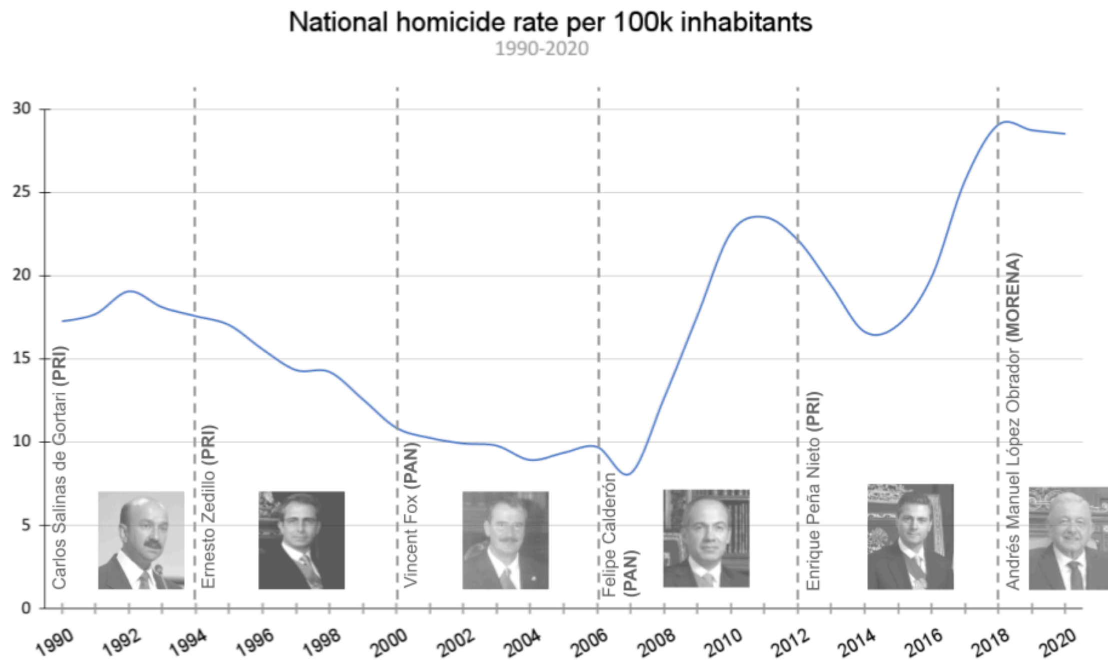

Figure 3. Mexico's homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants, from 1990-2020, with president start date, name, party and picture. The denominator of the rate for the period 1990-2019 corresponds to the population projections for 2016-2050 from the National Population Council (CONAPO) and the Demographic Reconciliation of Mexico, 1950-2015. Source: Own elaboration with data from the National Institute of Geography and Information Statistics (INEGI), July 2023.

4.2 Efforts towards Decentralisation

This section explores the process towards decentralisation and democratisation starting in the 1980s under the PRI and then under the subsequent executive governments of the PAN and the implications for the security strategy. A major argument made in this thesis is that uneven democracy is a fundamental factor in understanding the security crises responses from both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

4.2.1 Initial moves towards decentralisation under the hegemonic Single-Party Rule

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), once described as a "perfect dictatorship" (País, 1990), maintained its political dominance for a span of 71 years. The Mexican government employed a governance model characterised by electoral and by a "bureaucratic authoritarian" state, as O'Donnell (1973) labelled to refer to emergent regimes in South America. Despite the party's pervasive influence

within Mexican society, Alan Knight observed that its ideological framework, rather than being absolute, more closely resembles a metaphorical "Swiss cheese" (Knight, 1990, p.95). In expanding on this metaphor, I assert that the Swiss cheese analogy also applies to broader hierarchical control mechanisms operative within Mexico. There might be overarching control structures at the upper levels of authority; however, as with Swiss cheese, these structures have the tendency to degrade at the local level. Consequently, there is not uniformity in top-down control through to lower levels of control and instead there is a nuanced and the uniformity and comprehensiveness of control mechanisms diminish as one descends through the hierarchical strata, delineating a nuanced and varied landscape of governance within the Mexican political framework.

The presidency of Mexico has the right to exercise power over most aspects of the political process. Abuse of this power, coupled with the very hierarchical structure of the PRI and loyalty based advancement, led to a hiper-centralised government system. As Edmonds-Poli (2006) points out, Mexico under the PRI was "one of the most hierarchical and centralised in the world, with administrative, political and financial power firmly concentrated in the hands of the president and central [federal] government" (p. 388).` This centralised system led to various problems such as low administrative capacity and poor responsiveness to state and local demands as well as lack of accountability. Having said this, it should not be conflated with the idea of a centralised government with a government that has complete and all-pervasive reach. This centralisation describes the direction of power from its long arms to the seat of power, rather than the extent of direct power.

Though the government under the PRI was extremely centralised, the party did acknowledge a need for decentralisation. President de la Madrid instigated a reform in 1983 designed to decentralise federal agencies and shirk responsibility at the federal level. This reform would pave the way for heightening focus on empowering the municipal level. Then, the last president of the PRI, Ernesto Zedillo was committed to electoral reform and reinforcing democratic changes (Camp, 2015). In particular, he oversaw the 1996 Electoral Reform, which was passed by a PRI controlled Chamber of Deputies. This saw the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE, now INE) become independent from the executive branch and promoted fair allocation of public funds assigned to parties participating in the

elections (Ibid). These reforms were, in part, a continued response to the public outcry following the 1988 election fraud which forced the PRI to negotiate new electoral laws with the opposition parties. The changes in these laws, for the first time in Mexican political history, produced a largely fraud-free presidential election in 1994 when Zedillo was elected (Ibid.). The reform of the IFE and its later incarnation of the National Electoral Institute (INE) along with the willingness to accept political alternation by Zedillo cemented Mexico on its path towards electoral democracy.

Beyond electoral reforms, Zedillo also created a project of decentralisation called “Nuevo Federalismo” (New Federalism), which focused on the “vigorous and sustained national and regional economic development” and new “intergovernmental relations based on the principles of cooperation and coordination”[17] (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 1997). This was arranged into 10 objectives which promoted greater union, redistribution in terms of power, function and autonomy, greater intergovernmental cooperation and financial reforms. This did result in some changes such as an increase in state revenue, but ironically, this additional income did not translate into more autonomy as the gubernatorial states had to rely on federal decisions on how this money should be spent. Zedillo also reformed Article 115 of the Constitution in 1999 towards greater decentralisation that among other things gave municipalities the right to control their local police forces. Ultimately these reforms did not go far enough in redistributing power and decision making to local authorities to satisfy voters.

Thus, the method of control the PRI established was to cultivate informal relationships across different levels of societal strata, both through formal and informal networks built upon party loyalty (Pansters, 2012). The party had the capacity to discreetly command loyal participants to exert control and those participants could undertake their orders with impunity. Moreover, the PRI had a monopoly on being able to form and utilise this form of relationship, as only they could grant impunity. It is worth noting that this was the structure the PRI used for governance despite having largely questions and institutionalised power for decades. Even under authoritarian-like party rule, this was the option for exerting control in the context of Mexico, rather than attempting to enforce a purely authoritative top-down strategy. If a party that can exert an iron fist rather than play by the complex rules of

[17] Simple translation from the original document in Spanish language.

electoral democracies, still chooses to operate by fostering informal local relationships, perhaps this indicates that this is a fundamental functional element of governance in Mexico.

It was also during the 80s that the gradual process of fragmentation of the state was underway in Mexico, as the PRI gradually began to lose power. Even while the PRI were in power, the early effects of fragmentation were observed in society and collective mobilisation. A wave of political democracy was growing, primarily in the centre of the country was led by left-wing groups separated from the PRI, while in the north, a movement of citizens was mobilising along with the elite business This is evident in the massive mobilisations during the 1980s against electoral fraud at the gubernatorial level (See Nassif, 1987, p.179). By the 1990s, the PRI was losing the control of some northern municipalities including Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (1983) and Monterrey, Nuevo León (1992) that are addressed in my case studies (Chapters 5 and 6). The process of democratisation now began to be focused on the electoral level, where the opposition parties, PAN and the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD), won some positions. The PRI was losing its control in institutions and territories due opposition election victories by the PAN in the states of Baja California (1989), Chihuahua (1992), Nuevo León (1997), as well as the PRD in Mexico City (1997). These changes inevitably had implications on state capacity at a local level, as newly elected officials had their own allegiances, and former networks were disrupted, making state capacity weaker in those areas along informal networks of control (Trejo and Ley, 2020).

The PRI eventually collapsed, partly due to its perceived inability to handle the economy and due to frustration at the endemic corruption that characterised its reign. In this transition, the security institutions fragmented, to the extent that in the 1990s there were as many as 1,600 state and local agencies (Smith, 2021, p.338). This naturally complicated the landscape of governance. However, what is more significant is the upheaval and disruption of informal relationships. An example of this can be seen in the security sector, where many former elements of the military and police defected and fled into the drug trade (Smith, 2021; Kalyvas, 2015), potentially worried about their loss of impunity and whatever scrutiny that might fall upon them.

This monopoly of power under the PRI did have the benefit of containing violence. Or at least, it did not have to face the insecurity arising from multiple conflicting parties that were later seen in various turf wars. Though internally was endemic, top-down, and consistent in origin. The end of the monopoly of informal rearrangements between government and criminals led to a vacuum of informal control. This vacuum resulted in internal criminal conflicts and competing factions for the control of old and new territories (Atuesta and Ponce, 2017, p.378). One cynical view of the shift in the relationship between the PRI and the police following democratisation, is that the corruption of the police force became de-monopolised, and a new battleground for control through infiltration by organised crime. While traffickers used to pay the authorities bribes as a form of informal permit to conduct drug trafficking. They now started to outsource violence to the local police and gangs. Big traffickers used their own hitmen and local cops as an enforcement mechanism, forcing local criminals to pay a tax for moving through their territory. They became tax collectors instead of fee-payers[18] (See Smith, 2021, pp.332-343). The transformations of decentralisation continued under the first administration from the opposition.

4.2.2 Continued Attempts at Decentralisation under the PAN, the First Opposition Party

In this section I analyse the administration of the first opposition party after the demise of the hegemonic PRI, portraying national exposure of further fragmentation. Decentralisation continues and institutions underwent superficial transformations. The military's increased involvement in drug eradication and in the apprehension of criminal leaders is revisited. Despite changes in security and law enforcement institutions since President Vicente Fox of the PAN (centre-right) took office (2000-2006), the networks of informal protection went into a reconfiguration, contributing to instability. The period finishes with the onset of the turf war in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, marking a critical point.

[18] Another monopoly that the PRI had in Mexico was the use of violence via its security force actors to meet its ends. (Manaut and Deare, 2021).

The new President of the opposition was Vincente Fox Quesada, a pro-business neoliberal and ex-Coca-Cola executive[19]. There was a strong desire to unseat the PRI due to a low level of state legitimacy. Prior to the election, more than half of Mexicans indicated that they had no confidence in major national institutions (Klesner, 2000). Tapping into this discontent, Fox presented a vote for him as an anti-PRI . It is also worth noting that the demographics of Mexico had been shifting from rural to urban contexts and the level of illiteracy decreased. In this new context, the PRI's clientelistic tactics of trading services for votes among illiterate Mexicans in rural areas did not translate well to literate Mexicans in urban centres (Ibid).

One of the main agendas of President Fox was the decentralisation of power from the executive branch to other branches and levels of government. The extreme centralisation and hierarchical structure of the PRI had been blamed for financial problems faced by Mexico in the 80s and 90s to the extent that the PRI had even tried to make superficial reforms before being unseated. It is worth noting that reforms suggested under Zedillo did have some ground to stand on but the decision making powers were never meaningfully devolved to subnational governments.

One of Fox's approaches to decentralisation was to foster an environment in which checks to executive power were encouraged via opening discourse. Given that the president has enormous executive power in Mexico, it required some restraint on his part to let other branches of government do their job. The legislature put away its stockpile of rubber stamps and became more deliberative in discussing legislation while the Mexican judiciary also became more independent and began addressing issues such as constitutional breaches more frequently (Edmonds-Poli, 2006). Moving away from rubber stamping centralised presidential and party decisions seems to correspond well to the Deliberative Democracy Index shown in the Appendix G, where there is a general increase in this index under the PRI (in line with the more general third wave of democratisation) reaching its peak under Fox. In this regard, it seems that the PAN-*ista* government approach to decentralisation did promote some positive changes in democracy.

---

[19] Coca cola (FEMSA) is a very significant company in Mexico and accounted for around 1.4% of GDP in 2020. (The Economist, 2020)

Along with easing off his executive privileges, Fox also opened Mexico up to international scrutiny in terms of human rights abuses. This included welcoming a United Nations study of the Mexican judicial system in which it indicated political will by the administration for change. The UN report covered various issues, notably including suggestions to tackle human rights abuses such as forced conventions via torture by requiring oral conventions infront of judges rather than written confessions (Cumaraswamy, 2002). This would much later lead to quite significant changes in the justice system from written and private proceedings to public oral proceedings which opened the floor for more significant reforms such as the "presumption of innocence" which was not practically present in the justice system at the time (Shirk, 2011).

Focusing on the aspects of the UN report related to decentralisation, there is an observation that the quality of gubernatorial level courts were much worse than federal courts due to lack of resources. The recommendations call that human rights decisions (at national and state level) should be binding on authorities and the federal government, as well as for separation of powers, autonomy and a clear need for better resources (Cumaraswamy, 2002).

Shifting now to the issue of resources in decentralisation, part of the centralised system of Mexico is that the subnational governments rely on the federal taxation system to gather taxes and redistribute them at a subnational level. The rules governing how this general pool of taxes are redistributed are defined in the fiscal coordination policy (Ley de Coordinación Fiscal, LCF). As with the former government, Fox's administration also aimed to increase the revenues taken in by taxes that were very low (only 11.6% of GDP in 2001) at the time via tax reforms so that tax transfers could be increased. However, he was not able to gather enough political will to pass his reforms.

The LCF defines two different types of transfers, conditional and unconditional. The quantity of the conditional transfer for a state is contingent on the population size and degree of poverty in that state. The conditional aspect of this is also in what the money can be spent on such as providing clean drinking water and education. The unconditional financial transfer defined in the LCF provides a fixed and guaranteed state revenue. However, at the time this was often just enough to maintain operational expenses. This centralised system is a consequence of the lack of capacity for subnational

governments to collect their own taxes and so is a form of de facto centralisation by lack of state capacity. It is easy to see why the responsibility of financial autonomy might make actors at state and municipal levels nervous. Regardless of the cause of this centralisation, executive choices at a federal level were made about tax transfers which reduces local capacity for self determination according to their local needs.

4.3 The Basis for a Militarised Response

This section sheds light on the relationship between the military and executive power as well as the role of the military in public security issues in Mexico. Unlike most other countries in Latin America, Mexico did not implement a reform to alter the autonomy of the military which was built up through the 20th century (Manaut, 2021a, p.9). The arrival of democratisation did not diminish the autonomy of the army and it continued with the same untouched institutional organisations, practices and privileges (Ibid.). The autonomy of the military gives it discretionary ability to conduct itself as it sees fit in executing executive goals. It also faces the problem of lack of democratic scrutiny and accountability with respect to domestic laws and international treaties as well as investigating human rights abuses. This is partly due to lack of information distribution and reporting mechanisms. Finally, there is no civilian national defence ministry, and so no civilian elite specialised in defence matters among public officials (Manaut and Deare, 2021, p.49).

In Mexico, the president has close to absolute power over the military. This is codified in the Mexican Constitution, as the right "to protect national security, in accordance with the applicable law, for this purpose, the President of the Republic can make use of the permanent armed forces: The Army, the Navy and the Air Force." and furthermore "to make use of the National Guard to assure domestic security and foreign defense" (Art. 89, Frac. VI & VII, Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico, 2020).

Politically speaking, the military has been described as a pillar for support in exercising political power (Manaut and Deare, 2021, p.25). The exact duties that fall under military jurisdiction is unclear. Besides handling internal and external security threats, the military is also responsible for activities

related to providing social support. This is a very vague notion that practically consists of plugging in whatever gaps there are in government services that are lacking at a federal, state and municipal level[20]. Importantly, these are activities that are constitutionally and legally not part of their responsibilities (Manaut and Deare, 2021, p.36). This vagueness in defining the responsibilities of the army and the alignment of the army with the president allows them to be applied for politically motivated reasons.

Outside of active military personnel, there has also been a culture of putting the military or ex-military in positions of power (usually in security institutions). Under the PRI, retired military personnel or those on a leave of absence were responsible for significant parts of public security and were put forward to run as state governors (Manaut and Deare, 2021, p.25). This is the de facto notion that military people are friends of the government and society.

The closest thing to the heavily armed and OGCs prior to the rise of drug trafficking in the 80s were the armed uprisings that occurred in Mexico. The military was involved in counter insurgency activities and against various guerrilla groups between 1964 and 1976 in rural and urban areas. Most notably among these are the guerrilla groups that emerged following the atrocities committed by the army in the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 (Manaut and Deare, 2021, pp.28–30). The next wave of counter-insurgency operations were against the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) uprising (1994) and the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR) (1996), both in south and central Mexico. It is important to note the counter insurgency experience of the military. These armed uprisings overlapped with the start of the drug related OGCs and the army would carry forward lessons learned from the US counter-insurgency measures to tackling OGCs in the future.

With the growing drug trade in Mexico in the 80s, the military became more and more involved in dealing with drug-trafficking. Initially, the PRI exerted control over drug trafficking routes by requiring bribes from traffickers (Pansters, 2018; Snyder and Duran-Martinez, 2009; Bailey, 2008). However, drug-trafficking became a major point of conflict with the United States and during

[20] This includes various activities such as campaigns against plagues and epidemics, repairing roads, census taking in rural areas and reforestation.

President Salinas de Gortari's term (1988-1994), counter-narcotics began to be a major political issue. The Salinas administration engaged with the US to try and contain drug trafficking, agreeing to have Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents in Mexico and allowing the US aircraft to perform satellite sweeps. At this point the PRI carried out counter narcotic operations that were handled by law enforcement agencies, while the army focused on eradicating marijuana and poppy fields (Manaut and Deare, 2021, pp.28–30). The subsequent Zedillo administration (1994-2000) further strengthened ties with the US in intelligence sharing and the military became more involved in anti-narco actions, where most operations were carried out by the armed forces.

Zedillo began the process of formalising the role between the armed forces and public security with his "National System of Public Security" in which the army assumed a central role in backing federal, state, and local police departments (López Gonzalez, 2012). He also launched the "National Crusade against Crime" which focused on modernisation of police departments and the participation of the armed forces. Zedillo's use of the military came with the inherent belief that they "were more resistant to the corrupting power" (López Gonzalez, 2012, p.85). However, in this period, the faith in the military was questioned, following a high profile case of corruption in the army when it was discovered that Gen. Jesús Gutierrez Rebollo, head of the National Institute to Combat Drugs commissioner, was working with the Juárez Cartel (Manaut and Deare, 2021, pp.28–30). This was the first high-profile case of the army colluding with OGCs and was very damaging to their reputation.

Under the next president, Vincent Fox, many expected a drive towards a more civilian-led security force. In fact, he promised as much, stating that drug trafficking was a problem of public health and not national security, but he backed down from these promises (López Gonzalez, 2012). The military would feature more and more in government. For example, in 2002, 16 of the 20 positions in the Attorney General Office and the federal public security ministry were run by the military and by 2003, 16 of the 32 state police departments in the country, and 9 were secretaries of public security at the state level (López Gonzalez, 2012, p.88). The reliance on the military was partly due to the threat of the OCGs that have the capacity to buy out or kill police officers (Pansters and

Serrano, 2023). This has reduced the construction of an adequate police force and prevented a push toward “strong and assertive civilian leadership” (Pansters and Serrano, 2023, p.2).

Fox’s administration adopted a more confrontational approach to the OCGs (Chabat, 2010b, p.6), seen with the arrests of Benjamin Arellano Félix, from Tijuana Cartel, and Osiel Cardenas Guillén, from the Gulf Cartel. Despite changes in security and law enforcement institutions since President Vicente Fox took office, it persisted in the networks of protection, contributing to instability. The last year of his administration set the onset of the turf war in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, marking a critical point that will unfold the security situation.

In 1996 the U.S. and Mexico created the High-Level Contact Group (HLCG) to improve relations and cooperation and in the following year, the “Declaration of Mexican and United States Alliance Against Drugs” (1997) was made, in which they declared “shared responsibility for confronting the problem of illegal drugs and related crimes”. The relationship and activities over the years have been numerous including conducted joint activities, allowing some U.S. drug enforcement agents to operate with impunity in Mexico, holding joint conferences, transfers of military equipment, intelligence sharing, and training to improve the professionalisation of Mexican drug enforcement (Manaut and Deare, 2021, p.25; Storrs, 2004).

On this last point, it is important to note that professionalising the Mexican military in handling OCGs is one of the major points of collaboration in the U.S-Mexico cooperative relation. However, it is also the case that some of the military end up joining OCGs and also end up professionalising the OCGs. For example, from 1996-1999 around 3,200 elements from Mexico's elite Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFE) were trained primarily at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina (Stahler-Sholk, 2001, p.504). Many GAFE former members later became part of the private army, Los Zetas, formed by Osiel Cardenas Guillén, leader of the Gulf Cartel (Stahler-Sholk, 2001, p.504).

4.4 A Top-Down approach of the Security policy, 2006-2022

This section highlights the macro level view of the Mexican security policy, by noting the contradictions of the transition of democracy with an upward trend in unprecedented violence. It makes reference to the violence that unfolded while the government increasingly used the military to fight OCGs. I examine here how the local level has been neglected and societal forces who had been neglected emerged. The Sub-section finishes with the effects in the aftermath of the implementation of the "war on drugs".

4.4.1 The administration of Felipe Calderón: War against organised crime

Emerging from a very narrow victory in the 2006 elections amid a polarised environment, Felipe Calderón assumed office as the second President of the PAN. In his National Development Plan (2007-2012), the first national objective was outlined as "to guarantee national security, safeguard peace, preserve the integrity, independence, and sovereignty of the country, and ensure the viability of the State and democracy" (p.25). Calderón's presidential tenure was characterised by the implementation of an aggressive strategy aimed at directly decapitating drug trafficking groups (Guerrero, 2013). As I elaborated in Chapter 5, scholars have said that Calderón initiated the war shortly after taking office in response to the legitimacy crisis facing his presidency (Chabat, 2010b). As noted by Chabat, (2010a, p.11), a mixture of confrontation and changes to the state were the only options really opened to Felipe Calderón at the time and they had popular support.

His security policy involved large-scale joint operations among the military, the navy and the federal police. A notable first move was the deployment of 6,500 Mexican military personnel to his birthplace state of Michoacan, situated in the southwest of Mexico. This approach reflected Calderón's proactive shift in addressing growing violence generated by drug trafficking organisations, setting the course for the subsequent national and domestic security priorities. Though the war against organised crime was designed and waged by the federal level, its implementation was cross-cutting in all the tiers of government. This involves the different institutions participating on law enforcement and security issues at vertical and horizontal levels.

An important element is the influence of the US under the bilateral agreement called the Mérida Initiative which was a step to an even closer US-Mexico cooperation not seen before . Here, the U.S. provided training for operational, tactical and strategic operations, as well as equipment for the detection of drugs at ports of entry. Those resources were led to the institutions of interior and national security that included the Federal Police and SEDENA. The support obtained from the agreement influenced the implementation of joint operatives between the army and the federal police, such as the Joint Operation Chihuahua and the Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon (Chapters 5 and 6).

The close US-Mexico relationship influenced the use of the 'kingpin' strategy in tackling drug related crime in Mexico. This strategy involved targeting high-level targets in OCGs with the hope that it would weaken, collapse and dismantle them and had originally been devised by the DEA. It is undeniable what the lasting effects of the long-standing influence of the "kingpin" strategy in the drug war in Mexico and Latin America. In particular, removing high-level leaders from OCGs lead to destabilisation by creating power vacuums which have the potential to open up new fronts of violence and lead to fragmentation of OCGs (International Crisis Group, 2022b). In addition, the prohibition of "drug supply has transferred significant costs of enforcement to producer countries, often deepening the pernicious consequences of the drug trade" (Collins, 2014, p.9). Thus, drug violence is also attributed to the reinforcement of the illegal status of drugs and profits that generate.

The Mexican security strategy was accompanied by public discourse that followed a "them vs. us" dichotomy of belligerence (Pansters, 2018, p.317; Benítez et al., 2009), which was core to underpinning the "war on drugs" and iron fist policies. This discourse identifies traffickers, gang members and their allies as threats to the state that need to be fought with the full force of the state apparatus. The official indicators for the federal strategy provide a view on what they felt counted as success or failure. These indicators were: drug seizures, arrests of criminals, deportations and incarcerations. It is worth noting that there was no indicator for the civilian cost of the federal strategy, instead focusing on the perpetrators (the threat). The Mexican State has been unable to put into action comprehensive and long-term security policies that protects, guarantees, investigates and prevents disappearances, homicides and the killings of women in their different manifestations.

As well as the militarised response, Calderón pushed forward a package of constitutional reforms which were approved in 2008. These focused on judicial reforms in Mexico to attempt to rectify the legal inadequacies of the traditional criminal justice system and were partially a continuation of reforms proposed by Vincente Fox in 2004 (Shirk, 2011, p.202). Previously, Mexico had a traditional "mixed inquisitorial" justice system. This system takes the form of a formal investigation, placing emphasis on whoever is conducting the investigation/inquiry. Under this system, innocence rather than guilt needs to be proved or put more simply, "guilty until proven innocent". This preceding system incubated political control, corruption and impunity as political rivals would stand little chance of avoiding conviction.

Calderón's reform facilitated a transition to an "adversarial" model (the same used in the US), consisting of competitive trials between a prosecutor and defence where the judge functions as an impartial mediator. The adversarial model provides advantages such as greater transparency, efficiency and focus on due process. The reformed justice system aimed to address widespread issues like arbitrary arrest, prolonged pretrial detention, forced confessions, falsification of evidence, and wrongful conviction. There were other aspects of the reform such as relieving the congestion of the criminal justice system to avoid prison sentences through mediation, community service, reparations to victims etc., which would not have to go through the entire court procedure. The full implementation of the constitutional amendment after the deadline in June 2016 constituted a milestone for the country.

During the most intensive years of the drug war, authorities and specialists noted the need for a further explanation beyond the typical civil-war studies (See Kalyvas, 2015; Grillo, 2012). It was documented that active and former soldiers in leading positions of the state security institutions durings the state crackdown operations had training to combat rural guerrillas during the uprising of the EZLN in 1994 (Grillo, 2012). However, the extended use of the counterinsurgency logic from the conflict period into the post-transition phase to carry on a "war on crime", and the increased use of the military, justifies the use of excessive violence (Hill, Beger and Zanetti, 2007).

Since the launch of Felipe Calderón's security policy, which targeted seven of the major OCGs[21], some areas of Mexico have deteriorated into blood-drenched killing fields. Simultaneously, patterns of violence and crime have changed significantly. The drug-related violence has escalated as transnational crime networks and street gangs became an important player in the violence (Bagley and Rosen, 2017). OCGs became increasingly powerful and professional, partially due to the intake of paramilitaries into OGCs (Correa-Cabrera et al, 2015). The inability of the state to subdue OCGs standing in open defiance delegitimises the Mexican State. This could be considered to be a form of state capture, where the state capture is of the "monopoly of violence" (Correa-Cabrera, Keck and Nava, 2015). In typical consolidated democracies, the state is at the top of the food chain in terms of the use of violence but in the case of Mexico, OCGs outman and outgun law enforcement.

On the other hand, understanding the system that forged the mindset of soldiers is essential in analysing their actions within the context of organised crime violence. These soldiers, many coming from southern Mexico, had received training to combat low-intensity warfare conducted in rural areas. It is important to note that the legal framework, capacities, duties and permissible use of force differ between the military and the police. Given the nature of the federal strategy (including the discourse), the deployment of federal forces in the region was intended for a war-like campaign against an "enemy", wherein civilian casualties were considered collateral damage.

A prevailing discourse at the time framed the violence as a positive outcome, portraying all deaths as gang-on-gang killings, with the perception that all deaths were positive as it led to the elimination of criminals. In this discourse, the greater the death toll, the better the results were perceived to be. This was openly confronted by the public later on with massacres and human rights abuses. Among many other massacres, two high-profile examples of the massacres include the Villas

[21] At that time, those major OCGs were the Sinaloa cartel, Beltran Leyva, Carrillo Fuentes Organisation (Juárez), Arellano Felix (Tijuana), Gulf cartel, Los Zetas and La Familia. With more fragmentation of OCGs those major organisations included the Knights Templar and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), and in 2021 there were over "400 criminal cells [acting as] coalitions more than independent groups," (Chaparro, 2021; Beittel, 2020).

de Salvárcar in Juárez 2010 where 15 teenagers were killed, covered in chapter 5, and the Casino Royale attack in 2011 where 52 people were killed, covered in chapter 6.

Concerning human right's abuses by the military, these increased under Felipe Calderón, with acts such as forced confession, extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances (Steinberg and Human Rights Watch Organization, 2011). Moreover, these violations are generalised and not exceptional (Trevino-Rangel, 2018). To put a number to that, in total the Human Rights Commission received 34,000 complaints against federal state security agents during Caleron's war on drugs. However, despite the massive amount of information being put forward on human right's abuses, the administration of Felipe Calderón continued a discourse where "atrocities committed by the state bureaucracy never happened, are something else, or can be justified", lending to impunity of human right's abuses (Trevino-Rangel, 2018, p.497). One of core factors that contributed to human right's abuses was the privileged militarised position, where they could act without accountability. For example, being tried in military courts instead of civil courts for crimes like torture, rape and forced disappeareneces.These policies have fueled violence in the forms of human rights violations by law enforcers (García Clarck, 2018, p.11). Unfortunately, these practices did not change under the next presidential mandate.

4.4.2 The administration of Enrique Peña Nieto and the continuation of violence

After two terms of the PAN rule, the PRI came back into power under President Enrique Peña Nieto in December 2012. Once in office, he changed his predecessor's public policy discourse from a bellicose position on the insecurity crisis to a discourse on the reduction of crime and the strengthening of social cohesion. He openly acknowledged the problems of the former kingpin strategy and stalled Mexico's participation in the Merida Initiative with the US. To state his vision for his new approach, Peña Nieto created Mexico's 2013-2018 National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, PND). It is worth exploring what was laid out in the plan to better understand the Peña Nieto administration's perspective on the previous policies and suggested solutions. Of the 5 national goals outlined in the PND, the goal no. 1 related to security is called "Mexico in Peace", focussing on strengthening

democracy, security and governance towards “consolidating full democracy” (PND, 2013). This goal states that:

> *The priority, in terms of public security, will be to combat the crimes that most affect citizens through crime prevention and the institutional transformation of the security forces. In this sense, it seeks to reduce the risk factors associated with crime, strengthen the social fabric and living conditions to inhibit the causes of crime and violence, as well as build professional police officers, a New Criminal Justice System and an effective social reintegration of criminals.* (DOF, 2013)

The PND recognised problems with the former approaches to insecurity. In particular, it notes that the War on Drugs and the kingpin strategy led to increased violence as a consequence of turf wars and diversification of criminal activities fueled by increasing profits, increased corruption, and recruitment into OCGs from low income areas. However, it goes beyond this by noting that lack of democratisation is a fundamental problem of the insecurity crisis. Some of the examples highlighted by the PND are: human rights abuses as a consequence of a poor legal framework, impunity caused by an inadequate justice system, the need for greater trust in law enforcement, corruption, violence against women and children, poor transparency, and the poor flow of information and collaboration between institutions at different levels of government.

The action plan related to “Mexico in Peace” laid out in the PND is to “to achieve a strengthened social pact between the State and citizens that responds to the democratic and security challenges facing the country” (DOF, 2013). At least on paper, there was a strong focus on improving communication and coordination over the three levels of government and also decentralisation from the federal functions to the municipalities. Interestingly, The PND explicitly states that communication and dialogue between social groups and political parties is important and the promotion of citizen participation. In particular, “policies that encourage the construction of citizenship, the capacity of the State will be strengthened and a new relationship of co-responsibility will be promoted between the various actors that make up society” (Ibid.). This lays the ground for bottom-up approaches to play a part in national development.

Regarding insecurity, the action plan took two approaches. The social prevention of violence and the containment of crime through police interventions. There was an emphasis on intelligence gathering and sharing as well as better coordination between municipal, state and federal authorities. This is guided by the principles of "planning, prevention, protection and respect for human rights; coordination; institutional transformation; evaluation and feedback" (DOF, 2013). The PND notes that violence linked to crime is not generalised and located within certain regions of the country and that diverse security strategies could be adopted in each region. However, there is no detailed strategy other than the assumption of regional violence, specialised interventions and containment of violence.

To address the prevention of violence, Peña Nieto's administration launched the National Programme for Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency (Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y el Delito, PRONAPRED) in 2013. The goal of this policy was to prevent violence by supporting vulnerable communities and investing in urban regeneration projects (DOF, 2014). An example of this project was the "Macromural de Pachuca" (large mural of pachuca) in which citizens group together to paint large murals over a disadvantaged area.

PRONAPRED has received criticism on several fronts: the project did not provide a solid theory of change from community actions to the reduction of violent crime; there were no clear ways to evaluate if actions were successful; and funds would often not be allocated to community projects but instead be used to prop-up local budgets (de la Garza Montemayor, 2018). This is despite guidelines requiring there to be overseers from civil society[22] (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 2017) to supervise and evaluate projects. The logistics of finding and funding contractors were also poorly managed. Funds would be transferred early in the year to be spent by the end of the year. Delays in this process would result in work being bundled into a few months at the end of the year to meet spending time limits. Ultimately, funding dried up for PRONAPRED, and the project received criticisms that it was a political exercise rather than a concrete and effective solution. In 2016 the

[22] Three representatives each from civil society organisations, higher education institutions, and business organisations (DOF, 2017).

executive hollowed out the funds that had been made available for the entire anti-crime socio-economic programme.

With regards to security, Peña Nieto wanted to create a civilian-controlled gendarmerie that would be a paramilitary force made up of former military officers. This was built upon 3 pillars: a mix of military and the police, proximity to Mexican citizens, and rapid mobilisation when necessary. This force would be better trained, equipped and paid, mimicking the successes seen in Monterrey Nuevo León, where the police force was purged and reconstructed with careful vetting (detailed in Chapter 6). Though Peña Nieto wanted the force to be 40000 people strong, he only ended up with a force of 5000. It was ultimately too minor a force to do anything.

A turning moment for Peña Nieto's reputation concerning security was the enforced disappearance of 43 students in Iguala, Guerrero in September 2014. This atrocity unveiled the level of collusion of the local police, the army and local criminal gangs. The slow response of the authority was regarded as a great failure and did not result in finding the remains of the missing students, after arresting over 100 people including many people from the police, some confessions were obtained under torture (GIEI, 2015).

Peña Nieto announced "Todos Somos Ayotzinapa" as a cry to release social and economic investment into that rural area. This invoked the spirit of "Todos Somos Juárez", an important and popular federal plan in Juárez, invoked by the then President Felipe Calderón (covered in Chapter 5). Peña Nieto also tried to reform the police force by placing the often corrupt municipal police forces under the state police forces. This "mando-unico" (single command) proposal would imply strong centralised control and could be adopted by state governments who strongly suspected municipal police were corrupt. However these changes did not get through congress.

Unfortunately, without reforms to the security model, Peña Nieto's government's plans to tackle organised crime violence were only cosmetic. In practice, he continued the same kingpin strategy as before, prioritising a militarised response. In November 30, 2017, the lower house of the Mexican Congress approved the Law on Interior Security -*Ley de Seguridad Interior*- that would enshrine the armed forces in activities of public security, by providing a legal framework for federal forces

assuming public security roles. This led to protests by human rights organisations that raised concerns about the embedding of military power where they believed judicial power should be, and have since demanded proper investigations into members of the armed forces who have committed human rights violations. Also, critics pointed out the unwillingness to prosecute military personnel in cases of human rights abuses, while others feared that soldiers would be used to suppress peaceful protests (Agren, 2017). Subsequently, the United Nations through its body of experts in the Human Rights system warned that "giving the armed forces a leading role in security matters could weaken the protection of human rights" (OHCHR, 2017). A deeply disillusioned Mexican society, dissatisfied with the poor results in insecurity and corruption, ousted the PRI government from power and for the first time elected a left-wing President.

4.4.3 Administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The endurance of militarisation

In 2018, the newly elected president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO, came to power (2018-2024). Coming from a recently formed party called MORENA- Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (or National Regeneration Movement), a core part of AMLO's campaign was a promise to fight corruption. One of his main campaign slogans was "only I can fight corruption" and according to Parametria, an exit poll showed that corruption was the main issue of the elections, and so this rhetoric probably helped with his campaign. Indeed he was in a unique position to fight corruption given the public mandate to do so, winning the majority of voters, having majority support in both houses of congress, and the existence of civil and governmental organisations dedicated to this newly created National Anticorruption System (Fonseca, 2019).

AMLO had previously lost elections in 2006 and 2012 and famously expressed his dislike for the National Electoral Institute (INE) suggesting that they had taken bribes in the 2006 election and proclaiming "to hell with institutions!" . His landslide victory in 2018 did not reduce his suspicion of the INE. This anti-institutional attitude is also anti-democratic but perhaps better frames what he might feel is the problem of 'corruption' that he had been given the mandate to solve. Part of his

anti-establishment approach, is paradoxically to re-centralise powers in the executive and appointed individuals based on loyalty over technical expertise (Sánchez-Talanquer and Greene, 2021).

His security policy is branded in the rhetoric “Hugs Not Bullets” (abrazos, no balazos), portraying the message that his government would prioritise peace and social solidarity (Grillo, 2022). As part of his campaign, he promised the ending of the “drug war” that would halt the systematic human rights violations and that the soldiers would be returned to their barracks. Yet, since AMLO took power, military spending has almost doubled (Stott and Murray, 2023). There has been a worry that can act without scrutiny in the interests of national security. Since then, the Mexican state has undertaken extensive reforms and policy measures, yet the concurrent challenge of preserving the rule of law, while mitigating violence has gained heightening significance in recent years.

A core element of his policy was the creation of the National Guard -*Guardia Nacional*-, through an special presidential executive decree, in March 2019 (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 2019). It became a way to purge —and dissolve— the Federal Police (FP) with new recruitments and training, a measure of criticism given the progress that the FP had made in the topics of human rights and corruption. Thus, the National Guard would cover the gaps in the legislation enforcement to combat organised criminals in parts of the territory most affected. The former Gendarmerie created under Peña Nieto was also absorbed into the National Guard. Originally it was planned to be a civilian-led force, independent from the army. Yet, in September 2022, a presidential decree law handed over its command to the army.

In the face of state (in)capacity, AMLO has used the military more broadly than ever before. He relies on the government for long-term projects such as the construction of a new airport for Mexico City, branches of a new national bank, and part of a tourist train line in the Yucatán peninsula for which they get to keep some of the profits (Sánchez-Talanquer and Greene, 2021). Furthermore, though the National Guard is supposed to be civilian led in practice, the armed forces exert budgetary and operational control over the National Guard (Ibid.). Whereas former presidents conducted broadly political-electoral measures since Vincente Fox, with a reliance on the military as a last resort, AMLO has taken various anti-democratic measures under the guise of anti-corruption measures. Contrary to

the expectations, he has re-centralised power, attacked institutions, and increasingly relied on the military and broadened their roles to those that correspond to civilians. In the next section, I will explain the reasons why the Mexican security strategy has neglected the subnational level.

4.5 How and why the security policy in Mexico neglects institutions and civil mobilisation at the local level

After having taken a macro-level perspective on the top-down war on drugs, this section examines the potential local level mechanisms that were neglected by the Mexican security policy. This serves as an initial consideration of bottom-up approaches before my micro-level analysis in chapters 5 and 6. Broadly, I identify two neglected aspects of the local level. Firstly, there is a limited awareness of the local societal dynamics and the contexts that persist in the ongoing war on drugs. Secondly, there is limited capacity in handling the situation of uneven democratisation at a local level. Both have important implications for the state (in)capabilities in the implementation of Mexico's security policies.

4.5.1 Limited awareness of the local societal dynamics and context

The top-down security policies have paid little attention to the qualitative aspects of political participation and social change. Since its launch in December 2006, the federal strategy has largely treated victims and local society as passive entities facing a dire situation of violence. This perspective characterises local society as victims rather than as potential participants in the solution with potential agency (See Moncada, 2021). The government has prioritised aggressive interventions that are state-led and centralised (Pansters, 2012). These approaches have been unsustainable without permanent military occupation. Thus, the continuation of these centralised measures has prevented the ability to embrace the complex and nuanced local contexts.

The official narrative of the top-down strategy depicts gang members — often young, marginalised people — exclusively as perpetrators of violence. This promotes violence as it contributes to the idea that homicides are "killing between themselves", and contained within OCGs. This places the youth sectors in a precarious space, rendering them vulnerable to the punitive judicial

apparatus and various abuses. This is one example of the structural marginalisation prevalent in Mexico, encompassing class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and race. This undermines the equal value of lives and fuels stereotyping which as I will show in chapters 5 and 6 weakens the voices of those desperately searching for their disappeared loved ones by reducing empathy.

The government itself has been criticised for holding apathy and contempt for the casualties of the internal war (Schedler, 2014, p.13). This attitude leads to neglecting the human cost and struggles at a local level. An example of citizen response that media and scholars have documented, was the 2011 Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity spearheaded by poet Javier Sicilia (Gallagher, 2017; Schedler, 2014). This emerged from the local level and gained national visibility. This social mobilisation brought attention to the victims of the "war on drugs" and created new avenues for civil society articulation (See Chapters 5 and 6).

4.5.2 Limited capacity to navigate in an uneven democracy

One of the main features of democratisation and the evolution of OCGS in Mexico is the longstanding and evolving political-crime nexus. Failure to address systemic corruption within local institutions allows for the perpetuation, reproduction and infiltration of OCGs into political alliances at the local level. In this sense, the top-down security strategy of supplanting corrupt institutions (often the police) disregards Barnes' (2017) claims that organised crime should be considered "political" and that it can exercise "state-building activities at the micro-level" (pp.967–972). From this perspective, OCGs are an integrated part of communities, rather than an isolated entity that interacts with communities. The capacity to do this lies at the local where relationships are horizontal and based on trust.

The political-crime nexus often contains strong relationships between various OCGs and state authorities. For example, between the 1980-1990s a high rank official of the former federal intelligence agency -*Dirección Federal de Seguridad*- was the leader of the Juárez Cartel. These informal arrangements between fragmented actors and institutions have power dynamics that can survive, evolve and exceed the power of political authorities through several administrations. These

are visible in targeting killings of various politicians and policemen[23] at the subnational level (Barnes, 2017, p.974). As a consequence of this, any strategy has to survive political alternation to be sustainable. The local level is a good candidate for this as most of the actors remain across political alterations and are often highly motivated.

It is often the case that as a consequence of uneven democratisation, local level institutions have weak capacity on many levels. Here civil society can fill the gap of limited state capacity, by assuming some of the responsibility of the state governance, or by providing assistance to navigate through poor resources and implemented institutions and form local bonds of trust to circumvent corruption. One striking example of this is the lack of comprehensive accountability institutions. These are necessary for upholding the rule of law and breaking the cycle of systematic corrupt ties that perpetuate impunity within local security and judicial institutions (O'Donnell, 2004). In Chapters 5 and 6 I will show examples of this, where civil society responses work together to support the pursuit of justice, political participation and accountability.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter took multilevel characteristics of Mexico's democratisation process. The chapter centred on understanding the top-down response against the OCGs leading up which has endured in the form of the "war on drugs" under Felipe Calderón. The analysis spans the period from the last administrations of the PRI in the 1980s and 1990s up to the current administration along with the evolving security crisis introduced by OCGs during this time.

The focus was on following a trajectory of security policies with respect to the magnitude of OCGs, along with impacting political-historical events that influenced these policies. In my analysis, the process of democracy came with a wave of decentralisation and emphasis of further institutions at multiple levels of government, as well as reform packages in security and law enforcement institutions.

[23] In Ciudad Juárez alone, from 2017 to 2021, the gubernatorial attorney's office of the state of Chihuahua has recorded 16 cases of municipal police officials who were killed. (Response obtained through the National Institute for Transparency, INAI, request No. 080139722000213).

Although extensive options, the Mexican government has relied on a path of militarisation consisting of projecting the military onto positions that are typically constitutionally or legally the responsibility of other parts of government such as public security. The reliance of a militarised strategy has been possible because of the high level of executive control over the military, the autonomous nature of this institution, its ambiguous constitutional role, its high level of perceived trust by the public and loyalty to the president. It is used time and again to plug the state (in)capacity of government institutions (e.g. police) in the form of lack of practical and financial resources, decision making capacity and lack of trust due to corruption. Continuing with the adoption of the criticised "kingpin" strategy, ultimately the security strategy led to the fragmentation and diversification of OCGs, and did not impede the profitability of OCGs that continued to grow. Moreover, the militarisation came with increased violence and human rights abuses by a largely autonomous military model.

OCGS have an abundance of financial resources and have increased their capacity of harm, strategic territorial and diversified their illicit portfolios. OCGs construct informal networks with government and local institutions, both becoming what Tilly (2003b) calls "specialists in violence", that are "people who control means of inflicting damage on persons and objects" (p.35). With the transition to democracy, the OCGs infiltrated government institutions to gain the monopoly of violence and corruption that was formerly held by the one-party rule of the PRI.

Following the top-down exploration, I explained areas of neglect concerning local level approaches. I argued that the capabilities and dynamics at play between different institutions, civil society and the state, particularly at the local level, have been overlooked by the dominant policies to respond to violence. Particularly, when considering the unevenness of democratisation from a local perspective with respect to the reproduction of informal networks. Unfortunately, lack of funding, infrastructure, professionalism, corruption and state capture by OCGs hampered decentralisation efforts and the effectiveness of local institutions.

This may be a reason why the reliance on various well-intentioned but ineffective policies over decades has paradoxically ended up leading to more militarisation. President Peña Nieto's crime

prevention programme (PRONAPRED), was perhaps the closest integral policy to engaging with local-level problems that included citizen participation. Unfortunately, this fell short in various areas, including appropriate administration, development of an underlying theory of social problems, and a lack of resources.

Chapter 5. Towards demanding the stop of violence: The case of Ciudad Juárez

5.0 Introduction

One of the recent core elements in the analysis of Mexico and more broadly in Latin America is that organised crime cannot exist without informal criminal-state agents relationships (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Yashar, 2018). The escalation of violence in Ciudad Juárez is closely linked to the disruption of these informal networks. This disruption initially occurred during the shift at local level from the PRI's hegemonic rule to the PAN, disrupting previously stable and consolidated informal networks, leading to outbreaks of drug-related violence (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Duran-Martínez, 2015). The situation deteriorated with the violent inter-cartel turf wars. In response to this increase of violence, the federal government implemented the militarised intervention called the "Joint Operation Chihuahua"[24]. Unfortunately, soon after the state's military intervention, it was observed a dramatic alteration of the dynamics of the city, eroding local governance and a vacuum of power in the city. How did citizens respond facing this bleak situation?

This chapter uncovers the circumstances involved in civil society's actions to manage violence. As with the national situation of Mexico described in Chapter 4, uneven democratisation resulted in lack of state capacity and low legitimacy, particularly due to the evolution of OCGs and their collusion with state institutions. I argue that civil society was enabled to step in to fill this void of state capacity to respond to violence. I explore how civil society organised and what local impact they had over temporal periods in addressing violence. In this case, collective mobilisation was multifaceted, involving heterogeneous actors that acted in parallel and complementary paths in response to criminal violence. They did this by forming formal and informal societal structures, establishing relationships of trust within their communities, creating means of communication and protection, changing the

[24] In January 2010, the security public policy in Ciudad Juárez was modified by changing its name to "Coordinated Operation Chihuahua" that involved the arrival of 3,000 members of the Federal Police. In this chapter I will continue using its original name as "Joint Operation Chihuahua".

government narratives about violence, delegitimising violence, and bringing forward the demands of marginalised people directly to the authorities. The most prominent result led to the formation of the Mesas or working groups that were part of the "Todos Somos Juárez" strategy (We are all Juárez). These working groups featured close alliances between civil groups and public officials from the three levels of government, addressing various issues including violence and social and economic demands. Those actions, ultimately, helped to shape the patterns of violence through institutional changes.

I am not arguing that criminal violence disappeared as a consequence of civil society. However, the period of extreme security deterioration and indiscriminate killing of civilians has not been seen again by the majority of the citizens in Juárez. Instead, I argue that after the crisis in Juárez, these societal structures emerged as a mechanism of continuous participation as civilian resistance, and that by understanding how they emerged, what issues they addressed and how they addressed these issues I can understand the overall response and desired goals of the communitarian action against violence and the instability that goes with it.

There is a plethora of existing literature that has talked about the problem of violence in Ciudad Juárez. Scholars have examined different forms of expression of violence in the city related to feminicides (Monárrez Fragoso, 2019; Rodriguez, 2012; Wright, 2011), drug trafficking (Bowden, 2010; Campbell, 2009) and illegal markets (Durán-Martínez, 2018; Duran-Martinez, 2015). This literature is limited in its coverage of the mechanisms that were developed among different societal groups to respond to violence which are offered by this chapter. There is some existing literature that focuses on civilian participation in responding to violence, but this focuses on formal means of engagement with the government and participatory budgeting (Wampler, 2010; Avritzer, 2009).

Another area of research is the existing literature on collective mobilisation in response to criminal violence (Ley, Mattiace and Trejo, 2019; Bateson, 2012), as well as collective action in high-risk processes (Ley, 2022; Petersen, 2001; Loveman, 1998). Further to this, there is also literature on civilian resistance in the context of civil war described in Kaplan, (2017) and Arjona (2017b), however my work is focused on criminal war rather than civil war (See Kalyvas, 2015). Though there

are some similarities between this literature and my research, I expand on the existing work by exploring informal methods of collective action and community-level agency.

The rest of this chapter is organised chronologically, roughly corresponding to the four key temporal periods based on the levels of violence. For better clarity, the main events covered in this period are captured in the timeline in Figure 4. My main focus is on the period of intensity, which saw the highest intensity of violence and corresponded to the main period of destabilisation.

In section 5.1 (*onset*) I cover the groundwork in understanding the existing context of democratisation at a subnational level and I also situate Juárez within the spectrum of criminal politics. During this period, members of civil society in Juárez were aware of the risks they faced by taking action, becoming targeted by perpetrators, particularly women. I will also explain the conditions under which civil actors construct and perform their responses to criminal violence during the feminicide crisis between 1993-1997.

In section 5.2 (*intensity*) I describe the emergence of the turf wars, leading to a dramatic escalation of criminal violence followed by the federal militarised intervention. This period saw the emergence of the *Mesas* (working groups) and community actions to attempt to mitigate violence. During this period, citizens were able to use different strategies to communicate and/or negotiate with co-opted officials by participating in activities that made them visible, particularly those activities that involved denouncing systematic violence by the state. Different societal actions were activated as an effort to make state authorities accountable. Here, I will also talk about the implementation of the programme “Todos Somos Juárez” (We are All Juárez), and how the creation of the so-called “Mesas” (working groups) of Juárez were established, in which human rights activists, academics, business leaders and priests negotiated with authorities from the three levels of government. This section also provides a brief analysis of the soft skills that society showed in an attempt to break with the informal networks of protection between the authorities and criminals. Including, among other examples, bringing to light and denouncing violence through manifestations of collective actions such as collective fasting and protests.

In 5.3 (*reduction*) I describe the change of governance and the temporary truce that saw violence decrease in Juárez. Some forms of collective resistance emerged, including the appropriation of public spaces with art depicting violence and its impacts. Following this in section 5.4 (*continuation*) I look at the current state of Juárez, which saw the former truce being abandoned and an increase of violence ensue. This section will reflect on challenges and constraints for the society today in criminal governance.

Finally, in section 5.5 I conclude this chapter by summarising the different responses of civil society to criminal violence in Ciudad Juárez. To do thi,s I identify the main actor pathways and what their roles were. This lays the ground for a comparative analysis in Chapter 7 that includes my next case study of Monterrey, Nuevo León where I answer my research questions in more detail.

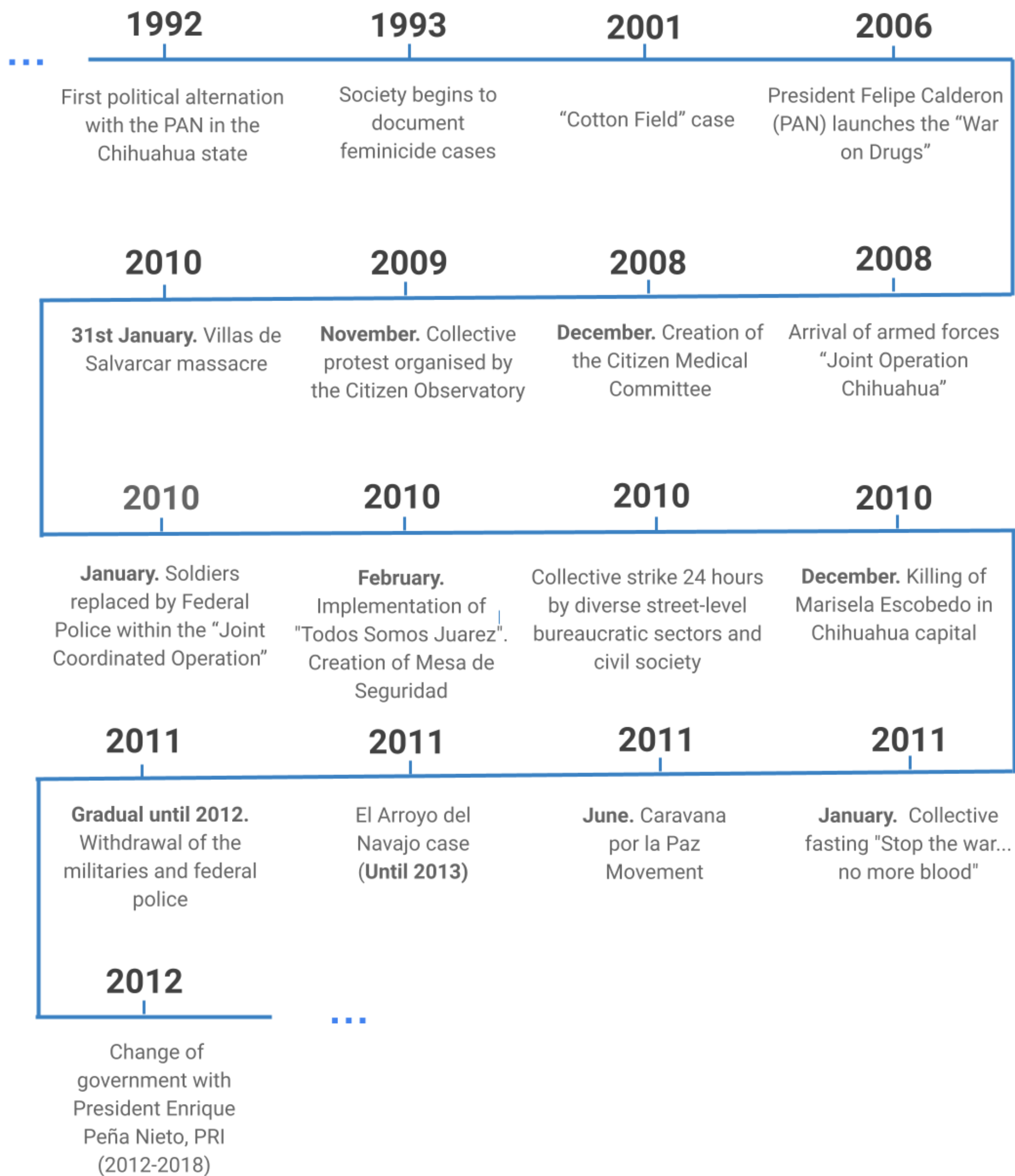

Figure 4. Timeline of events Juárez, Chihuahua 1992-2012. Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

5.1 Subnational democratisation, 1992-2000s

This section explores the impact of the process of democratisation at thes local level, particularly with the political alternance in Chihuahua and its connections to the continuum of violence at subnational level. It also investigates the quality of democratisation at local level, its influence in the evolution of criminal networks and factors that prompted significant societal responses.

In 1992, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, coming from a business background, became the first governor that ruled the state of Chihuahua from the PAN, the opposition party. Before this, in 1983, Barrio achieved the notable milestone of being the first politician outside of the PRI to hold the mayoral position of Ciudad Juárez. For Chihuahua's society, the political alternation in Juárez and Chihuahua capital was symbolic, as it marked a divergence from the central power after a series of anti-PRI social protests in the 1980s[25] and a PAN model towards modernity and liberal democracy (Nassif, 1987, p.217).

In section 5.1.1, I show that paradoxically, despite the political-electoral openness, this very element played a contributing role in the persistence of violence within the city. Consequently, the objective of this section is to enhance our comprehension of the quality of democratisation at the subnational level at the time and its correlation to subsequent events in the city. These events shed light on the progression and intricacies of criminal networks. Additionally, in section 5.1.2, I delve into the circumstances that prompted certain societal actors, particularly women's rights groups, to formulate their initial large-scale responses when Juárez gained global notoriety following the feminicide[26] crisis in 1993.

---

[25] 1986 is remembered locally as one of the most controversial elections in Chihuahua's contemporary history, when Francisco Barrio lost the state governorship against the PRI candidate, Francisco Baeza Meléndez.

[26] In Mexico the concept used is *feminicide* (feminicidio), which was coined by the Mexican academic Marcela Lagarde to refer to the Juárez killings as a crime of the state, due to the misogynistic violence against women and institutional block to access to justice. (Lagarde, 2005, p.156). Different from the Anglo-Saxon term *femicide*, the concept *feminicide* has evolved, from

5.1.1 Border zone: political alternation and the unintended consequences

Juárez, situated on the border with El Paso, was one of the cities most hit by the Mexican debt crisis of 1982. As this occurred mainly in the north of Mexico, once in power, the new generation of opposition party leaders in Chihuahua, largely composed of businessmen[27], did not prioritise the development of social institutions, security and law enforcement. Contrary to the corporativist and clientelistic practices of the PRI, Francisco Barrio (1992-1998) extended the *panista* ideology implemented in Juárez to the whole Chihuahua state, and even when he adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the federal government afterwards, he remained critical of the corruption and lavish spending of the previous governments. Barrio's administration greatly reduced spending in some governmental areas and initiated programmes for the cleaning up and professionalisation of the police force that included the creation of a police academy. The new administration (PAN party) put in place plans to overhaul the state attorney and police institutions, which had serious allegations against it in the past that it had colluded with criminal groups and drug traffickers at the border (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Proceso, 2004).

Consequently, the newly formed opposition party in Chihuahua took a different stance from the national policy. At the local level, they adopted a vision that emphasised a democracy of industrial modernisation, market freedom, and integration with the United States. Considering the historical context of Juárez as a border location where both legal and illicit activities coexist, the city played a pivotal role in shaping the development of these dynamics. In its early stages, primarily through alcohol smuggling, this border city quickly emerged as a catalyst in both the initiation and transformation of the drug trade. As conveyed to me by a senior academic from Juárez, the democratic political change brought about certain unfortunate consequences, although not necessarily directed at

---

the Global South, as a counter-hegemonic term that "describes the different political, social and economic systems that act against the life of girls and women." (Monárrez Fragoso, 2019, p.926)

[27] A business leader in Juárez told me, since the 1982 Mexican presidential decision to 'statise' all national commercial banks, "the unwritten rules, where the government was dedicated to politics and the private sector to banking, were broken". The business leader also stated that the democracy advocated by this entrepreneurial sector centred on their same profit-oriented criteria, but "it lacked a focus on governmental perspective and a model of social equality" (César, business sector).

the institutions themselves. “Rather due to the redefinition in the relationships between the state and organised crime, [leading to] a more fragmented and difficult to control organised crime with the capacity of agenda that the centralised state used to have [during] the authoritarianism of the PRI” (Pablo, academic). The following years witnessed a noticeable increase of violent deaths in the city related to organised crime and drug trafficking, as well as gang related violence, which was evidenced in the visit of the Special Rapporteur of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to Juárez (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2002)

Another significant aspect to consider is that this model of subnational democratisation not only triggered drug-related violence by destabilising complicit networks but also brought forth the activation of the citizenry. The political awareness among the citizens was derived from their historical experiences and socio-political struggles under the authoritarian rule of the PRI. However, this political shift soon encountered challenges in terms of inclusivity, especially regarding the voices of those on the margins. The subsequent testimony of a civil organisation leader in Juárez, who possesses over 20 years of experience, sheds light on this matter:

> *[The political alternation from PRI to PAN] was a significant change. In fact, during that time there were numerous protests movements in the city which were highly anti-system, very anti-PRI of course, and strongly influenced by the PAN approach. Indeed, there was a meaningful social change, especially it awakened citizen participation and political awareness. However, it is evident that it was not a very democratic opening... the PAN-ism, as a party, was not open to participation from the ground up.* [P1-31, civil society organisation, highlighted mine]

In this first part I shed light on the manner in which the local level in Juárez grappled with the process of democratisation, ultimately leading to uneven participation in policy design and implementation. The dissolution of the old complicity networks ensued as new actors emerged during the local political alternance. It was in 1993 when a new wave of violence emerged, indicating a new era of intense competition to control the whole of Juárez’s drug market. This was characterised by gruesome acts of torture, killings in public streets and surge in disappearances (CNDH, 2003). The

next decade became an explosive period of murder of hundreds of women and rampant impunity, triggering the rise of prominent societal actions in response to state inaction to curb them.

5.1.2 Feminicides and drug violence: Exploring citizen response and collective mobilisation

The phenomenon of feminicide in Juárez that came to notoriety in 1993[28] has been documented in numerous bodies of literature (Valdez, 2021; Monárrez Fragoso, 2019; Rodriguez, 2012; Wright, 2011; Pérez and Padilla, 2002). Some factors that have been mentioned and that contribute to this issue is the integration of women and young people into the low-wage workforce of the *maquila* (Leal, 2008, p.32). Moreover, the city's exponential growth and migration deepened the social inequalities, further limiting access to essential services such as healthcare and education in impoverished slums of the city. Also, the diversification of criminal groups to new portfolios of drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering and arms trafficking is a constant risk of violence (Monárrez Fragoso, 2019, p.915). In this case, despite the recent political alternation, I show that this dismay phenomenon has evidenced the continuation of authoritarian bureaucratic practices, a weak rule of law and the reconfiguration of complicit relations that deepend power asymmetries. This section sets the grounds for the understanding of motives and earlier mobilisation of civil society in Juárez, which was key for the later collective response to the security crisis (section 5.2) and for developing mechanisms of resistance that I analyse in the last two sections of this chapter.

---

[28] In the same year that the feminicides gained international attention, Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, a former federal police who was the leader of the Juárez Cartel, was assassinated by order of Amado Carrillo Fuentes, aka "The lord of the skies". Following this, Carrillo Fuentes, from Sinaloan origins, assumed the control of Juárez Cartel and safeguard of the *plaza*. To achieve this, he aimed to put on the payroll every police officer and attorney at the municipal and state levels in Chihuahua. Within the cartel, La Linea group emerged, with the involvement of defectors from different corporations: militaries from Chihuahua, federal police, state and municipal level, as well as ordinary delinquents. This shift had significant implications for the operational methods and the cartel's ability to wield violence in the region (See Valdez, 2021 [2011]). Once in charge of the Cartel de Juárez, Amado Carrillo aimed to establish new pacts with different local and national official authorities, police forces and local businessmen (Ibid.)

Despite the continuation of killings and disappearances of women, both the police forces and state authorities lacked the capacities — and even incentives — to investigate and curb these crimes (Leal, 2008, p.32). On the contrary, corruption within the state and municipal police remained the norm, while the first massacres in public spaces became visible between 1995 and 1997[29]. "Organised crime used to take revenge in the mafia-style method of making bodies disappear," a pattern that was known to families who experienced these disappearances, primarily affecting males (Amalia, local journalist). This knowledge compelled them to undertake excavations themselves in the southwest region of the city. In response to the numerous neglected demands and impunity, women's rights activists and mothers of the victims organised collectively to document the characteristics of the female victims of disappearance and murdered (Martha, academic). They also embarked on risky paths to search for their missing loved ones in the desert. (Amalia, local journalist). During this perilous journey, independent investigative journalists from both sites of the border played a key role in accompanying the mothers of victims, who had embarked in a quest for justice for their daughters, while also documenting the issues when the authorities were negligent. When relatives reported these heinous crimes to the police it became frequent to receive sexist, classist comments and stereotypical roles of gender, assuming that the women were guilty for causing their own deaths (Wright, 2011). Even Governor Francisco Barrio commented once that the number of women killed was normal for a city like Juárez (Diebel, 1997), while various officials and members of the business sector resisted to accept the problem as it would damage the city's image.

With this in mind, this recent democratising period soon became a wound in the city that still persists as exclusionary. In 2000 for the first time at national level, there was a political alternance when the PAN reached the Presidency with Vicente Fox, which brought the illusions that Mexico would move towards a consolidated democracy (See, O'Donnell, 1996). In reality, the situation at the local level looked bleak for citizens. Particularly in 2001, when the bodies of eight women were found

---

[29] In this year, Amado Carrillo Fuentes died during a plastic surgery. The leadership of the Juárez Cartel was assumed by his brother, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, aka El Viceroy, who had established *La Linea* as his armed branch for securing the logistic operations of the cartel.

in an area that later became known as the “Cotton field”.[30] Various participants conveyed to me the profound shock experienced within the local population (Inés, women rights defender). The interview dataset shows that this event marked a significant turning point for the women’s movement in understanding the complex reality and shared struggles. This event also served as a catalyst for the emergence and initial interactions of human rights groups, coalitions between artists, cultural movements (later Pacto por la Cultura or Pact for Culture), groups for youth development and strong women’s activism in the city (Ibid.).

Thus, the “Cotton Field” case not only brought national and international attention on the impunity of the Mexican state, but for the women groups and human rights activists in Juárez this case activated their collective engagement in a more general and inter-disciplinary form with other NGOs and international organisations in topics of prevention of violence and demands of transnational justice. At the national level, the mothers’ mobilisation led to the creation in 2003 of the Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against the Women of Ciudad Juárez, being the first investigative body for these cases of murder of women. The commission was the only means of contact between the mothers and the federal government and despite the absence of official records at that time, the commission acknowledged that the phenomenon was nationwide. However, the majority of investigations continued to be carried out by civil society groups (Leal, 2008, p.33). The people who I interviewed commented about the different forms of collective action that resulted in the creation of shelters for women survivors of domestic violence, the acquisition of fundraising experience, the demanding of working rights for women in the *maquila*, and the push of the feminicide issue into the national public agenda.

[30] In 2009, the “Cotton Field” case or Campo Algodonero became the first in its type judgement issued by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights (IACHR), in deciding that the Mexican State was responsible for the killings of Claudia Ivette Gonzalez (age 20), Esmeralda Herrera Monreal (age 15) and Laura Berenice Ramos Monarrez (age 17). The three women lived in Ciudad Juárez and disappeared after leaving work. IACHR (2009)

In 2003 the CNDH (2003, pp.2–3) reported that over the past 10 years, 263 women had been killed and there were 4,587 official reports of missing women. Many of the victims were maquila workers. The relatives of the victims and women and feminist groups have continued their struggles against violence through public protests, symbols in the outskirts of the city such as the pink crosses and marches with mothers covering distances of over 400 km, these actions have dragged international attention and presence of international organisations in the city (Carla, feminist organisation). When asked about the type of organisation that could be behind these killings of women, an academic shed light about the ongoing networks of complicity and thus a form of hegemony and social power:

> *I do believe that important elements are at play here. They are men involved with drug trafficking, politics and the economy. It can't be otherwise. I mean, organised crime cannot function without the agreements that exist with certain sectors of the government… If Juárez has received so many recommendations and observations from international and national organisations, and the "Cotton field" jugement, how is it possible that [feminicides] still persist?* [Martha, academic]

These transformations in the relationships between the local authorities and criminals played an important role in unleashing the violence that exploded in 2008. In the next sections, I will explain the process of the activation of local civil society against the extreme violence and their perils in dealing with it.

5.2 Activation of civil mobilisation amid criminal violence, 2004-2011

5.2.1 The origins of the turf war

This section introduces the reasons that led to the outbreak of violence, producing a general instability. The turf war started when the Sinaloa Cartel arrived in Juárez in 2005. There were two criminal sides: The first was the US prison gangs *Los Mexicles* and *Artists Assassins* (or the AA's) and the armed wing called *Gente Nueva* allied with the Sinaloa Cartel; on the other side, *La Línea* and *Los Aztecas*

allied with the Juárez Cartel (Durán-Martínez, 2018). These gangs can be thought of as something like cartel-aligned militias that did their bidding.

The interview dataset indicated that one of the key triggering events of violence be was the detention of Saulo Reyes Gamboa on drug trafficking charges in January 2008. Saulo Reyes Gamboa was the municipal police chief during the mandate of Mayor Héctor Murguía (Carroll, 2009). Until Reyes Gamboa's detention, the Juárez Cartel had the control of the municipal police (Dávila, 2014), but his arrest brought the homicides of municipal policemen that allegedly were colluded with the Juárez Cartel (Fabian, activist). This experience evidenced how the fracturing of former arrangements between state agents and criminals led to an upsurge in violence.

Between the years of 2008-2011, violence proliferated rapidly and visibly. In just one year from 2007 to 2008, the city reported an alarming increase of 713% in murder rate, reaching 1,589 homicides in Juárez. Ciudad Juárez was then named in the media as "national dump of the dead" (Turati, 2009, p.11). This escalated to a peak of 3,766 homicides in 2010 before reducing to 2,282 homicides in 2011. The city became the scene of 61% of them at the state level, and 11.35% at the national level (INEGI, 2010) (See Figure 5). It was during this period that Ciudad Juárez was described as the most dangerous capital worldwide (Vulliamy, 2009).

What drove this rapid increase in violence? It started with an initial turf war between the Sinaloa Cartel and the Juárez Cartel when the Sinaloa Cartel tried to capture the Juárez *plaza*. Both sides were affiliated with small militia-like groups that were involved in heavy and active recruitment strategies. However, the policy that really triggered a sharp increase in violence, was seen in March 2008. Under the Joint Operation Chihuahua, which was the local version of the federal strategy against organised crime, the government of Felipe Calderón sent 3,000 elements of the military to Ciudad Juárez and then 4500 federal police officers in 2010. The result was the explosion of a battlefield in the city.

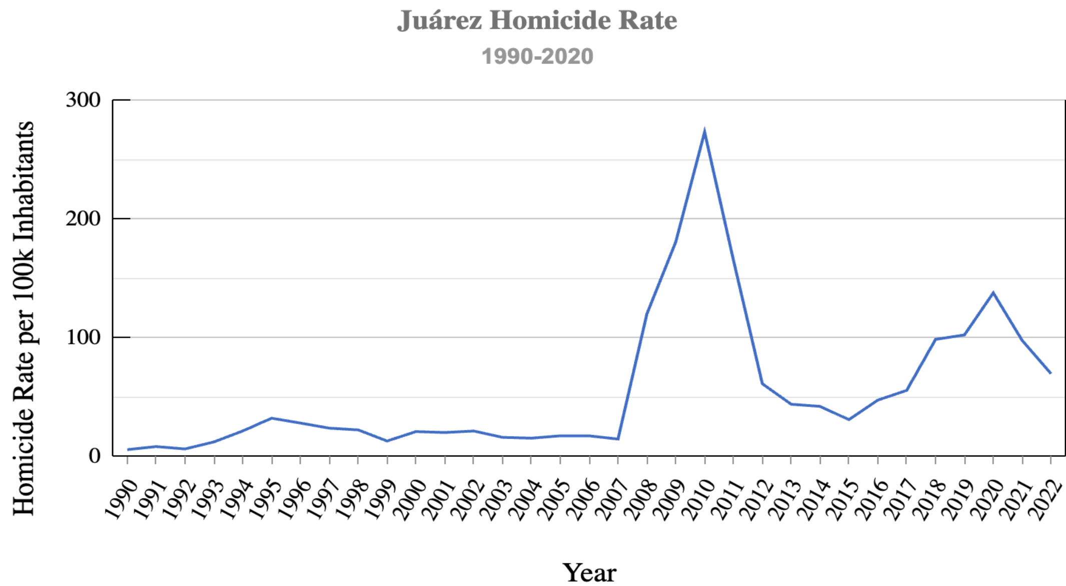

Figure 5. Juárez Homicide Rate from 1990-2020. Source: Own elaboration with data from National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI), 2021 and estimates from the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO), Mexico population projections 2005-2050.

By 2010, Juárez had earned the infamy distinction of being named the most murderous capital in the world. The main targets of this criminal war were young men and women, mainly from poor and marginalised sectors of the society. Additionally, the prevalence of firearms in the region played a significant role in fuelling this cycle of violence. In a city of 1.3 million inhabitants[31], there had been the promise of getting employment in the *maquilas* and improving the conditions of life for thousands of people who had migrated from the south of Mexico. For this reason, the primary victims of this lethal violence resonate with what Hannah Arendt refers to as "superfluous" beings in totalitarian regimes (Van Duzer and Arendt, 1952, p.457). As exemplified in this case, entire communities in Juárez were stripped of their most fundamental rights to life and protection.

During fieldwork, I heard repeatedly from interviewees that during the 80s[32]-90s the drug traffickers were the ones that paid taxes or delivered money "as a gift" to state attorneys and chiefs of

[31] INEGI (2010) Censo de Población y Vivienda.

[32] During the mid 80s and 90s, Rafael Aguilar Guajardo was one of the main leaders of Cartel de Juárez and high rank official of the former DFS (*Dirección Federal de Seguridad*). One can expect that the long term informal arrangements evolved and exceeded the power of political authorities.

police. With the intense competition and further fragmentation of the informal networks, that completely changed. In August 2011, more than 90% of 10 thousand businesses in the city paid rent extraction or *cobro de piso* to the organised crime, which collected more than from those who pay to the Internal Revenue's Office (Turati, 2009). From 2008 extortion rapidly spread in Juárez, first it was with the *yonkes* (tyre shops), then with the formal business, then the informal business, and with the entire population (Fabián, activist). Those who refused to pay the criminal tax their business was set on fire or they were brutally killed. This predatory form of "protection racket", certainly not the type that involved an accepted form of extortion or one that would guarantee low-level of violence (See Gambetta, 1996). Thus, the social base of organised crime in Ciudad Juárez was also at stake. The interview dataset strongly emphasised that the kidnappings and extortions went at its maximum scale particularly when the *federales* arrived in early 2010.

5.2.2 Initial responses from society

Until the beginning of the 1990s the Cartel de Juárez had the hegemony of Juárez and El Valle de Juárez. Regarding this period, some of my participants commented that when those dedicated to the drug trade were local, the violence was contained within the cartel and hence less visible. However, the disruption of the informal networks with the political democratisation were strong reasons that led to the death of Amado Carrillo Fuentes in 1997. When local traffickers were replaced by outsiders, violence became a more serious and more public problem. In the 2000s this started to change. Participant data suggests that one of the first manifestations of this change occurred with the arrival of the Aztecas[33], that altered the dynamics of the illicit market in the slums. The Barrio Azteca is a gang formed in a Texan prison by "Chucos" (the nickname for El Paso natives) and Juárez inmates (Grillo, 2012, p.119). Soon after their release, they quickly made a significant impact on the dynamics of the local drug market.

[33] The Barrio Azteca or Aztecas gang was formed during the mid-1980s into the prototype of a paramilitary force that after serving sentence, they took control of drug smuggling on the streets of Juárez. A study estimated that by 2009 the gang had around 3,000 members (Castillo, 2009, p.309).

One of the first red-flags for members of society in Juárez was an increase in gang recruitment among young people. This recruitment was often principled upon calling in cartel-related debt that was a consequence of drug addiction. This introduction of a new mode of the drug violent gang activities in the streets, tienditas (small shops) or *picaderos* (Campbell, 2009) resonates to what (Sviatschi, 2022, p.1986) calls the spread of criminal capital from US prisons. Maria, who works in youth development programmes in the slums of Juárez told me: “With all the complacency of the authorities, they [Aztecas] went into the neighbourhoods and took people out, practically, since 2005 some of us saw that something was going to come. Nobody paid any attention to us, of course, but then in 2008 Calderón got out of control” (P1-26). As I will explain later in this chapter, it was not the federal military strategy’s goal in understanding the gang recruitment and measures to prevent it, but to achieve their annihilation. The Barrio Azteca gang later joined the Cartel de Juárez-La Línea in alliance with the state, the municipal authorities and the police of Ciudad Juárez.

One of the most worrying topics is the number of young people who do not study or work (Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training, NEET). It is estimated that between 2007 and 2009 a total of 230,000 young people abandoned school as a consequence of violence; from them, 24% moved to El Paso (García Z, 2015). The lack of employment opportunities contributed to their easy recruitment for the cartels (Almada, 2012). Several interviewees also referred to the lack of justice for thousands of orphans that this war has left. This problem was later covered by a coalition of citizens called the Citizen Observatory, which I will explain later.

Initially, there was an effort to curtail the gang recruitment of young people in a community in the southwest of Ciudad Juárez. There, members of a community suggested that there should be a self-imposed curfew to keep young people off the streets after 10pm. This same measure was later replicated by the Mayor Héctor “Teto” Murguía. At the beginning, the curfew seemed to meet with a good response among the members of the community, “particularly parents who started to pay more attention to their children, that in ordinary moments it wouldn’t happen due to the exhausting working times in the *maquila*” (P-21, faith leader). However, it soon became the justification for the municipal police to commit various human rights abuses against young people that broke the curfew, especially

from the poor slums of the city. It became a public outrage when numerous reports by societal groups detailed the illegal detention of youths and furthermore that youths were also extorted by the police in Juárez. Unfortunately, this community-led measure that initially helped contain gang recruitment, was eventually dropped as a consequence of this police abuse. In response to this abuse, a small group of long standing civil society organisations, faith-leaders and women's rights groups, joined together to document these diverse cases and to file a human rights complaint.

By that time, feminist organisations that merely had focused on supporting women affected by domestic violence, found themselves in extraordinary times and collaborating with schools to support young people who were in extreme risk during this war (Turati, 2009). Citlalli (P2-04), a teacher and activist, told me that the situation in the city had escalated to the point where these adolescents were arriving at school carrying guns and drugs[34]. Instead of avoiding involving the school authorities or the police, she decided to take a different approach, otherwise, it may have led to their expulsion, leaving them at the mercy of the cartels. She chose the strategy to engage with these youths on a more individual-level, which involved adopting a more informal type of language which was used by the youths to become relatable and a closer bond of trust with them. From this point of trust, she showed negotiation of empathy and allyship in avoiding dangerous consequences for the kid's life:

> *I tried to have a healthy, friendly relationship with the family and with the children, at the same time. Believe me, it was hard for me to understand that it was me who had to change to be able to have good communication with the children*. [Citalli, teacher and activist]

This passage represents the way in which communities put into practice their soft-skills in acknowledging structural challenges, particularly, faced by the youths. The risk was eminent especially at that period when two opposing sides were fighting for the control of the Juárez' *plaza*. Some of these youths came from impoverished homes and lacked proper nourishment, and so she took it upon themselves to provide them with food. In extreme cases, some students faced threats from gangs on the basis of being affiliated with rival gangs or refusing to join gangs. To ensure their safety,

[34] As in other instances, Citlalli gained the trust of adolescents who recounted to her the cruel methods through which many young people were forced into "initiation" of *sicariato*.

Citalli helped some of these students escape the city to live with family members from elsewhere in Mexico. This case also illustrates how these civil organisations cared for narratives of the "Otherness" (Ley, 2022; Santos, 2019). Similarly, dismal stories like Citlalli's were not isolated, but rather a common occurrence in various schools in Juárez, thus, in this context many front line workers resorted to their discretionary power (Lipsky, 2010, 1980).

One important dimension of decision making is the time horizons over which the decision can be considered and implemented. I draw this characterisation from Ana Arjona's work (2017) on rebel governance in Colombia, where time horizons represent the duration within which criminal organisations must execute their actions. A first element is that shorter time horizons result in reactive, myopic decision making, while longer time horizons allow for more strategic decision making. During this period of study, the time horizons of these violent actors significantly shortened as a consequence of the rapidly changing power structures and competition unleashed by the fragmentation in the informal networks (Trejo and Ley, 2020) and the federal top-down intervention. Second, one can view this short time horizon as pushing urgency or desperation into decision making. A third element is combining this with compelling incentives of the diversification of their portfolios into more predatory illicit activities, affecting the wider population in social and political control, along with a general atmosphere of violence. This likely increases the chances of brash, and severe acts against life and dignity. Long-term strategic goals such as maintaining good public standing, are brushed aside for survival, turf and drug money. In the context of Juárez, the primary objective revolved around securing the *plaza*, which is a strategic control in territory and its communities for the operations of the criminal group. This explanation enables me to move on and shed light on the way in which civil society reacted and responded within this short time horizon.

5.2.3 Lack of coordination within the incumbent party

José Reyes Ferriz (2004-2010), from the PRI, arrived at the mayorship in Juárez with 70% of voter abstentionism (Turati, 2009). His popularity was low from the very beginning and from this unfortunate starting point, he had the unenviable task of dealing with the magre conditions of public

safety institutions and low levels of citizen trust. This negative political context would be a handicap in coordination and implementation of measures.

José Reyes Ferriz soon abandoned his campaign promises — to focus on building urban infrastructure — and was noted to be related to prominent and traditional members of the PRI in the state and engaged in the same clientelistic practices that they did. With the return of the PRI in both municipal and state levels, the state of Chihuahua and particularly Juárez was mostly associated with the influence of two parties (PAN and PRI). This behaviour was a red flag for the governor Jose Reyes Baeza Terrazas (2004-2010), who did not want to be associated with those kinds of political behaviours. However, it was the arrival of the federal armed forces that deepened the tensions and the decay of trust and relationships between the mayor and the governor of Chihuahua, despite being from the same political party. Acting from a state of mistrust, low voter mandate and internal conflict does not make for cohesive decision making between slices of political society.

In 2008, following the arrest of municipal police chief Reyes Gamboa on drug smuggling charges, Reyes Ferriz took action to flush out members of the police force that had drug trafficking links. He announced that he had replaced hundreds of municipal policemen and transit police with former and active military service people. This decision was made after conducting vetting exams to ensure that these new recruits had no connections to drug trafficking groups (Dávila, 2010, p.42). Thus, there were attempts by Mayor Reyes Ferriz to improve the legitimacy of the municipal police. However, regardless of the local efforts to cleanse the police at a municipal level, the military arrived and pushed the municipal police aside. There was low to zero support for the municipal level security policies from the state or federal level, which as a consequence, contributed to a negative effect in the security policy implementation.

At the state level, Governor José Reyes Baeza had created the Police Intelligence Unit (Cuerpo de Inteligencia Policial, CIPOL) within the Chihuahua State Police in 2004 with the focus on investigation and intelligence. Multiple journalistic reports and human rights organisations have documented the existence of informal agreements forged between this office and criminals. There were sources that suggested the “tolerance” of the governor Reyes Baeza and the state attorney

Patricia González, towards groups of the Juárez Cartel-La Linea, an action that afterwards was accused of allowing the Sinaloa Cartel to enter Juárez. Soon, the military control washed over the existing institutions in Juárez, regardless of their status, limiting their autonomy.

As has been discussed so far, communication was poor between the mayor and the governor, making coordinated action difficult. Trust in all parties was not particularly high or driven by a strong public mandate. Thrown into this situation, the following intervention of the army and the federal police, complicated the relationships.

Extortion became a huge problem for the entire population, including the private sector of Ciudad Juárez. Contrary to lacklustre actions of the municipal and state government, business leaders and actors from the private sector organised themselves in order to create contention plans against extortion and to recover as soon as possible the economy of the city, considering that hundreds of people were leaving from Juárez. The financial crisis of 2007 had already hit the city hard. Many companies had closed down and their facilities were abandoned.[35] The anecdotal evidence shows that when some of these spaces were taken by the *federales* as their operations centres, violence rapidly soared at unprecedented levels. Afterwards, the business and clergy later joined the demands for the withdrawal of the *federales*, many aligned with the Observatorio Ciudadano and their organisation evolved within the working group *Mesa de Seguridad*. This later evolved into the Trust for Competitiveness and Citizen Security (FICOSEC) and the Citizen Observatory for Prevention, Security and Justice. Both with the private sector initiative.

5.2.4 Established and Experienced Societal Actors

A variety of heterogeneous civil society groups and collectives started to activate and work together when predatory and extractivist forms of violence were more visible, frequent and sustained for over two years. According to the interview data, the most dreadful crimes at that time were extortions,

[35] Violence severely affected the domestic economy. It is estimated that more than 10,000 local businesses shut down and 100,000 inhabitants moved to the U.S. or elsewhere in the country, between January 2008 and 2009. (Fondevila and Vilalta, 2021, p. 5)

kidnappings, homicides and femicides, along with numerous human rights abuses by militaries and police forces across different levels of government.

A doctor recalls an event in November 2009 when for the first time a hitman entered the General Hospital No. 35, looking for a wounded person after a shooting, and who had been taken to be treated in hospital. The *sicario* threatened the medical staff and managed to enter the hospital, and killed the gunshot victim who had been brought in an ambulance (Elán, P1-21, doctor). This unprecedented event in the city represented a trespassing of the social norms that characterised a changing situation in Mexico towards doctors, this obliged them to modify their behaviour to avoid menace. As the following script posits:

> *Until that moment, in some way, doctors had a place within society, right? It was traditional, there was respect and recognition as an important part within the entire social framework. There were crimes like anywhere else, [but] the proof was that doctors practised freely. They had their offices with their names, their schedules, their phones… and as a result of violence, all of that disappeared.* [Elán, doctor]

The deprivation to the right and access to medical services that followed and no guarantees of state protection was apparent to everyone: medical staff, patients and ordinary people suffered at the expense of the rampant impunity. No one was safe from the aggressive forms of criminal war that were happening in the city. Thus, in December 2008 the Medical Citizen Committee was formed, initially as a group to denounce and make visible the aggressions, first against the medical sector, then against the rest of the population. For example, similarly to the business sector, doctors faced extortion and kidnapping. One of the ways that the Citizens' Medical Committee responded to the crisis of extortion and kidnapping was by setting up a call-in number staffed by doctors to report these crimes and also provided a bridge to authorities (International Crisis Group, 2015).

The interview data set suggests that the combination of different conditions in the midst of epidemic violence enabled the "perception of political opportunity" and empowerment in society (Loveman, 1998, p.487). This is because Juárez has been characterised for having an heterogeneous

and polarised society and without the levels of risk presented at that time it would not have formed key groups such as the Medical Citizen Committee (Elan and Marcos, civic group).

In this period the activation of massive collective action was significant. Even in this high-risk context, in December 2009, after a protest organised by the Medical Citizen Committee, the Citizen Observatory was formed by various heterogeneous groups. Many of them already had pre-existing interactions since the civil mobilisation of the "Cotton-Field" case. It became the first space of interaction between a diverse society such as business leaders, doctors, the clergy, women's rights groups, academics and *maquila* workers. This group's contribution was to give the opportunity to be a voice to marginal sectors of society, to raise their demands when interacting with the authorities during the Mesas.

Given the generalised citizen's distrust in the government, the vast majority of crimes happening in the city were not reported. People completely lost faith in institutions to denounce crimes, the very same formal institutions that were supposedly built based on the ideals of a modern state. Moreover, the lack of crime reports through formal police and state agencies, not only interfered with the effective monitoring of the incidence of violence, but it limited even further the institutional accountability.

One common goal was the key to unite the different layers of societal actors at that time, to give a sense of belonging, as well as the apolitical and communitarian interest to "do something for their city" (Marcos, P1-34, NGO). By 'apolitical', participants mean without the intervention or reference to a political party or any other economic force. Of course, there were other actors that preferred to go it alone, either by themselves or together with a small group of individual actors, but these awareness and struggles were echoed in the rest of the population.

Having experienced the tangible consequences of this war, since the violence was more visible, collective mobilisation was activated and increased into what it was called the Citizen Observatory. This Observatory was key in the so-called *Mesas* of Juárez*,* which were led by citizens. "The sense of security is a state of mind in which both factual and perception variables play an important role in individuals' decision to participate collectively against crime" (Vilalta, 2013). Following this, citizens

gained attention according to the level or tone of violence experienced. In a political act, they made a general 24 hour strike (See Appendix I) that garnered the attention of the national and international media. Independent investigative journalists were particularly helpful at that time given the high risk to receive threats by the criminal groups. Here, the Human Rights Centre Paso del Norte had a powerful participation and a convening role in a commemoration fasting in January 2011 (See Appendix H) for one year after the Villas de Salvarcar' killing. This form of collective action was formed by various societal groups, including the Medical Citizen Committee, and is one of the most visible representations of the delegitimisation of the violence produced by these criminal wards.

In general, these actors represented those who had more experience in Juárez in themes such as women's rights, minority groups, human rights and citizen participation (many NGOs and CSOs[36] had formed since the early 2000s and they were already known by the locals). Also, there had pre-existing relationships ever since their mobilisations to denounce feminicides. After this crisis many of these actors changed their priorities giving their experience in the interaction with authorities, the risks involved and the leeway to act within situations of systematic violence (See Salazar and Curiel, 2012, p.56). Many of their members received reprisals from the crime, federal police forces and from the local authorities. Those who had the possibilities, seeked asylum in El Paso. Some of them lost their jobs for being deemed as uncomfortable for the political power. Overall, not only did these actors facilitate the interaction and initial citizen articulation to face the authorities in the *Mesa de Seguridad,* but they also connected with the members of civil society taking part in social resistance that represented the voices of the most marginalised and who were looking for justice in the middle of that bloodshed.

5.2.5 The activation of citizen mobilisation amid violence

One factor that changed the course of this citizen support was state repression. In Juárez, human rights abuses and massacres committed by soldiers started to be more visible each time by the population. I will go deeper in the case of Monterrey (Chapter 6), with the killing of two students from the

[36] For the purpose of this thesis, a local society organisation (CSO) involves those people who do not identify with or are not part of a formal Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). See Appendix A.

Tecnológico de Monterrey in 2010. The people that I interviewed in Juárez told me that they were witness to how for some people the presence of the militaries turned out to be a major condition of vulnerability and risk towards their everyday life.

Not only did the incidence of violence increase to historical records in a short period of time, but attacks and intentional aggressions against unarmed civilians also increased exponentially. Even when this type of violence is parallel to other forms of conflict, such as civil war, the war that erupted in Mexico did not fit in with the common forms of an armed conflict (Grillo, 2012, p.119). Similarly, when the militaries took over from the municipal police duties and were in charge of the streets, many had a formation of counterinsurgency in the rural south, however the city was a very different context than the rural south (Adair, P1-18, academic) and this resulted in various violations of human rights such as shooting at cars that did not stop at check points and sexual harassment (Meyer, Brewer and Cepeda). "They entered your house without a search warrant. There were many cases, especially in the lower-middle sectors of the population. So it was very polarised" (Adair, academic).

Local organised society formed and sustained diverse reactions and responses against the acts of deliberate repression and growing uncertainty, due to the aggressive military intervention. These societal actors are notable for their consistency, autonomy and capacity to reach out to individuals and gain support at a national and international level. They openly denounced the abuses of the militaries and demanded their withdrawal from the city (Villalpando, 2010), which exposed their members, but at the same time, they were actors to trust in navigating the situations of risk. There were cases that fueled fear among the population, causing paralyzation. It was the case of Josefina Reyes Salazar, a human rights defender who was shot dead in January 2010 and whose murder is related to her activism against the violations committed by the army (WOLA, 2018). In the following script, Fabián who participated in the different expressions of activism at that time, explains the strategy of public exposure that these groups applied to protect themselves, particularly by using the political factor in their favour:

> *When we started the movement against militarisation, obviously many people told us "Hey, they're going to kill you! What's wrong with you? Can't you see what's happening?" But we*

said, let's see if they're going to kill us. It's better to be killed in public and knowing why they killed us. That's what we analysed. We said, if we are killed, [people] will say "these guys were killed by the militaries because they were publicly challenging them". And then it would be a political cost for the Calderónismo and that was our assurance. [Fabián, social activism]

The account of Fabián on risking his life as well as those involved in the collective action against the militarisation of public security in Juárez, represents Loveman's (1998) claims of the costs and risk are measured: "If the likely result of action is death, ration choice models would predict inaction, unless they determine ex post facto, with reference to the individual's behaviour." (p.481). This is core to understanding local contexts that go beyond nonmaterial incentives that can prompt mobilisation efforts. Having said that, while violence increased, the role of emotions was core. Some groups that formed a network of coalitions of social resistance, presented a more parallel activity from the *Mesas* of "We are All Juárez". One of the most representative contentious collective mobilisation occurred in February 2010, with a massive march as a consequence of the Villas de Salvarcar events and when President Calderón went to Juárez. In this case, the combination of outrage and grief became powerful shared incentives across heterogeneous groups of society, triggering further responses to an event that had surpassed all legitimate forms of coercion. In contentious politics, this evidences the importance of emotions in continuing mobilisation of the crisis in Juárez (Loveman, 1998). This is significant as it challenged cost-benefits explanations for joining into collective action. In this sense, the march was called "March of courage, pain and atonement" (Marcha del Coraje, Dolor y el Desagravio) and had the presence of substantial sectors of the population, including doctors, NGOs and some business leaders. From this march, the National Front against Repression was created and then the Juarense Citizen Assembly. After this period of crisis, some actors continued to receive reprisals from municipality authorities. In addition, the anti-military sentiment evolved into communities of collectives and assemblies of feminist, cultural, and anti-capitalist resistance for the recuperation of public spaces and more informal forms of approaches, as well as the accompaniment of vulnerable populations in Juárez: women, girls, migrants, indigenous people, young people and maquila workers.

Women and feminist groups in Juárez also reacted and responded to various types of violence that emerged from the OCGs' turf wars and militarisation. In this regard, the continuum of violence refers to the different types of violence that women suffer throughout their lives in the multiple dimensions of their private or public life. In this sense, how and why women were affected in differentiated ways in the aftermath of the implementation of the federal strategy? Various female participants claimed that since the arrival of the federal armed forces, a pattern of exacerbated violence erupted against them not only in the public space, but particularly at domestic level and with threats with the use of firearms (Carla, feminist activist; Inés, municipal government).

The soldiers that had arriven into Juárez, many were coming from southern Mexico and had received training to combat low-intensity warfare (or counterinsurgency) conducted in rural areas. As explained in Chapter 4, it is important to note that the legal framework, capacities, duties and permissible use of force differ between the military and the (civil) police. Given the nature of the federal strategy (including the belligerent discourse), the deployment of federal armed forces in the region was intended for a war-like campaign against an "enemy", wherein civilian casualties were considered collateral damage. This war-like mindset in dealing with the problems in Ciudad Juárez and the disproportionate damage in populations from the poorest sectors, may have been brought about by their aggressive anti-local mentality. A prevailing official rhetoric at the time framed the violence as a positive outcome, portraying all deaths as gang-on-gang killings, with the perception that all deaths were positive as it led to the elimination of criminals. In this discourse, the greater the death toll, the better the results were perceived to be. This was openly confronted by the Juárez society with the case of Villas de Salvarcar which is covered later in this chapter.

The use of the militaries in charge of local public security duties had consequences. Soon, there were several complaints of human rights abuses of soldiers shooting at vehicles who would not stop at improvised checkpoints on the streets, there were inspections made inside houses without a proper legal warrant (Adair, academic).

In Ciudad Juárez, during this period of crisis and particularly from the arrival of the militaries, there were numerous cases of women disappearing. Disturbingly, various participants told me that

many of these women vanished after having prior interactions with the military or police, including cases of harassment. (Ines and Citlalli, feminist activists).

In contrast to the feminicides of the 1990s, this wave of violence exhibited a distinct pattern of criminality (Monárrez Fragoso, 2019). This change in the pattern of feminicides strongly indicates that these were not the same feminicides of the 1990s, but something new and a product of the situation occurring in Juárez at the time. For example, between 2011 and 2013, the case of El Navajo creek occurred in the middle of a besieged city and their remains were disposed of in an area that was frequently transited by federal forces. The state was not there to protect the lives of women and girls. Today, thousands of women and girls have yet not seen justice from these episodes of cruelty and impunity.

5.2.6 Villas de Salvarcar massacre and public outrage against the official narrative

This section explains the circumstances that created a "critical juncture" (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) that opened the opportunity to networks of society to react and intervene in an unprecedented form to counter violence. On the 30 of January 2010, a heavily armed commando brutally stormed a house that was celebrating a party, killing a total of 15 people, most of them teenagers. Interviewees asserted that the killings in the neighbourhood of Villas de Salvarcar is one the biggest wounds that persists in the memories of Juárez society to the present. These young people were students from the CBTIS-128 high school. They had been murdered out of a case of mistaken identity as they were confused for a rival gang called the *Double A's*. There was public outrage in Juárez and the national and international media when President Felipe Calderón made unfortunate declarations in Japan that the killings were the result of a gang fighting. The same posture was replicated among the authorities at different levels of government.

Given the ongoing mounting pressure, President Cálderon came to Ciudad Juárez in February of the same year and held an open forum with different members of a selected group of the population. In that forum the President was accompanied by his executive cabinet, the Governor Reyes Baeza and Mayor Reyes Ferriz. Participants narrated that the venue was highly restricted and there were mainly

members of the private sector, academics, doctors, and NGOs. While the sessions were developing, a massive protest of young people, human rights defenders and citizens in general was taking place outside. In view of the repressive acts that militaries were taking against the protest, a mother of two of the student victims of the Salvárcar massacre confronted President Calderón (Fabián). In front of all the authorities and members of local civil society, she stated that their children were not gangs -as the President had declared-; there were students who were working to pay for their studies. This declaration was reproduced at national and international outlets. With the legitimacy of the mother in the views of local citizens, this event became a historical mechanism of accountability, where local society evidenced in front of the authorities of the three levels of government that the federal strategy was neglecting the security of citizens, causing severe harm on the *Juarense* society.

As it was shown in Chapter 4, the militarised federal strategy was implemented with a war-like discourse in which the homicides were "killings between gangs" devaluation of life and the abdication of the state in its main duty to provide order and security. For the Juárez society, the massacre of Salvarcar was the point in which violence had crossed the line.

An academic was very critical about this official rhetoric in which it relies, which has been used by that other mayors and state officials when undertaking investigations and during the implementation of public safety measures:

> *[The authorities] cannot argue that they [gangs] are killing each other because then, [the policy] is avoiding what it was created for, which is to safeguard [the life] of people. Then, that is called a policy of fear.* [Martha, P1-27, academic].

It was the moment in which local citizens complained in front of the authorities at the three levels of government about the state institutions abuses and the neglect of the local conditions which completely evidenced the failure of the security policy. As a consequence, President Calderón announced the implementation of the plan "We are All Juárez" (Todos Somos Juárez, TSJ). Since then, authorities at multiple levels of government and even with the next presidential administration,

moderated or changed the discourse based on "war" (Trejo and Ley, 2014). The next section explains the adoption of the federal strategy and the evolution of the different networks of civil society.

5.2.7 Todos Somos Juárez Strategy

The initiative *Estrategia Todos Somos Juárez, Reconstruyamos la Ciudad* ("We are All Juárez" or TSJ) aimed to coordinate the three levels of government to develop concrete actions to reduce insecurity and "to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the city" (Presidencia de la República, 2010). The initiative included 160 commitments and the total amount of resources to achieve them accounted for 3,383 million Mexican pesos in 2010 (approximately 180 million euros)[37]. The aims of the public policy were worked through 6 *Mesas* (working groups), which were led by citizens to coordinate with the authorities of the three levels of government: public safety, employment, education, health and social development (Ibid.)[38].

Thus, the *Mesas* became a core mechanism for the interaction and deliberation of diverse topics between local citizens and authorities amid the context of the crisis of insecurity. This exercise of governance became historic not only in Juárez, but also at national level for being the first its type where normal citizens were discussing local issues with members of the central government (including the President, the Secretariat of Public Security, SEDENA, SEMAR), as well as from the state and municipal government (e.g. the Governor of Chihuahua and Mayor of Juárez, among other representatives of the local government).

The lack of coordination between authorities at the three levels of government of the incumbent party proves that Juárez was a great distance from the ideal characterisation of a modern hierarchical state (Weber, 1978). Not only does it show principal-agent problems (See Guerrero, 2013), but it also illustrates the incentives of inter-agency competition in the federal government and an attempt to

---

[37] In my interviews, all the participants agreed that there has been discontent directed at the central government, as they felt that Juárez was not receiving its fair share of tax revenues compared to what it contributes. In light of this, TSJ was also a probably good political move to counter this narrative.

[38] For accounts about the involvement of the business and the private sector in the implementation of the TSJ, *see* Moncada, (2013) and Coger (2014).

prevent accountability and the rule of law, leaving citizens even more exposed to predatory forms of violence.

Concerning the question of what made interactions through these working groups possible, one significant factor was the wide array of forms of citizen participation that unfolded, to put pressure over the authorities. This is captured in the following account:

> *While people sat with the authorities at the security working group, others were in the streets [protesting], including activists groups. In fact, at one point, I was also on the streets protesting before and after the security meetings. It was the citizen participation that made us not to remain silent.* [Elán, doctor]

This account also suggests that the high levels of participation among heterogeneous coalitions in society was important for widening the encouragement of society. In breaking their silence, not only did society reject neutrality, but deliberately demonstrated a public rejection of criminal and state-led violence (Ley, 2022; Chenoweth, 2021; Loveman, 1998), even when the presence of high-ranking authorities did not reduce the risks associated with protesting.

One of the urgent challenges faced by the Mesas was the widespread gang recruitment. Yet, at that time, the lack of experts in the area made it necessary to compensate for this absence of expertise. In this regard, the Citizen Observatory, whose members had some experience in working with the youth of Juárez, became an important source of knowledge for policy and decision-makers. One important move was to work with the SEP -*Secretaría de Educación Pública*- in the cross-reference of data in public education to address the school dropouts in the city (María, P1-26, NGO). As explained above, the youth phenomenon had been historically covered by local activists in Juárez, becoming later a prime information source of initiatives to work with the authorities at the Security and Education working group.

Among the measures, there were plans for building infrastructure such as schools and parks in marginalised areas. Other developments included the form of the Centre of Conventions (a model

imported from Colombia). This last measure raised local criticisms, given the huge amount of resources invested in the project with structure but without clear indicators or objectives.

In the middle of the scenario of war, where the city was full of soldiers and police authorities from the different levels of government, the *Mesa de Seguridad* (MSJ) (security working group) and the other *Mesas,* operated as more than just a conventional policy of federal intervention. It became an opportunity leveraged by citizens and societal organisations in the creation of a new space for the interaction of citizens and authorities, reinterpretation of the strategy and a bridge of communication for the neglected voices in the city. Within the participation in the MSJ, it was the Citizen Medical Committee who was key in communicating about the victims of kidnapping in the community, where the voices of ordinary citizens would not have been heard within the MSJ. This created the conditions to access safety and legal rights, particularly for serious crimes, such as kidnappings and extortion. Contrary to the war discourse that accompanied the federal strategy, the following script demonstrates an appreciation for the impact on everyday lives:

> *Since [the onset of the crisis] we noticed that homicides, robberies, were increasing as well as serious crimes, such as extortions, kidnappings and killings in public streets… Then, it wasn't centred on doctors anymore, but on the entire population. So, the violence was widespread, and we had to demand social peace not just for the protection of doctors, but for the population in general.* [P1-21, doctor]

At this point, there was already a general public outrage and a loss of public trust in the state. Several participants who I talked to mentioned that the main actors directed their demands towards the federal authorities, who had implemented a militarised strategy in the city since 2009. But their actions were not diminishing violence, on the contrary in fact. Thus, the power vacuum left by the Mexican government was key to enable citizens' participation and negotiation with state authorities to attempt to curb the crisis.

Numerous participants commented on the prevailing lack of inter-agency confidence in the system and approach, which was provoking the dearth of cooperation and coordination in the

implementation of the security strategy. Various participants commented that it became evident that tensions and distrust in institutions permeated not only among citizens, but also between the authorities of different agencies and between the different levels of government. This was particularly significant given the open lack of communication between the mayor and state governor. Similarly, there was simmering resentments between the Mexican military -*Secretaria de Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA- and the Federal Police. These underlying divergences across multiple levels were intensely observed by the citizens, further accentuating their concerns about the disruptions in governance.

> *No one [authority] trusted anyone, and everyone had many interests, as we had seen they supported one group or another.* [César, business sector]

An event that demonstrated the discoordination between the members of the SEDENA and the Federal Police was the explosion of a car bomb in July 2010, which killed a member of the federal police, a doctor and an alleged criminal (Social, 2011).

In the lack of a main body that steers the policy, the Citizen Observatory -*Observatorio Ciudadano*- became the key backbone in bridging the lack of cooperation and coordination between different state agents. The Observatory was led by a heterogeneous group of citizens that contributed to articulating new ideas, decision-making, design and implementation of policies. The previous interactions within the Citizen Observatory evolved into the works of the *Mesa de Seguridad* (César and Elán). It was within this latter group where there were created specialised groups anti-kidnappings and anti-extortion. These groups helped to create trust and have a direct line of communication between citizens and individual officials, either from local or federal authorities, who were usually the operators of the investigations and not necessarily the chiefs who frequently were raised suspicion of having other personal incentives.

Concerning the question about the development of the negotiations with the authorities at these working groups, participants recalled their interpretations and understanding of the complexities of the crisis, shedding light on the complicit networks between and state authorities at different levels of government. The following quote by a doctor reflects on the contextual and tangible dimension of the

situation, but it also acknowledged their agency within the very hostile environment in the efforts to curtail violence.

I understood what was being said up until that point. The authorities, criminals, and organised crime were in collusion. I understood it because I saw it and lived it. They were involved at the federal, state, and municipal levels. Those people were implicated in various ways from low to high levels. And this was completely proven with the arrest of [Genaro] García Luna last year or the year before. He was one of the highest levels of corruption and was involved with drug trafficking groups, and sometimes we had to sit with him [in the working meetings].

So, at that moment, during the monthly meetings that we held, I personally felt like I was facing the people responsible for what was happening, but we had to do it because we needed to make attempts to stop or minimise the violence. [P1-21, doctor]

Two years after conducting this interview, in February 2023, in Brooklyn, Genaro García Luna was convicted of conspiring with the Sinaloa cartel in the trafficking of cocaine. As a result, the former Secretary of the Federal Police in Mexico, and one of the key architects in the instrumentalisation of the top-down anti-drug strategy (Feuer and Schweber, 2023), will be remembered by Juárez society as one of the main executors of the policy intervention that disrupted the lives of thousands of families and contributed towards the instability that arose when federal police members arrived in the city in 2010.

The impact of public outrage and violence in Juárez even raised international attention to the new approach, the US-Mexico Merida Initiative, an anti-drug strategy adopted in 2007 which was then later upgraded in 2010. The evolution of the strategy included expanding collaboration with civil society organisations in violence reduction programmes (See Olson, 2017).

Between 2010 and 2011, the different police institutions at state and municipal levels in Chihuahua went into a process of purging and restructuring institutions (including the CIPOL). However, some corrupted agents managed to survive these cleansings (Trejo and Ley, 2020). In 2011, various local citizen groups in Juárez managed to articulate with the national movement of victims led

by poet Javier Sicilia. This helped to place victim's voices at the front and pushed more effectively for changes in the law to recognise the human cost and their justice demands. (Juan, NGO; Gallagher, 2017).

A major problem that society confronted to tackle predatory violence was the informal networks of collusion between state security agents and criminals. These state and society alliances in the MSJ, in tandem with parallel local communities were fundamental in tackling the high-levels of extortion and kidnappings. From discussions within the MSJ, two core specialised sub-groups were created: the Unit Anti-Extortion and the Unit Anti-kidnappings (Unidad Antiextorsión and Unidad Antisecuestros) groups. These units were particularly prominent within the gubernatorial attorney office to prosecute, control and reduce high-impact crimes of high impact for society that, at that time, could be conducted with almost complete impunity by criminals. This trend of violence reduction in the city followed the same tendency at state gubernatorial level (La Jornada, 2013). Doctors, lawyers and businesses also reacted by creating trusted channels of communication to report these crimes. Along with these channels of communication, a more assertive and unified society became more confident in reporting crimes, even when these involved the military and the municipal police.

Local citizens carefully constructed relationships of trust at the street level with members of the local fiscalia, even in the face of possible state-criminal collusion. Their direct channel of communication with the operators of the plans adopted during negotiations within the mesa de seguridad, mainly at gubernatorial level, were leveraged by citizens to overcome — at least during the crisis — the frequent changes of high-level staff within institutions. This direct oversight coupled with the commitment of street-level bureaucrats, drove them to carry on investigations and achieve detentions. Members of the MSJ accompanied victims in reporting their crimes, preserving their anonymity to avoid reprisals on the victim. Participants agreed that these measures were fundamental in liberating citizens from the mafia-like control over citizens.

5.3 A new government: Discontinuation of alliances and collective reflection 2012-2016

The interview dataset revealed that the social pressure was effective in the withdrawal of the militaries and the federal police. This immediately was observed in the official statistics (See Figure 5) and perceived among the population. Even when violence was not entirely resolved, participants commented that their collective action was paramount in shaping this predatory pattern and, without the intervention of citizens it could have been worse such as in Tamaulipas. Sectors of society, such as doctors, did not have cases of kidnappings in the following years.

Soon after mounting pressure from the social mobilisation, as well as from the media, there were strong rumours of a re-arrangement of a truce between the two criminal factions that went into war. This suggests the (soft) impact that citizens had in the rearrangement of informal networks. The interview dataset demonstrated awareness of the new arrangements. Some of the interviewees commented that the distribution of the city was divided by the Pan American highway and in neighbourhoods spread between the gangs affiliated to the Sinaloa and Juárez Cartel.

The change of presidential government in 2012 with Enrique Peña Nieto with the PRI party (2012-2018), seemed to have a continuation of these works and even a bottom up federal policy was developed. In fact, “several of the officials at the tables said "no, we've come this far". And on the other hand, “Peña Nieto's government did not invest anything in Juárez”. (María, social activist)

However, the policy never received funds and it ended up not being fully implemented. In Juárez, one topic that was covered by my participants and that has been largely disregarded (at least until the publication of this work) is the development of measures to protect mental health, particularly of children.

With the violence that the city witnessed after the implementation of the Joint Operation Chihuahua, the dispossession and forced displacement also increased in Juárez. During my fieldwork I saw many dilapidated, abandoned and burned-out buildings in Juárez. In 2021, it is estimated that there were 70,790 abandoned houses in Juárez (Plan Estratégico de Juárez, 2021).

Some of my participants commented that when violence erupted in the city they had to leave and go to El Paso or other parts of Mexico. While some of them gradually came back to the city, others remained living outside. Families that used to live in the Juárez Valley flee to El Paso. The following passage describes the disconnection of the land and the nature:

> *I was already very hurt. When you have to leave your home you don't just leave your heart, your family, or your old job; you leave your home, your dearest, your living and your dead. You leave your animals and your plants, right? You uproot yourself.* [P2-04, civil society organisation]

With the militarisation that was brought with the Joint Operation Chihuahua, made it more difficult for citizens to conduct their communitarian activities. Citizens risked facing violence and potentially death when leaving their homes. The exacerbated violence was already affecting families and causing fear and pain in citizens of the border city. Women were particularly affected as many who were vulnerable to sexual harassment or in a position of vulnerability were forced to migrate outside of Juárez, to their places of origin in other parts of Mexico, particularly to Veracruz. Thus, their hopes to improve their lives with better living conditions when they arrive to work in the factores of Juárez were not achieved.

With the general perception of the state forces being involved in massacres and perpetuation of impunity, many who fled chose not to report their problems or departure to the authorities. Many houses and buildings that were abandoned were used as a *picaderos,* which is a place for drug consumption. However, there were small groups, mainly from young people and students who organised and recovered places that were later turned into cultural and communitarian places.

I also interviewed a group of young people that were running a cultural space that served as a safe space for sharing and connecting to other collectives in the middle of the most deadly years of the security crisis. I will refer to them here as “Xolas”. The active advocacy of “Xolas” in this place came immediately after a civilian movement against militarisation settled in one of the thousands of abandoned houses in Juárez, as a consequence of the insecurity crisis experienced in 2011. In that

year, they were able to recuperate the space as if it was a picadero.[39] From decisions taken through assemblies, “Xolas”[40] preserved a place of culture and activism with collective groups of young people, whose voices have been frequently silenced and marginalised in Juárez. In January 2013, “Xolas” played a significant role in the accompaniment of mothers whose daughters had disappeared during the crisis of the war against organised crime. Even when at national and international levels, Juárez was flourishing as one of the models of citizen security, the disappearances of women and girls not only continued but hundreds of families were enduring the rampant impunity after the blood spill over their city.

PRONAPRED

As discussed in Chapter 4, one of President Enrique Peña Nieto’s (2012-2018) major policy plans was the crime prevention project called PRONAPRED. In some ways this initiative was superficially similar in spirit to TSJ, though applied nationwide. While Peña Nieto eliminated TSJ from the government budget, he put forward his own crime prevention project. From the national funding, Juárez received the 2nd biggest payout, initially starting at $6 million a year, featuring diverse infrastructures projects such as equipping three public libraries, creating a youth orchestra, financing a drug addiction treatment centre and also community projects like workshops or classes aimed at children, youths or women providing training to keep teens in schools or connected to jobs (International Crisis Group, 2015) .

In some senses PRONAPRED has a similar community-oriented spirit but unlike TSJ, it was much less targeted at solving specific problems. One major problem with the PRONAPRED project was that it did not provide clear indicators of success or processes to monitor success. As the International Crisis Group (2015) noted “indicators were measurements of activity, not impact:

[39] The *picaderos* is Mexican slang to refer to a place where drug addicts gather for the sale, management and/or use of drugs. The term is frequently applied to cases of micro-trafficking of drugs (*narcomenudeo*) at the US-Mexico border.

[40] “Xolas” is a cultural space with an anticapitalist position that was formed organically. They promote more flexible, equal labour relationships and, until the writing of this work, only women live in this space.

number of events, classes, visits, parks and libraries built, equipped or renovated" (p.18). Moreover, the convoluted approval process for funding and assigning workers to projects often resulted in lack of following up on projects (See Chapter 4). Ultimately, just as TSJ had been left behind by a political alternance, so too was PRONAPRED.

5.4 Continuation of civil resistance: A novel view of political participation, 2016-2021

Based on the interview dataset, the reason why violence was increasing again in this period, is that the truce established between the different factions that the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels was broken, or at least it went into a new period of tensions. There were other factors that played a role in this increase, such as the autonomy that gang groups such as the Barrio Azteca had gained.

While the investment in infrastructure such as primarily schools and pavement in the southwest of the city seemed to have gained positive measures, there were many unattended demands, as an activist who works with young people accounts:

> *A lot of things were never taken care of, so, we are already facing the next generation of kids who had their parents killed and who are more determined, right?. They have grown up with a desire for revenge, resentment, they are children that nobody has taken care of. And there are thousands of them, because some organisations are taking care of them, but we really, with our capacity, can't reach them all.* [María, activist]

In Juárez, organised crime has been generating around 95% of the homicides, and this has been linked to micro trafficking. Juárez should have 6,200 police officers to comply optimally with its duties, but currently it has only 2,500 policemen, which is working with 30% of human resources. (Gabriel, P1-23, municipal police). For the municipal police elements that I interviewed, in order to build confidence, it was necessary for them to first work on the long term strategy to overcome the cultural fear of the police and achieve trust through crime prevention programmes in schools, parks, civil society groups, maquila factories, among others.

Gabriel said that in order to combat corruption it is necessary to dignify the police community, particularly in terms of social benefits, for instance, until recently the municipal police in Juárez did

not have access to mortgage credits or life insurance. Gabriel (P1-23) commented that good outcomes in police investigations are impossible without good inter-institutional coordination and cooperation with the citizens. Since the violent crisis in Juárez, the closest citizen alliance with the municipal police has been with the Trust for Competitiveness and Citizen Security (Fideicomiso para la Competitividad y Seguridad Ciudadana, FICOSEC)[41] in the design, coordinate and implement law enforcement and public safety security policies. In the coordinated works, it was considered an achievement when the first certification of a municipal police at national level by a committee formed by citizens (P1-09, FICOSEC member).

The same situation of lack of attachment to the place was manifested by my interviewees with the authorities, particularly with some chiefs of police at state and municipal levels who came from other parts of the country and with limited or no commitment to serve.[42] The constraint to time in the position and political factors in the public administration influence the incentives for the officials in public security to make decisions in the long run.

5.4.1 Navigating a new governance of crime: Everyday resistance and communitarian efforts.

The Red de Vecinos (Neighbours' Network) is a communitarian project promoted by the Strategic Plan of Juárez -*Plan Estratégico de Juárez*- (PEJ) that has been operating since 2012. The first

---

[41] FICOSEC was formed in parallel to the *Mesa de Seguridad*, with a self-imposed tax on the resources of the main business leaders in Juárez. The trust has primarily supported the strengthening of security institutions in Chihuahua, as well as providing funds to other civil groups such as Tira Paro, engaged in important work in crime prevention among adolescents in the slums of Juárez, or Plan Estratégico de Juárez, for citizen participation programmes (P1-09, FICOSEC member).

[42] As it occurs in other countries of the Global South, the electoral time of the government, particularly at local level, severely limits the time frame for the security programmes, as well the sustainability of projects in the benefit of the population. In Mexico, the Constitutional reform of 2014 enabled the consecutive re-election of mayors and other local legislators and officials. In Juárez, the first mayor to be immediately re-elected was Armando Cabada Alvidrez, first independent candidate, in 2016 and then in 2018.

members of this network were women and feminists collectives, there were other collectives in the initials of the network but with the time, it became until now formed mainly by neighbours of the city. By 2012, there were more positive comments within the Mexican government and the news about Juárez, since crime statistics showed a rapid decrease of 85 percent, compared to the peak in 2010. One phenomenon seen during the war in the city was the development of neighbourhood associations to enclose the public space, through the installation of gates. To do this, denoted prior organisation to conduct the administrative procedures with the municipality. These pre-existing means of organisation in the neighbourhoods were helpful for the leverage of further forms of citizen's participation from the Neighbours' Network. The interactions and rutinary practices at the micro-level have been significant to implement sensitive mediation between the ordinary people that are members of the network.

This type of organisation has allowed to evidence the differences in the local demands which lie on alternative claims from dominant narratives of security. For example, Rosa, a member of the network, depicts these in the following script:

> *Many times [the neighbours] ask you "I want help to fix the streetlamp, the trash to be collected, the park to be cleaned", simple things that are the municipality's responsibility and yet they don't do it.* [Rosa, P1-33, neighbours' network]

In the following section, participants reflect about their struggles that confronted state inaction and that has positioned them as political actors:

One of the elements that was left outside from the national governmental recovery packages was the development of methods for mental health as a consequence of the intense war (Valentina, P1-20, member of CEDIMAC). When mounting efforts were put on the shoulders of civil society groups as well as communities, the resources and the outreach to cover the number of people who were exposed to severe trauma and was very limited, particularly for the children and young people who were harmed or lost a loved one during the most intense years of that criminal war. A local academic and journalist commented that kids need "love and time of attention" (Julio, P1-08). Today, official data in violent conflict-affected communities is still very scarce, if not absent.

Moreover, a leader from a civil organisation that promotes youth development in neighbourhoods that have been susceptible to cartel involvement, particularly in recruiting, have implemented various activities with art, culture and music. Moreover, a doctor recalls the experiences during the working groups of the TSJ and reflects on the long debt that the Mexican State owes to society in terms of justice: "They discussed so much about legality…, but legality is not justice. Because there are laws that are unjust, or the law moves in the direction that suits it" (P1-21).

As these lines have shown, civil society in Juárez has been versatile and able to respond to different situations of crisis. For instance, Rosa (P1-33), a communitarian activist, explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they deviated from their regular communitarian work and adapted their resources towards other urgent demands that required dealing with uncertain situations, such as gathering the neighbours and collect resources as a hands-outs or paying the internet bill for students and helping them to complete their study terms. As she concluded:

> *We have to see each other and work according to the circumstances and the situation available at that moment.* [Rosa, NGO/activist]

Another form of resistance has been the use of art and culture. This has been through assemblies and collective shared spaces. Here communities leverage their connections, and demonstrations of empathy in accompaniment of women whose daughters have disappeared and care for the others in these forms of community. (See pictures 1-3 in Appendix H)

The collective painting of murals of the "faces of feminicides" is also a form to challenge the official discourse when it suggests that they are guilty for their own death or when it diminishes a person's life. The murals serves as well for the re-appropriation of public spaces, defying projects of modern state and urbanisation that have characterised the city since the 1990s. It also reminds the state of the long debt of justice for these women and girls. The forms of resistance by these communities become significant in comprehending and challenging the violence that they have lived and how they have resisted.

In a community led by women in the southeast of Juárez, their members have used rhetoric at personal level to engage with a young person who is involved in drug trafficking at street level.

Considering the context that Juárez lived 13 years ago, and the historical inequalities that marginalised societies have suffered, this activist shows a different perspective in making this kid part of the community:

> *It used to be a very conflictive community and several people were killed there. .. At the beginning there was a lot of harassment by halcones [paid subordinates and drug smugglers] who sell drugs. But what we have done, I'm not going to say friendship, but they are kids from the community. If you don't mess with them, they're not going to mess with you. However, what we actually do is [to tell them] "come to the class", "you have a scholarship", "come here, how can I help you?" They know that we know [what they are involved in], but we don't talk to them about drugs; I don't know, we talk to them about life, art, and the community. It's counterintuitive.* [P1-24, activist].

This community has created a safe space with art and cultural activities where families can recreate the faces of their loved ones who were killed during the war. It's common to talk about the wounds in Juárez and the trauma that the war has left to their persona. This contributes by creating memories to document what happened along with their long demands of justice. These groups have built communities and given a sense of identity to those that were not originally from Juárez and might have not felt like they were integrated there, and by creating an environment to imagine a better life that the Mexican state has not been able to provide.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the process that involved various responses in local society organisations that contributed to manage violence, as well as the role of alliances . It did so by performing a micro-level analysis of the case of Ciudad Juárez, focusing on the responses of civil society to violence across four temporal periods. These covered the themes explored from the analysis and triangulation of interview data and document materials.

To aid in my analysis, I identified three main actor pathways. These serve to better group together similar actors and analyse their actions over time. A more detailed analysis of these pathways will be given in Chapter 7 including a comparative analysis between both cases.

The **Dialogical nexus pathway** (DNP) - The DNP consists of actors with long-standing experience in human rights, citizen participation and community. For example, the Juarese Observatory for Public Security and Social Security, the Citizen Medical Committee, and Plan Strategico. As well as providing their extensive knowledge, this pathway was respected in the community and facilitated communication between different actors.

The **Social resistance pathway** (SRP) - The SRP consisted of various actors such as academics, human rights activities, feminists, smaller NGOs and others. These actors took high-risk participation activities amid organised crime violence, collective fasting and strikes, marches and other approaches. Their motivation and drive was to express injustices, suffering and grief.

The **politico-elite pathway** (PEP). The PEP consisted of traditional and economic power figures of the city including leaders of cooperatives, maquilas, politicians and the clergy. Members of this pathway usually have a more direct line of communication with members of the government and could use this to influence outcomes. The business leaders in this pathway also mirrored various initiatives from a business context, focusing on reducing extortion and the crisis of businesses shutting down and leaving.

The first period (*onset*) captured the immediate aftermath of the political alternation, emphasising the infamy Juárez gained in 1993 due to the surge in feminicides and drug-related violence. Despite attempts to reform state judicial and police institutions, these efforts systematically fell short in terms of investigating, preventing, and curbing the killings, often exhibiting authoritarian attitudes towards the victims. In response to these dire circumstances, the SRP led by women groups mobilised themselves in an unprecedented form in Mexico to denounce these atrocities to international human rights bodies, document cases, and press for civil rights and alternative approaches to city development grounded in culture (Leal, 2008).

In the second (*intensity*) all social pathways became more activated as criminal competition escalated in intensity and acted as “roving bandits”, as characterised by Mancur Olson (1993, p.567), against the population and how the coercive federal militarised strategy led to chaos and increased violence. As well as homicides, kidnappings and extortion were problematic for doctors for the DNP and businessmen from the PEP, becoming an important issue to be dealt with. Businesses were closing down and people were leaving the city. The empirical analysis shows the importance of the role of emotions, as public outrage and grief, in high-risk mobilisation amid the crisis in Juárez. This is significant as it challenges cost-benefits explanations for joining into collective action (Jasper, 1998; Lovemann, 1998). This was mirrored across the country and supported by all pathways though the SRP was particularly prominent. The actions of all pathways in complex and often complementary ways led to the withdrawal of the federal forces that were part of the Joint Operation Chihuahua and the Mesas were created as part of the Todos Somos Juárez project. The Mesas became a melting pot of communication and coordination between the various pathways, integrating the existing experiences of the DNP and PEP, and creating social alliances in coordination with the government allowing for greater participation in (democratic) decision-making. While these responses were facilitated by preexisting social relations, they did not emerge as premeditated strategies, but rather as a necessary response by civil society to the weak state capacity of local governance.

In the third period (*reduction*), the election of President Enrique Peña Nieto in 2012 became a significant factor in the discontinuation of security and crime prevention plans adopted after the implementation of the ‘Todos Somos Juárez’ initiative and the Mesas. This shift gradually led to a reduction in the federal funding for Juárez's activities and various Mesas did not continue. Yet, Peña Nieto simultaneously launched his own nationwide initiative PRONAPRED for crime prevention (illustrated in Chapter 4) with a similar basis in citizen participation as Todos Somos Juárez. However, for the last two years of his administration, the PRONAPRED no longer allocated resources for the program. In particular, neighbours actively changed their urban contexts to improve security such as closing streets using barricades and installing police stations. The DNP organised these urban projects

with Plan Estratégico Juárez, which promoted the creation of a network of neighbours to respond to violence.

In the fourth period (*continuation*), I showed the significant impact of women's movements on the city's governance from the SRP. I highlighted the collective action undertaken by these movements that provided communities with the means to resist. Contrasting the general civil society and collectives that exhibited a more visible, varied and autonomous participation in multilayered forms, the case of Monterrey featured a more constrained involvement with the influence of a powerful business sector.

Different pathways came together with different responses that blended together across the different pathways. For example the SRP's displays of high-visibility actions helped to raise the visibility of the crisis in Juárez. This increased exposure created a critical juncture following the Villas de Salvárcar massacre that resulted in the federal plan of Todos Somos Juárez. From this initiative, various Mesas were created, combining civil society and the three layers of government that served as a point of alignment and coordination for the PEP and DNP and indirectly for the SRP via the DNP.

The initial efforts to respond to the problem of state legitimacy by purging the local police were brushed aside by the militarised intervention. However, the initial efforts prior to the formation of the Mesas by the DNP, such as the Medicinal Citizen Committee hotline, the planning experience of Plan Estrategico, and the data gathering of Juárez Observatory for Public Security and Social Security could be successfully absorbed into the Mesas. This was mirrored by the business actors in the PEP pathway with the creation of FICOSEC who also set up their own observatory. Similarly, the gubernatorial attorney office (Fiscalia) created support policy units against extortion and kidnapping that also provided secure channels of communication for crime reporting. This propagation of initiatives across pathways is an indication that they were probably quite effective.

Despite the uneven democracy in Mexico and the low state capacity and legitimacy of institutions, society found its own way to exercise democratic-like decision making by coming together in the Mesas with the three levels of government to address a dire situation. Their reactions were diverse, including forming formal and informal societal structures, shaping violence through

agenda setting along with policy and institutional changes, establishing relationships of trust within their communities, creating the means to communicate in a protected and/or anonymised way, changing the government narratives about violence, delegitimising violence, and bringing forward the demands of marginalised people directly to the authorities.

There is also evidence that the soft power exerted by various pathways, but especially the high-visibility actions of the SRP applied the necessary pressure to renegotiate the informal arrangements between local criminals and between local criminals and the authorities, perhaps to avoid reigniting the escalation of measures by the government and the community. Though this status quo is by no means optimal, criminal violence did persist, there was a reduction of criminal violence in the community and a changed pattern of violence.

Chapter 6: Confronting Hard Truths: Acknowledging Inadequacy and Taking Collective Action Against Criminal Violence in Monterrey, Nuevo León

6.0 Introduction

Monterrey, in Nuevo Leon, has an established and powerful entrepreneurial elite dating back to the late 19th century. Its subnational democratisation was characterised by a civil society that was heavily influenced by the ideals of the entrepreneurial elite in liberal democracy. Prior to the eruption of violence by OCGs, Monterrey had a good reputation as an attractive city for doing business in Latin America, but that reputation would change drastically. From being named the safest city in Latin America up until 2005, it turned into a warzone in 2011, facing violence primarily orchestrated after the breakup of the Gulf Cartel and its former armed-wing and paramilitary style force, Los Zetas. As a broader national response to the epidemic of drug-related violence in Mexico, Monterrey faced its own local version of the "war on drugs", known as Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo León.

In this chapter I explore how civil society mobilised and responded to a failure of government in Nuevo León to address the rampant criminal violence that erupted in the city. To do so, I draw upon qualitative evidence and findings from the analysis of micro-level data acquired through fieldwork and interviews. These responses consisted of collective actions in the form of student assemblies, alliances of civil actors, collectives of relatives of disappeared people, as well as an important entrepreneurial sector supporting the creation of a new local police force called 'Fuerza Civil' (FC).

I show how the business elite and civil society had some overlapping paths, using technological tools to create mechanisms of accountability and reporting criminality, focusing on coordinating with local municipal and gubernatorial authorities to address the situation. Furthermore I show how a more holistic analysis of policing led to better local level police strategies to crime prevention and bolstered relationships between the police and communities. These changes coincided with a reduction of homicides and kidnappings. The population voted for the first state government of an independent candidate, largely to remove the existing PRI and PAN forces. With this political alternation, there was

no continuation in the planned development of the local police that had seen previous successes. Instead, local authorities focused on unintegrated, blunt-force security measures.

Returning to the broader contributions of this thesis, I continue my analysis of the process of democratisation at a subnational level and how this shaped criminal violence over time. As with the case of Ciudad Juárez, I explore the quality of democratisation and its influence on the evolution of criminal networks and factors that prompted significant and *sui generis* local societal responses. Unlike the case of Ciudad Juárez . I also step back to consider the commonalities between the federal level actions and their outcomes observed in the case of Juárez in Chapter 5 and now in the case of Monterrey. I observe similar unintended consequences of the federal strategy of the so-called 'war on drugs'. In particular, I recount how criminals expanded their illicit portfolios and became more aggressive against the general population.

The rest of this chapter is organised chronologically, according to the four key temporal periods described in my methodology. For better clarity, the main events covered in this period are captured in the timeline in Figure 6.

In section 6.1, I elucidate the features of subnational democratisation in Monterrey following the partisan alternation from the PRI to PAN. In particular, I unveil an uneven democracy with lack of inclusiveness in political participation as well as the limited state capacity to protect the lives of citizens. The main civic organisations in this period had entrepreneurial roots. Moreover, the disruption of old networks caused issues of organised criminal violence in the northeast that was soon expanded to the capital *regiomontana*.

In section 6.2, I explain how and why Monterrey became one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico. Here, the turf wars, and then the implementation of the Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon[43] were key elements that had the effect on the intensity of violence. In particular, how criminals

[43] The Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon was implemented in January 2008 with approximately 6,000 elements from the army and the federal police. Similar to other local interventions across the country and as a response to the dire turf war between the Gulf Cartel and

were operating reactively as “roving bandits” (Olson, 1993, p.567) as a consequence of operating within short time horizons. I then show how there were various responses to the violence in Monterrey at a municipal and societal level. At the level of civil society, the dire conditions drove citizens to mobilise and take high-risk collective action. At a local level, the escalation of predatory violence and the inability to deal with the situation forced the Nuevo León governor to change the priorities of his administration. Finally, at an institutional level, based upon some pre-existing relationships between civic actors and the new insights of societal actors, an unprecedented form of participation towards managing criminal violence was achieved. Structures, such as assemblies of students and neighbours emerged.

In section 6.3, I explore how communitarian measures were implemented. There was a sudden generalised decrease in the predatory violence, however with the time the number of disappearances increased. Many societal organisations oriented their efforts to the development of mechanisms of accountability and governance mainly between municipalities. The collectives of mothers and relatives looking for their disappeared family had a strong resonance locally and nationally to create searching protocols and working groups directly with state public prosecutors. Furthermore, with the work of feminist and women’s rights groups, an official alert of gender violence against women was issued for the first time in the Nuevo Leon state. This is a mechanism established by law to address the security issues facing women and girls. The changes brought about during this period heavily involved the engagement of the private sector, who influenced in the historical election of the first governor for an independent party.

In section 6.4, I explain the outcomes of the actions taken at a municipal and societal level. In particular, based on the interpretations of the outcomes expressed in the interview dataset. I argue that civil society groups and collectives were key in not only changing the course of the security policy, but also in shaping the patterns of violence. There was the administration of the independent governor and the path towards the approval and further challenges of the implementation of citizen initiatives.

Los Zetas, in 2010 the strategy was then rebranded as “Operative Northeast”, which included the states of Coahuila and San Luis Potosí.

Lastly, I make the case that a lasting legacy of the mobilisation of society was a change in society's capacity to form communities and take more assertive attitudes towards violence, along with the willingness to express themselves through other formal and informal arrangements, beyond political-electoral institutions.

Finally, in section 6.5, I draw conclusions about the factors that led to collective action and outcomes after various societal responses to criminal violence. I identify the main actor pathways and what their roles were. This lays the ground for a comparative analysis in Chapter 7 that includes my case study of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, where I answer my research questions in more detail.

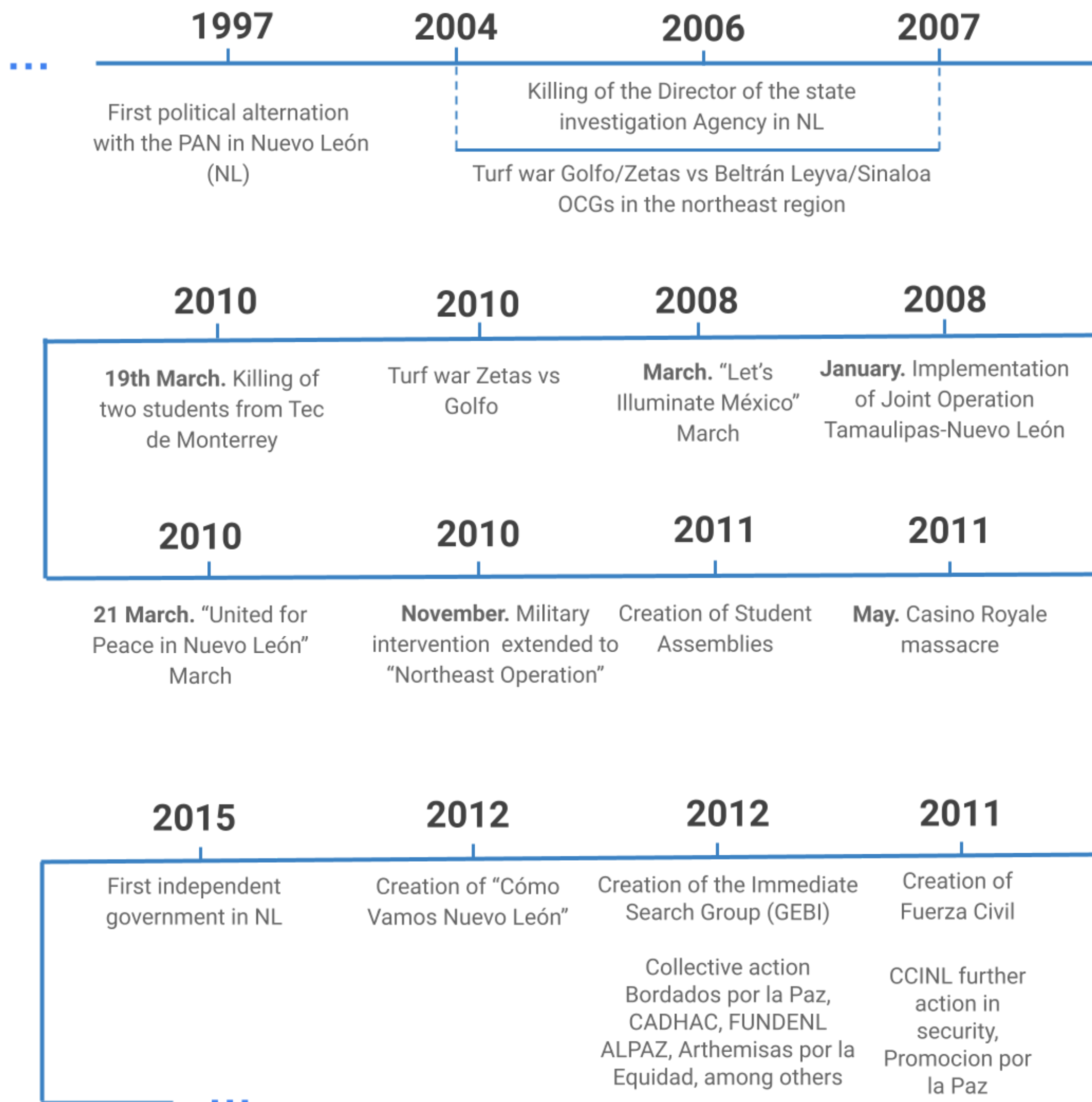

Figure 6. Timeline of main events Monterrey, Nuevo Leon 1997-2015. Source: Own elaboration, 2023

6.1 Overview of Monterrey

Monterrey, Nuevo León is located in the northeast of Mexico, 200 km south of the border with the US. It is surrounded by mountains, including the imposing Cerro de la Silla, that towers over the metropolis and gives it a unique skyline. Its semi-arid climate is characterised by warm and dry

conditions that often result in droughts (Monterrey, 2014), while simultaneously contending with flooding that stems from inadequate fluvial infrastructure. The Monterrey Metropolitan Area (MMA) is the second-largest in Mexico, surpassed only by Mexico City, following the process of urbanisation and industrialisation of the MMA that integrated together 11 municipalities[44]. As of 2010, the MMA contained the majority of the population of the state (79.84%) (INEGI, 2010).

6.1.1 The inaugural political shift in Nuevo León: An initial look of the unintended consequences for bottom-up approaches (1997-2011)

Monterrey has a rich historical background, deeply intertwined with its industrial and entrepreneurial heritage that dates back to the late 19th century. Indeed, the *regio-montano* (a moniker for people from Monterrey*)* business elite has been known for taking a prominent role in shaping industrialisation policies at local and national levels (Tijerina Sepúlveda, 2018). However, its projection as a safe and modern centre for culture, finance and services is in stark contrast with a large marginalised population that lives in the urban sprawl within the MMA that has continued to grow since the 1940s (Monterrey, 2014, p.8).

My examination of Monterrey's recent history begins in 1997, a pivotal year marked by the significant local political transition from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to the National Action Party (PAN). This shift was catalysed by the forced resignation of Nuevo León's governor Sócrates Rizzo (1991-1996), as well as accusations of corruption in the state police, which highlighted the wastefulness of the PRI's rule in Nuevo León. As a consequence, citizens of Monterrey rallied behind the opposition, leading to the election of Fernando Canales Clariond as the first governor from the opposition party. Crucially, this shift in power found strong support from a prominent local business elite known as "The Monterrey Group". Prior to this political transformation, civil organisations, primarily grown from entrepreneurial origins, championed civil participation and advocated for changes in governance. One of their primary motivations for pushing for political

[44] The municipalities that integrate the MMA are: Apodaca, García, Guadalupe, General Escobedo, Juárez, Monterrey, San Pedro Garza García, San Nicolás de los Garza and Santa Catarina. Then, it was added: Cadereyta Jiménez, Pesquería, Salinas Victoria and Santiago.

alternance, was to combat the political electoral fraud associated with the PRI in 1985 and the pursuit of political liberalisation (Mendoza, 2006). Thus, accounting for the deeply ingrained politico-entrepreneurial background of the society in Nuevo León is crucial in understanding the nature of the main collective mobilisation that emerged against criminal violence, though there were also other forms of collective action that emerged besides this. I will elaborate on this further later in this chapter.

At a local level, the political alternation from the PRI to PAN, altered the informal arrangements between government and local organised crime groups. Historically, the Gulf Cartel, under the leadership of Juan Nepomuceno Guerra, had maintained a presence in Mexico's northeastern region, actively engaging in smuggling activities since the 1930s. Ironically, the governors of the PRI had long rejected claims of narco-related activities in Nuevo León, even as Juan García Abrego, the leader of the Gulf Cartel was detained near Monterrey in 1996. In contrast to this, the inaugural PAN governor adopted an entirely different approach, boldly asserting that "the narco is running errands for me." (El narco me hace los mandados) (Proceso, 2011) while evidence suggested that members of OCGs were already living in the city, attracted by its economic hub. This disparate stance underscores the contrasting practices employed by the two political parties regarding narco connections. Thus, the instability caused by the transition, not only led to the fragmentation of old networks that informally managed violence, but also introduced new aggressive actors into the mix. There had been background violence in Monterrey before these events, but it was marginal enough to be ignored. However, this new escalation of violence could not be brushed aside, and not only was Monterrey no longer a safe city, it was among the most dangerous cities in Mexico.

By 2007, from the federal perspective Monterrey was becoming a war zone. To combat this security crisis, it was prescribed the same federal pill as Juárez. This consisted of their local version of the so-called 'War on Drugs': the Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo León[45]. In 2008, this intervention

[45] As explained in Chapter 3, President Vicente Fox increased military operations in drug eradication and interdiction, as well as the detention of drug lords, particularly in the state of Tamaulipas.

materialised with the deployment of around 6000 army and federal police personnel — a striking measure to address the escalating crisis. Also in 2008, another layer of complexity emerged as the Beltran Leyva OCG, who were fighting for control of the wealthy municipality of San Pedro Garza García, went into an internal war within the Sinaloa OCG against the faction of El Chapo. This clash further amplified the turbulence of the already fragile context. Subsequently, in 2010, the Gulf Cartel witnessed the dissolution of its alliance with its armed wing, Los Zetas, a formidable paramilitary force, a rupture that brought forth a wave of violence which can be seen very prominently in Figure 7. This was felt across society. In terms of the municipal police, some policemen colluded with one cartel or another, while others were killed or disappeared. Simultaneously, the business community and high-ranked politicians faced heightened risks, contending with extortion and kidnapping.

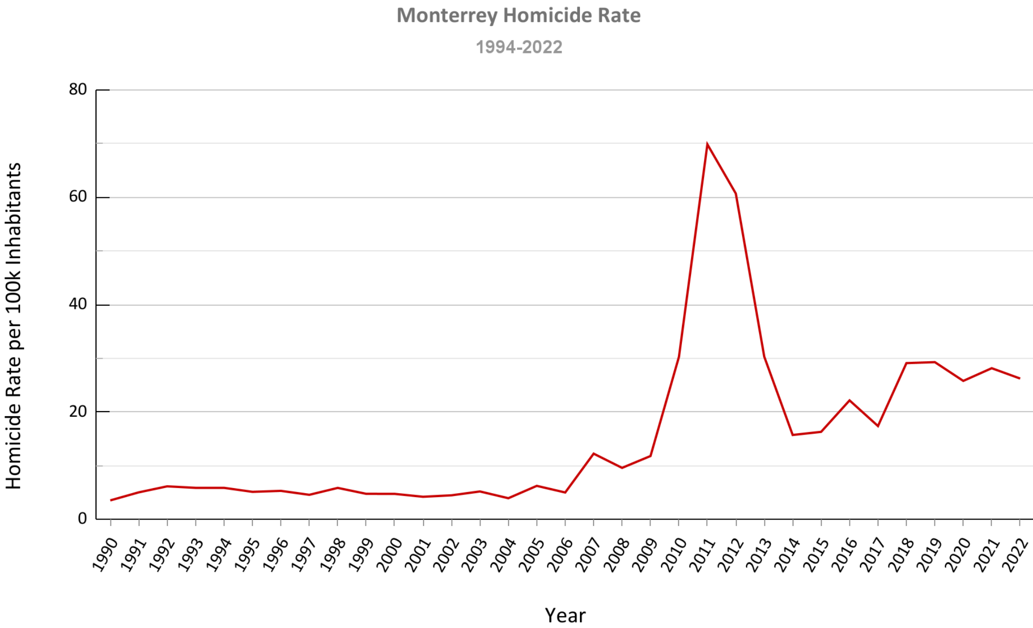

Figure 7. Mexico population projections 2005-2050. Source: Elaborated with data from National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI), 2021 and estimates from the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO),

---

However, it was under Felipe Calderón's federal security policy aimed for direct combat against organised crime groups.

6.1.2 Cultural and Social Context

During the last decades of the 19th Century, Nuevo León followed the 'modernisation' of the country dictated by the *Porfiriato*[46]. However, this changed at the beginning of the 20th Century, where the local economic elites opposed the central policy of industry, and instead focused on defining their own policies based on their consolidated industrial force. Indeed, as a state, Nuevo León tends to go against the grain when it comes to adopting the same political affiliations and positions taken by central power. For example, with the political alternation and diverging reforms and policies (such as fiscal pact, water, industrialisation and recently in security) adopted in Mexico City.

The form of the ideological opposition taken at the beginning of the 20th Century was an industrial pattern of modernisation championed by the Monterrey Group. Core to this pattern of modernisation, was to leverage the benefits of being at relatively close proximity to the US border. This policy of connecting to the US, might go some of the way to explaining the traditional *regio* sentiment of feeling closer to the US than to Mexico City.

Monterrey has a strong culture of entrepreneurship that is extended to different strands of the elite in Nuevo León, particularly in universities (ITESM, UANL), forms of organisation of civil society (Consejo Nuevo León and Consejo Cívico de Instituciones- CCINLAC), mainstream local media and, of course, the active business-driven members of society[47]. This focus on industry and entrepreneurship is ultimately characterised on an individual level as an ingrained culture of hard work that developed at the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1917, with the growing entrepreneurship activity (Sánchez Santana and Pérez Esparza, 2014, p.99). This was echoed by one of my

[46] The *Porfiriato is* known during the period of President Porfirio Díaz who ruled the country for over 30 years. His regime was based on the positivist ideology of "order and progress" (Centeno and Silva, 1998, p. 5)

[47] As occurs in many other movements, funding is very important. The case of Monterrey, is fundamental given the (historical) influence of the private sector over formal civil society organisations of Nuevo Leon. As Benjamin (social leader) commented about the entrepreneurial associations "A lot has to do with business, because at the end of the day civil society is subsidised by private companies in many areas, right? At least the strongest civil society."

interviewees, who said: “OK here in Monterrey, normally people work a lot. They work so much that when they get home, so, what they want to do is drink beers.” (Emilia, social activist)

Generally speaking, the *regio* society did not have any high-visibility socially leftist movements from the 1980s to the early 2000s. One potential explanation of why, is that there is an ingrained US-like capitalist perspective which brings with it a focus on individual responsibility and a suspicion of social reform. Here, “everything is more individualistic and less [citizen] participative” (Santiago, communitarian leader, P2-11). Similarly, “indignation is perceived as a forbidden social emotion, referring to a dark leftist past” (Paz, P2-08 social activist). This lack of a culture of protesting was echoed by another participant who said: “If, for example, the truck fare goes up, then many places make protests so that the fare does not go up. But here, people say, "well, no way, we'll have to work more" (Emilia, social leader). Even with the case of trade unions a business member told me:

> *Without social movements to form opposing political fronts, the only source of political persuasion comes from elite members of the business class, who can effectively give a nod at their preferred candidate for the next governor, who is then more likely to win.* [Rocío, P2-15]

In many ways, Monterrey has been a success story in terms of wealth growth in Mexico. However, as with the rest of Mexico, this wealth is unevenly distributed across the city and there is a lot of inequality and poverty. The urban areas show a big contrast between municipalities. While San Pedro Garza García is perhaps one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in the whole of Mexico, other municipalities lack public spaces for sports and recreation, as well as the absence of green spaces. (Cerda Pérez, 2010). Here it is common that violence related to street gangs surge in populations where there is a low salary, education and housing. Before the criminal war, between 2006 and 2008 there was an estimate of 1600 and 1905 street gang members in Nuevo León. According to authorities of Public Security, in just three years there was an increase in the number of street gangs and the increase in the number of members tripled (Ibid, p.45).

Despite the high Human Development Index (IDH) of Monterrey and San Pedro Garza García (with a IDH index similar to France), certain areas in the urban sprawl face pronounced high levels of marginalisation. These areas are usually lacking fundamental services such as housing, water,

electricity, transportation and street pavement. In this vein, many of these areas are characterised by low incomes, and they exist within socially hostile environments marked by the presence of other violences, such as street gang and domestic violence. This adds to the complex picture of socio-cultural struggles that already coexist along with other types of violence, such as domestic violence, and that demand particular prevention of crime measures.

6.1.3 Analysis and related work

For my analysis of the case of Monterrey, I draw upon the same series of established frameworks that were used in Chapter 5, for the case of Ciudad Juárez. These frameworks include the scholarship of high-risk collective action applied to the local context of criminal violence (Ley, 2022; Petersen, 2001; Loveman, 1998), as well as the scholarly discourse on conflict and preexisting affiliations that prompted citizen responses to insurgent forces (Kaplan, 2017; Arjona, 2017b). Additionally, I will incorporate the aspect of time horizons, drawing insights from Moncada, (2021), Arjona (2017b), and the significance they bear in explaining the repercussions on both criminal actions and civic engagement, especially within the realm of criminal activities characterised as 'roving bandits,' as described by Olson (1993, p.568).

The discourse surrounding criminal violence in Monterrey has been subject to exploration by several scholars. Carlos Flores Pérez's (2020, 2019) comprehensive research in Nuevo León has delved into the intricate network interconnecting political, business, and illicit actors to safeguard unlawful endeavours, facilitating the accumulation of capital. This examination not only sheds light on the informal institutions that emerged in different contexts, but also serves as a foundation for understanding the institutionalisation of impunity. Moreover, scholarly emphasis on the state-criminal nexus within the context of the drug war in the northeast of the country has also surfaced, as documented by Flores, (2019), Bailey (2008), Correa-Cabrera (2015) and Grillo (2011). My work compliments this by accounting for the societal element, in particular the potential of agency of society to counter criminal violence and defend against the predatory outcomes of the state-criminal networks.

Concerning the different levels of societal response, I consider both micro and meso levels. At the micro level, my work extends the existing work of (Rizzo Reyes, 2017) on violence and societal responses, by similarly exploring micro-level details specific to Monterrey. However, I go beyond this micro level by also tracing the processes and mechanisms to manage violence as well as the outcomes achieved by these processes. At a meso level, the interplay between arms trafficking, money laundering, and escalating drug violence has been explored in the literature by Grillo (2021), Flores (2019; 2020), Cedillo (2018), the collaborative work of Esparza and Weigend (2015) and Osorno (2013). I consider this meso level analysis, but concretise it by applying it specifically to Monterrey, looking at the specific dynamics that were present at the time.

The main contribution I make in this chapter relates to the work of Ley and Guzmán (2019) and Moncada (2016), who explored Monterrey from a subnational perspective, scrutinising the role of corporate entities in shaping security policy. I build upon this work by incorporating the crucial dimension of broader societal groups within the subnational unit, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors that interact to define the dynamics of criminal violence within Monterrey. Here, the information gathered through fieldwork and interviews with participants from various slices of society and the local government is used to shed light on the actions and decision-making processes undertaken by local societal actors in response to the unprecedented violence. Where pertinent, I will also include some references to the Metropolitan Zone of Monterrey (MMA) and the northeast region (includes the states of Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas)[48] when this is relevant to Monterrey.

[48] Tamaulipas features significant importance due to the violent turf wars involving the Beltran Leyva organisation, part of the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Gulf Cartel in early 2000s (Grillo, 2012, p.119). That drug-related violence was soon spread to Nuevo León.

6.2 Uneven democratisation and the onset of inter-cartel violence (1990s-2005)

This section serves to capture key transitional changes in Monterrey with its transition in political alternation from the PRI to the PAN and a period of relative stability and peace which then began to degenerate into violence. I first (in section 6.1) explain briefly the social and cultural factors that influence the management of violence. Following that, I describe (in section 6.2.1) the unintended consequences of the quality of democratisation that led to political-electoral openness, as well as the structures of civil society that were mostly active at that time. Finally, I discuss (in section 6.2.2) the breakdown of old networks of protection and the subsequent onset of criminal violence in the northeast of Mexico.

6.2.1 The impact of local (uneven) democratisation: Governance and civil society dynamics in the new PAN-*ista* administration

During the 1990s, an increase in political-electoral openness emerged in Mexico, driven by the ongoing transition from the former authoritarian regime to a democratic framework. In Nuevo León, this was preceded by a plural social mobilisation, that advocated for a shift in state dynamics toward political liberalisation and to address issues related to state electoral fraud in 1985 (Mendoza, 2008). This transformation was particularly apparent in the section of civil society affiliated with the business sector mobilised within the PAN. Collective participation outside of the private sector (such as the Frente Popular Tierra y Libertad) was present, but was repressed by the local government. In this sense, the democratisation process in the state of Nuevo León materialised with the political alternation from the PRI to the PAN in 1997.

The PAN's ascent in this northern state became evident when it started to win two municipality elections in 1988, and 15 in 1997 (Dávila, 2003). In Monterrey, the opposition party won the elections in 1994, three years before the governorship level and even before the alternance at the federal level in 2000. The first PAN representative in Monterrey Fernando Canales Clarion who ascended to the position of the first PAN-affiliated governor of Nuevo León (1997-2003). Clarion came from an old

family with a prominent business background and was politically connected (Flores Pérez, 2020)[49]. His administration, particularly supported by the 'Monterrey Group'[50], extended preferential treatment to segments of civil society characterised by entrepreneurial inclinations. Thus, for this administration it was not a priority to extend the political rights of citizens (Mendoza, 2008, p.270). This lack of an inclusive and representative mechanism in democratic political decision making of the first PAN-ista government impacted its legitimacy in broader society. As noted by O'Donnell's (2004), the absence of systems that ensure accountability, civil liberties and political rights, weakens the rule of law, putting citizens at jeopardy to the abuse of state authority.

In contrast to the case of Juárez, the period under consideration in this city witnessed relatively fewer civil organisations dedicated to human rights. Among these, Citizens in Support of Human Rights (*Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos, A.C.,* CADHAC) stands out as a prominent advocate for human rights of inmates in the state, while Peaceful Alternatives (*Alternativas Pacíficas* A.C., ALPAZ) played a pioneering role in establishing the refugee centre for women who suffered from domestic violence, a model that afterwards spread to a national level.

6.2.2 The outset of violence in the northeast: The inter-cartel war in Nuevo León

In this section I discuss the breakdown of old networks of protection and how this led to the development of predatory criminal violence that affected the lives of ordinary citizens in Nuevo León. To do this, I first describe the process that led to the atomisation of the informal networks of protection and the way in which this atomisation impacted the criminal actors. This unsettling period was primarily triggered by inter-cartel conflicts caused by OCGs vying for control in the neighbouring

---

[49] Before becoming governor, Canales Clariond was on the board of the Confia Bank. During his mandate, he continued to be investigated by the federal attorney's office (PGR, now FGR) for the bank scandal case Lankenau. (Quintero, 1997)

[50] Monterrey Group is a conglomerate of the local business class with influence not only in the economic development of Nuevo León, but also at national level. The relationship between the local political and economic entities is *sui generis* in the country and can be traced back to the *porfirista* period in the 19th century. (Tijerina, 2020; Mendoza, 2006). For a historical development of the relationship between the business elite and society in Monterrey *see* Nuncio (1982).

state of Tamaulipas. This political shift would ultimately become a pivotal precursor to a succession of violent events that turned the northeast of Mexico into a highly turbulent and perilous area.

The political alternation, that eventually resulted in the disruption of old networks, was the appointment of Canales Clariond from the PAN. The campaign of Canales Clariond developed during a tumultuous time in the state of Nuevo Leon. Governor Sócrates Rizzo had been a politician allied to the group of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), his departure from the governorship was linked to arrangements coming from the administration of Presidente Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) (de la Garza Montemayor, 2018, p.56). Rizzo was implicated in a corruption scandal following the ruthless murder of a local attorney who had accused governor Rizzo, his attorney and top security officials of giving protection to the Gulf Cartel (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Carrizales, 1996).

Owing to the evidence of the corruption of his predecessor of the PRI, Fernández Clariond decided to reform the government, which directly or indirectly put the pre-existing networks into a state of uncertainty. This reform consisted of an atomization of the actors that conformed to the old networks of protection, thus, leading to a disruption of the structures and interactions that depended on these networks. Canales Clariond appointed prominent members of the business community as part of his cabinet. José González Suárez, one of the most well-known tax lawyers in the state, was put in charge of the state attorney (El Norte, 1997). Though the reforms did address corruption, it is worth noting that Clariond kept individuals in his cabinet that were known for practices that were associated with the authoritarian regime; they remained unaccountable and in total impunity. In particular, some of the old guards of the PRI were appointed in the area of security. For example, Américo Meléndez, who served for a long time in the federal attorney general's office, was appointed to the state judicial police who had been accused of using torture and forced manipulation of testimonies during the period which saw the Dirty War in the 1970s and El Halconazo in 1971 (Reporte Indigo, 2013)[51].

[51] The *Dirty War* was a period during the 1960's and 1970's of systematic government persecution against left-wing students and social movements. The *Halconazo* is called to the massacre of students by a paramilitary group *Los Halcones,* as a response to the government repression of protests.

During the 1990s, there were networks of traffickers operating in Matamoros, Tamaulipas that were later branded as Gulf Cartel. Their networks included elements of the military, the state, municipal police and local businesses. The unseating of the PRI in Nuevo León by the opposition in 1997, created a situation of uncertainty in the control of drug smuggling routes. It is important to say that some of their members and families have traditionally resided in Monterrey (Ramírez, 2002), and this also posed threats to the criminal groups who had their criminal hub in the capital that connected with the neighbouring state of Tamaulipas. This situation added difficulties to the Gulf Cartel regarding a succession struggle, since the detention in 1996 of Juan García Abrego, near Monterrey (Grillo, 2012, p.119). The disruption of old networks of the Gulf Cartel affected them in multitudinous ways that ultimately led to an increase of violence due to criminal competition. Notably, there was criminal fragmentation and instability that resulted from the arrest and rapid extradition of García Abrego. The escalation of violence that resulted from this was emblematic of the problems to come with the continued security strategy of militarisation. Perhaps, this red-flag could have been used to redirect public policy away from the escalating violence at the time.

The arrival of a new party in the Nuevo León government also impacted the traditional informal mechanisms for managing conflicts within the old networks, which had become heavily fragmented. This had significant implications for the implementation of federal anti-drug interventions. For example, the military operations against drug trafficking in Tamaulipas ordered by President Vicente Fox[52] — the first PANista President — (2000-2006) altered the already unstable nexus between criminals and the militaries, the local police and mayors (Osorio, 2018).

With the threats to OCGs emerging from different fronts, new aggressive actors entered the scene. It was in 2001 that journalists began making references to the existence of Los Zetas, when they stormed at the Expo-Guadalupe, near Monterrey. Los Zetas was a paramilitary-style army formed by Osiel Cárdenas Guillén. This OCG was formed from defectors from the Mexican military elite unit

[52] With the influence of the US, President Vicente Fox started to increase the number of military interventions in detentions of drug bosses, as well as in key positions of civilian institutions of public security and law enforcement issues.

known as Special Forces Airmobile Group (GAFES)[53] (Flores, 2020; Osorio, 2018). Consequently, the detention of Cardenas Guillén, in 2003, was the prelude for the heightened instability within the political-criminal networks that spilled over the northeast region, subsequently extending to Monterrey. This context of proliferation of private militias such as the Zetas at the service of Gulf Cartel, coincided with the acquisition and trafficking of military weapons from the US, which was replicated among the other major criminal organisations that boasted military power with a high level of lethality[54]. As a consequence of this, all criminal organisations increased their capacity of damage, creating further tinder boxes for violent crime. Hence, the period of subnational political alternation was conflated with the rise of the Zetas as the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel for managing drug trafficking corridors. The network of protection on Abrego's operations was disrupted and resulted in the creation of new alliances with rival OCGs coming from Sinaloa[55]. This led to a bloodbath among the different networks of traffickers between Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Monterrey for the control of the drug trafficking routes (Flores, 2020, p. 414).

External threats to the Gulf Cartel came from the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels that had already made an incursion in the area on Monterrey and in its surroundings (Trejo and Ley, 2020). It was in 2001 when the Beltrán Leyva organisation, the security force of the Sinaloa cartel, made a major venture into the Tamaulipas. Beltrán Leyva had recruited members of a lethal street gang that operated along the US-Texas border that would defend their new territorial acquisition attempts. Thus, the

[53] The Zetas recruited former members of the Guatemalan Army Special Forces army, known as Kaibiles, the most lethal force during the civil war in Guatemala. The alliance of the Gulf Cartel with the Zetas was a pivotal step for the Gulf Cartel to grow and maintain influence in the underworld of drug trafficking. (Trejo and Ley, 2020)

[54] It is significant to add that in 2004 the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act, that had kept a ban on the purchase of assault weapons, expired in the US. The expiration of this Act, widened the options for the illicit flow of arms trafficking and, thus, the increase of gun homicide near the US-Mexico border. (Esparza et al ed, 2021, p.65; Grillo, 2012)

[55] For example, Agapito Garza Salinas, legal representative of the firm Grupo Aztlan was killed in the same year as Abrego's arrest, in December 1996. His death was related to a member of the Judicial Police at federal level. (Flores, 2020)

brutal confrontations between the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartels were carried out by their private armies for the control of the northern state of Tamaulipas, from 2001 to 2006. These violent battles were characterised by the use of sophisticated low-intensity warfare techniques and war supplies used in civil wars (Grillo, 2012, p.119). Indeed, security analysts have argued that the involvement of the Zetas in the inter-cartel violence increased the professionalisation and lethality during these turf wars (Valdés, 2013 and Correa-Cabrera, 2017). Taking advantage of the following political alternation in other subnational jurisdictions, the Zetas ventured to defy other criminal organisations in their own home bases, which set the pattern for the extension and evolution of organised crime in Mexico.

The political scenario at the local level underwent important changes as well. After a short period of political alternation ruled by the centre-right party PAN, in 2003 Natividad González Parás became governor and represented the return of the PRI (2003-2009)[56]. Initial changes within the police and intelligence institutions jeopardised alliances involving criminal groups, municipal and state officials. The surge in violence, initially downplayed by the local authorities, paved the way for the federal military intervention (known later as "Monterrey Seguro"), eventually taking control of municipal police institutions within the MMA. As several participants pointed out it was at the end of his administration when crime aggressions and collusion with some authorities became more conspicuous. Concurrently, this period witnessed an outbreak in the death toll and overall crime, significantly impacting citizens' perceptions about public security (Medellin, 2016). This suggests that the situation was already showing signs of deterioration.

6.3 The security crisis in Monterrey: criminal wars and high-risk collective action (2006-2012)

In this section, I explain how and why Monterrey became one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico. This section attempts to explain the sheer intensity of the criminal war that resulted from the split between the Gulf Cartel and its paramilitary-wing, Los Zetas, where perpetrators responded with

---

[56] In his State Development Plan, Chapter 2. on public security and justice, its first objective called for a "culture of legality, citizen participation and crime prevention".

intense and organised violence. This coincided with the federal state intervention, which marked the most violent period of recent history in Monterrey (2010 to 2012).

Echoing Olson (1993), I take the view that the turf wars and the federal state crackdown under the 'War on Drugs' shortened the time horizons of criminals, who started to operate reactively as "roving bandits" (p.568). In this section, I examine how criminals were operating within short time horizons and in a more predatory manner against the local police and civilians.

Following this, I detail the response to this unprecedented violence, in particular how citizens activated gradually in collective mobilisation. This was in reaction to high-profile events, including — but not limited to — the killing of two students from the Tec the Monterrey and the Casino Royale massacre shocked society into collective action which demonstrated the inability of the governor of Nuevo León to restore order. To combat violence, structures emerged, mainly in the form of assemblies, alliances, massive protests and collectives of actors (some of them initially part of other long standing NGOs) that later many of them became officially recognised as civil associations.

This period of intense criminal war, not only unveiled an increase of homicides, extorsions and kidnappings, but it led to an continuous heinous phenomenon that was later made visible in the entire country: the (enforced) disappearances of people and growing of sexual violence. Witnessing the silence and complicity of state authorities in those crimes led to efforts from various civil society groups and communities to open spaces of action with the government. These actions prompted the authorities at multilevel to acknowledge the problem and take measures at local level that then replicated in other parts of the country. The incidence of these societal groups was crucial for law reforms and the creation of local and national institutions, a topic that I will explain more in the next section.

6.3.1 Unravelling the criminal war in Monterrey

Scholars have studied how Monterrey deteriorated from one of the safest cities nationwide up until 2005, to being one of the most violent cities in Mexico in 2011. This situation was the culmination of a long history of inter-cartel power struggles that became even more unstable with the fragmentation

of networks. This followed the local democratisation in the northeast of Mexico that eventually descended south and arrived on Monterrey's doorstep.

With the escalation of criminal war, there was a targeted murder of police officials at state and municipal levels. In September 2006, the killing of Marcelo Garza y Garza, the head of Nuevo León's state intelligence police, shocked the population as the event occurred in broad daylight in an upmarket suburb of Monterrey (González, 2021). As an interviewee (Germán, P2-22) told me, the killing or disappearing of policemen fueled the sentiment among the population of mistrust and lack of protection from the authorities. The grisly attacks were also extended to other symbols of public life, such as shootings in the facilities of a local broadcaster, night clubs, as well as the silencing of journalists in reporting the events[57]. As discussed in Bailey and Taylor (2009), there was an overt confrontation between criminal groups and parts of the state. This challenge of power impacted the legitimacy of the state and thereby undermined the institution's democratic governance, particularly as it gives criminal groups leverage over state authorities.

Between 2007 and 2008, the Ministry of Public Security reported that the number of youths joining gangs in Monterrey doubled to over 26,000. In this period, the number of gangs in the metropolitan area were nearly 2000. In this period, an increase in murders and kidnappings related to drug trafficking became very noticeable. It is estimated that in the metropolitan area, over 100 people were killed, including more than two dozen police officers (US. State Department, 2008). The increases in violence also included bank robberies, carjackings and extortion (Conger, 2014).

In response to this increase in criminal violence, the Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo León descended down to MMA in 2008, with the deployment of approximately 6000 soldiers and elements of the federal police. The aim was to address the violence by the turf war involving Gulf Cartel, Los

[57] It was in the northeast region at that time where many journalists received the infamous treat of 'silver or lead' (*plata o plomo*) or more literally 'your money or bullets'. As a journalist (P1-40) told me: "Journalism adapted in a simple way: by no longer signing the articles and no more investigative journalism… Many colleagues that covered violence left journalism, while others shifted to another outlet or location".

Zetas and Beltran Leyva. By that time, the Beltran Leyva OC had formed corrupt ties with political leaders and businessmen of the MMA. The escalation further increased with the breakup of the Beltran Leyva and El Chapo factions from the Sinaloa Cartel[58].

The patterns of violence changed dramatically between 2010 and 2011 when the turf war swept when Los Zetas split off from El Golfo. From 2011 to 2012 the gruesome violence continued. The security chief of a Monterrey prison and the top intelligence official of the state were killed, 78 security officials were killed in 2011. In August 2011, eight gunmen carrying automatic weapons and gasoline burst into the Casino Royale in Monterrey, poured gasoline and set the gaming machines afire, leaving 52 people dead inside the building (Conger, 2014), the majority of them were women. Authorities reported five suspects, one was a state policeman who confessed to being a Zeta member (Dudley, 2012).

In response to the Casino Royale attacks, one activist said:

> *The act was so serious that the Governor and the Mayor of the city should have fallen. Why the Governor? Because the State Constitution states that the first obligation of the executive is that they are responsible for the security of all the people of Nuevo León.* [Emilia, social activist, P2-13]

This further lends to the idea of frustration and lack of legitimacy of the government in their response to criminal violence. Given the increasing predatory violence targeting citizens, people started making their demands to restore public security more visible, through protests and public marches (Contreras y Zamora, 2013).

[58] From 2008 to 2012, civilians in Monterrey witnessed each time more grizzly events such as shootings in public streets, bodies hanging from bridges, killings in bars, as well as local business and casinos became targets of extortion and money laundering (Archibold, cited by Correa-Cabrera, 2013).

6.3.2 From shock to unprecedented collective mobilisation in high-risk contexts: 2011-2012

This section brings to light the specific circumstances of how and why the initial denial of shocking violence eventually transitioned into citizens coalescing into heterogeneous collective mobilisation. This often consisted of taking to public spaces to express solidarity as well as to denounce the inadequacy of the local governor in dealing with the crisis. This mobilisation also involved interacting directly with the local government. According to the evidence in this section, this period marks an unprecedented citizen-led development in the conservative subnational unit to address criminal violence. The intensity and indeterminacy of violence experienced by the population of Monterrey influenced various sectors of society to mobilise and take collective action to fill in the gaps of governance that were left by the state governor Rodrigo Medina.

a) "An initial turning point": The Killing of two students at Tec de Monterrey and the formation of student assemblies

In March 2010, a tragic event shook the society in Nuevo León. Javier Francisco Arredondo Verdugo and Jorge Antonio Mercado Alonso, students of excellence from the Tecnológico de Monterrey (*Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, ITESM*), were brutally murdered by soldiers inside the facilities of the ITESM. The Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA) planted weapons on the teenagers, claiming that they were "armed to the teeth" and that they were members of a criminal group. This narrative was also replicated by federal authorities and the ITESM. However, the 45/2010 recommendation of the Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (2010) evidenced a deliberate alteration of the crime scene of extralegal execution. Despite this evidence, a few months after, the local state authorities abandoned the families of the victims (Rizzo Reyes, 2017, p.436).

At this point the interview data shows an initial reaction that consisted of a general feeling of fear along with reactions of denial. This later turned into a wave of outrage and blistering criticism directed at the cover up of the crime and the disrespect this showed to the relatives of the victims of the Tec de

Monterrey. Interviewees also questioned the use of excessive force by the military and there was general frustration at the levels of violent crime that had escalated to never-before seen levels.

A group of students from the ITESM organised a public tribute to remember Jorge and Javier, as a memorial and to demand justice for the relatives of the victims[59]. Other societal groups mobilised as well and in March of that year a massive protest emerged organically from university students called United for Peace in Nuevo León (Unidos por la Paz Nuevo León) (Rizzo Reyes, 2015).

Soon after, the Asamblea Estudiantil Tec formed, which is a student assembly that is still active today in the universities of Monterrey. This assembly dared to question the role of the military for security in Monterrey. This example of student mobilisation was soon replicated in other universities such as UANL and UDEM. Contrary to the reaction of students, the business elite of Monterrey — including the ITESM — were mostly mute in their public reaction, despite the high impact of the case. Though the two students were very promising academically and had been awarded scholarships, they were from poor to middle income backgrounds and so were not part of that sector of society. Furthermore, many of the student protests that followed the murders, were not covered by the mainstream media in Monterrey. In an act to preserve the memory of this tragic event, an emblematic mural was created in the entrance of Tec de Monterrey as a permanent display of collective memory and a demand for justice (See Appendix J).

Despite some actions of protest (some of them questionably organised by governor Rodrigo Medina), there was a collective fear and continued stigma perpetrated against the victims of violence, where there was a default assumption of gang affiliation, regardless of any proof. This was a way for the authorities to diminish their apparent failures in maintaining public security and also reduced their requirement to handle difficult cases.

During the peak of violence, the streets of Monterrey became a battlefield. There was internal displacement as some *regios* left the city and the enrollment at the Tec de Monterrey reduced by 10

[59] In March 2019, the Mexican State apologised for the violations of the rights of the students and thus accepted its initial negligence in the case. In October 2023, thirteen years after the tragedy, five members of the army were sentenced to 90 years in prison. (Rosete, 2023)

per cent (Cedillo, 2015). However, the collective mobilisation refused to be silenced, shedding light on the abuses of the heavily armed state and the impunity of its perpetrators.

b) Towards an umbrella of collective mobilisations

Under the plight of violence, in 2010, many individuals gathered to form collective groups to bring to light to the human abuses and the violence perpetrated by criminals and the authorities. Initially those efforts were disorganised. However, in order to address the explosion of extreme violence in Nuevo León, a more visible and collective mobilisation was necessary.

There was a preexisting organisation that functioned as an enabler for social mobilisation called Alianza Cívica Nuevo León (Civic Alliance of Nuevo León). This organisation played an important role in supporting social organisation and amplifying the voices of the community, especially during high-risk periods. This historic organisation's roots can be traced back to as early as 1994. Germán (P1-02), an social activist and human rights defender, describes the main actions during the period 2011-2012 within the this group:

> *(...) the Alianza Cívica and particularly its branch in Nuevo León has been very active. We did many activities there related to human rights, such as accompanying families for disappeared persons. [We] primarily [supported] institutional strengthening, either by forming collectives or registering as civic associations and so on. Of course, [we performed] actions of visibility, ranging from protests to symbolic events, as well as legal advice and legal accompaniment. Within Alianza Cívica, in the area of political rights, we focused on community organisation as a kind of solution that gets straight to the heart of the problem.* (Germán, social activist)

Germán's words contain many important analytical points which can be dissected into 3 core ideas:

1. As discussed in the first period of this chapter (Section 5.1), Nuevo León witnessed a significant historical social and political mobilisation during the 1970s, closely related to *guerrilla* and left-wing social movements during the so-called *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War), in times of the Cold War. However, over time this group was practically deactivated and part of

the movement spread into individual social activism or politics. Up until 2000, the *Alianza Cívica* had advocated for a more participative democracy with a new law that would allow citizens to participate in government decision making among other activities. They did this with the help of some of the former members as well as a new generation of young social activists and also members of the Catholic church.

2. They used symbols in their protests. For example, a group of citizens placed shoes in MacroPlaza, a space used for expressing resistance in front of the public offices, representing relatives that were reported as disappeared. This served the purpose of raising awareness among common citizens, as well as displaying solidarity with the relatives of the disappeared who demanded justice.
3. As indiscriminate predatory crime (extortion and kidnappings) was tangible at a street level, many neighbours organised into novel structures in conjunction with the newly formed police force, in order to take action and defend their communities. The mobilisation led to the approval of the *Law of Citizen Participation*, which I will delve into more later.

At this time, a considerable number of young individuals including both women and men, found themselves vulnerable to grooming for recruitment by criminal organisations. This vulnerability was due to their marginalised status and the extreme financial hardships experienced by their families, often living in impoverished conditions[60]. Several participants told me that many young people became associated with gangs, initially assuming roles such as lookouts (referred to as "hawks") and later engaging in activities like extortion, including instances of kidnapping for monetary gain. This stream of income in disadvantaged areas deepend the social bases of these gangs within urban areas.

Families of these young people would of course notice this new source of income; however, due to pressing economic necessities, many families chose to not scrutinise the origins of their income.

---

[60] Differently from Ciudad Juárez, where there were conditions with the federal level to calculate the number of student dropouts and attempted to find solutions, in the case of Monterrey, there are not clear official figures that conveys the number of school dropouts in those years. (Claudia, P2-24, CSO who works with youths in prisons)

There are many potential explanations for this. As noted, families were often in desperate need, but beyond this, OCGs often had a deeply entrenched base within communities and so reporting or confronting activities might be dangerous. This danger might not directly come from the OCGs, but from the authorities that might be in collusion with the OCGs. The official narrative produced by the government and the elite in Monterrey was that young people drawn into OCGs were chasing an easy life, influenced by the narco culture and that they had lost their sense of values. This stance marks young people colluding with OCGs as intrinsically morally reprehensible, reinforcing the punitive perception for government intervention by simply marking them as criminals.

Despite the difficulty of addressing the problem of the recruitment of young people in Monterrey, both in terms of an entrenched OCG presence in communities and lack of official sympathetic narratives, not everyone turned a blind eye to the problem. There were also parents that started to take an interest in the plight of children in their community, transforming the problem from a private issue to a public issue that deserved collective attention. As the voices of these communities became more prominent, concrete actions gradually became more and more feasible as municipal governments of the MMA, including the Monterrey municipality, started to support the actions. These actions included the implementation of different social activities in the public space, such as sports, dancing and art. These give an opportunity to young people to be integrated into their communities and to find a community identity.

These simple community activities had interesting outcomes. Claudia from a social organisation formed in 2011 that works with vulnerable youth, commented that during the most dire years, they organised sports tournaments in violent deprived neighbourhoods of Monterrey. In her words, she explains how these actions changed the perception of the OCGs: "when they see their children playing football, singing or dancing. They start to support them and they themselves start to move their space, I mean, they change their points of drug sale and they go to other places". Compared to the heavy handed and aggressive methods of the federal military approach, this very basic community activity could be one that recovered the public space and displaced the actions of the OCGs "voluntarily" (Ibid.).

In wealthier neighbourhoods, collective action took a different form. Many community representatives owned small to medium scale enterprises suffered constant life threats due to extortion and kidnapping. This represented a huge challenge as these crimes are frequently non reported and perpetuate impunity. To deal with this, Lucian, who chairs his neighbour's meetings, commented on the main actions they carried out. As his community was increasingly being exposed to lethal violence, their initial response was to take action by attracting the attention of the media. However, the media spotlight was saturated by the sheer scale of the problem being faced by different neighbours, and the impact of violence in their neighbourhood was diluted, making this action insufficient.

They next turned to organising themselves to put pressure on the authorities. They did this by forming into different thematic subgroups that could apply specific pressure directly on relevant authorities across different sectors. Some of these thematic groups related to parks, urban planning and electricity. People from these groups would directly contact public servants that were in charge of these topics at a municipal level. This was perceived as extremely beneficial for improving the situation, as they could see their demands being laid out on the table and addressed. Whenever they faced excuses at the municipal level that attempted to deviate them away from their security issues, they could apply collective pressure as a group to keep on track. Furthermore, their accumulated collective knowledge of the processes involved were also very helpful in navigating through the complexity of these processes. Both of these features of collective organisation proved to be key in advancing their immediate demands.

In Lucian's neighbourhood they also grouped together to install a police booth with a prepaid cell phone. This had the effect of both increasing access to, and confidence in, communication with police services. They also managed to arrange to have direct contact with the commander in chief of their area when facing emergencies via this line. This facility was very useful as preexisting phone services were frequently understaffed and there were not direct paths of communication to relevant authorities, where instead multiple transfers through an already inadequate system were required.

Social media also played a significant role in improving channels of communication. With the increasing access and use of Whatsapp from 2012, the communication among neighbours and the

-recently created- Fuerza Civil (FC) was expedited. The increased access to social media such as Facebook and Twitter at that time was used to expose the identities and actions of the perpetrators. Many households invested in CCTV and private security systems and prioritised timeliness in sharing information with the authorities so that responses could be more rapid. This experience and knowledge was then shared horizontally with other neighbourhoods, particularly when the same perpetrators were spotted across different areas of the city. Each community had different dynamics, often characterised by pre-existing ties among neighbours that also played a crucial role for extending an interconnected network in the city. In this script, Luciane captures this collaborative spirit: "We shared what we did. If you don't have video surveillance cameras, maybe you have to do something else. In the end, a structure similar to what we did was set up in many neighbourhoods in Monterrey."

These neighbourhood meetings were later formalised with the 2016 Law of Citizen Participation (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 2016), a legislative achievement in Nuevo León championed by members of the Civic Alliance. Therefore, the establishment of these structures was a significant development of citizen engagement in governance. While there is still much left to do, these mechanisms also have facilitated communitarian organisation and cohesion.

Several of the interviewees commented on the delicate nature of this progress. They noted that when a new Governor or Mayor assumes office, efforts need to be made to not undo all the progress gained in terms of communication and synergy with state and municipal police authorities.

The immediate outcome of the overall collective action was the displacement of perpetrators to other areas where there would be less chances of getting caught. Serious crimes in these areas diminished noticeably such as homicides, kidnapping and violent robberies. This unfortunately does not mean that violence and crime disappeared, but that there was a clear positive change in the pattern of violence and people felt safer. Further research should be conducted to more clearly explore the relationship between neighbourhood actions and changes in violent crime both qualitatively and quantitatively. This collective mobilisation went on to also address other topics such as protecting parks and nature; better service in water management, as well as environmental issues related to abuses in housing construction.

c) Actions amid the crisis influenced by the business sector: Creation of Fuerza Civil

Since 2010, the escalating security concerns in Monterrey had increased attention from key figures within the private sector, including business leaders and chambers of commerce (Tatiana, CSO; Claudia, CSO founder). Amidst the severity of the situation, prominent businessmen and high-ranking local politicians found themselves directly targeted, intensifying apprehensions regarding the state governor's efficacy in ensuring security. Participants agreed that the tweet of Lorenzo Zambrano, a prominent businessman in the city, represented an important call to the business sector and *regio* population to remain and defend their city. In response to this critical juncture, an unprecedented development unfolded in 2010 through the establishment of the *Alianza por la Seguridad* (Alliance for Security). Comprising members of the Monterrey Group, then known as *Grupo de los Diez*[61], alongside representatives from academia and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), this alliance coalesced with the objective of conceiving and implementing a novel state police force.

This was initially met with reluctance on the part of Governor Rodrigo Medina, a member of the PRI who was apprehensive about embracing this form of historic citizen participation. The influential role assumed by the business sector and the prevailing citizen mistrust, originating from a perceived vacuum of power within the state, compelled a reconsideration of political strategies. These factors ultimately facilitated negotiations with various segments of society, paving the way for a transformative local approach to addressing the immediate challenges posed by crime and governance in Monterrey. The interaction between political dynamics, citizen engagement, and private sector initiatives became instrumental in shaping an evolving paradigm for addressing security concerns within the region.

[61] According to specialists, the ‘Group of Ten’ is formed by Armando Garza Sada, from Grupo Alfa; Rogelio Zambrano, from Cemex; Tomás González Sada, from Cydsa; Sergio Gutiérrez Muguerza, from DeAcero; José Antonio Fernández, from FEMSA; Eduardo Garza, from Frisa; Enrique Zambrano Benítez, from Proeza; Adrián Sada González, from Vitro; Eugenio Garza Herrera, from Xignus, and Julián Eguren, from Ternium.

As its name suggests, Fuerza Civil (Civil Force), became the Nuevo León's civilian-led force established in 2011. The main priorities were to build a professional and modern institution that was aimed to be free from corruption via deep and careful vetting, with expertise in military technology and intelligence operations. All of these factors made it particularly different from other local state police forces in Mexico at that time. Moreover, rather than simply training recruits on the operational ability to react to violent situations, they are also provided academic training through the University of Security Sciences (Universidad Ciencias de la Seguridad).

In the face of tangible security threats confronting Monterrey, one of the primary objectives of the FC was the restoration of public trust in the police force. This multifaceted initiative involved practical reforms within the police structure, encompassing the purge of existing municipal and state police officers and rigorous vetting procedures for incoming recruits. Simultaneously, the formation of FC aimed to establish a new identity or 'brand' for the police force through strategic marketing efforts. The initial purge of local police forces existing alliances between criminals and local authorities (The, 2013). Officers who retained their positions underwent relocation to municipal police roles or other security institutions within the state (Buderath and Heath, 2021).

To effectively address the pressing security crisis, FC needed to rapidly increase its number of personnel. To do so, the Monterrey Group spearheaded dynamic recruitment strategies, offering a highly competitive salary that was more than double the previous earnings of police officers, serving as a substantial incentive for prospective recruits. This recruitment process was complemented by a carefully crafted marketing strategy, employing language such as "volunteers", implying noble motivations for joining FC. Scholars have posited that this approach resonated with the diligent work ethic and mindset of the *regios* (Buderath and Heath, 2021). The concerted efforts in restructuring and rebranding contributed to the multifaceted initiative aimed at both practical and perceptual improvements within the Monterrey police force.

d) Collective mobilisation in response to disappeared people

In the midst of high-risk mobilisation and witnessing the complicity of the authorities, citizens resorted to carrying out the work of prosecutors and policemen themselves. Santiago (P2-11), a faith leader who had accompanied a civil group of mothers and relatives of disappeared people told me about experiences when searching the north of Nuevo León. He recalls that in their search in the north of Nuevo León, they found two extermination sites used by criminal groups to eliminate the people that they had kidnapped. "We were going to put up a cross, like a sign with a memorial. When we dug it up, bones and human remains came out. I mean, the authorities had not cleaned up properly" (Santiago, P2-11). This is an example of the inadequacy of state authorities either by lack of capacity, incentives or perhaps collusion. This is an example of these collectives of citizens gaining knowledge of the dynamics of this inhuman criminal phenomenon through their own investigations and experiences, but they were constantly exposed to the seeming nexus between authorities and crime.

Embroidery for Peace Movement

Embroidery for Peace Movement emerged as a public demonstration of protest in Mexico City in 2011, as response to the heightened levels of violence across the country in the aftermath of the "war on drugs". This movement, designed as a platform for both contemplation and celebration, serves as a collective effort to unite individuals in the face of adversity. An early instance of this form of expression occurred when the activist group Fuentes Rojas (Red Fountains) chose to publicly embroider the names and details of violence victims onto handkerchiefs, dedicating one handkerchief to each victim of violence.

The manifestation of Embroidery for Peace in Monterrey took place in the Macroplaza de Monterrey and involved families and relatives of disappeared individuals, particularly mothers of disappeared people. During these manifestations, feminist activists also became contributors to the movement who became key allyship for mothers who were in this public manifestation. One example of this is the FUNDENL group that was composed of mothers of disappeared persons, who had recently separated from CADHAC, a human rights organisation. They formed out of frustration at the inadequate institutional capacity to follow up on their cases. Their objective was to independently

exert pressure on the government, seeking to locate their missing relatives within the context of the ongoing inter-insurgency war style unfolding in the streets of Monterrey.

This Embroidery for Peace mobilisation represented a high-risk public action, taking place against a backdrop of political turmoil. A central aspect of this movement was the utilisation of public space as a medium for political citizen action. The act of embroidery is particularly important here, since traditionally associated with feminine gender norms, assumed a countercultural significance, challenging established gender norms. Initially abandoned by state prosecutors, who neglected their responsibility to search for missing persons, this public space eventually transformed into a symbol of cooperation and collaboration.

The Embroidery for Peace movement played a crucial role in the formation of identity in the midst of the violent context. As articulated by a participant in the movement:

> *I think FUNDENL should not be understood without embroidery. Not so much because we all like embroidery, but because FUNDENL's founding project or values were to celebrate being together, as well as the need to embroider and be in touch with reality.* [Paz, P2-08]

Through this innovative form of protest, the movement transcended mere symbolism, becoming an embodiment of resistance, collective memory, and the pursuit of justice. This act of mobilisation served as a symbol to bring together different activists. This was the formation of networks of solidarity. Unlike the formation of FC, this was a nationwide movement around a mobilisation activity.

Establishment of Immediate Searching Group for Missing Persons (GEBI)

Since 2011, a coalition of groups that represented relatives of disappeared people were interacting with the state government attorney (PGJNL), which resulted in the formation of Immediate Searching Group for Missing Persons (GEBI in Spanish). This unit has specialised personnel dedicated full time to searching for disappeared persons. They follow the procedures to respond to and instigate the investigation for a disappeared person from the moment the authority becomes aware of the disappearance and also to follow up on existing disappearances.

Relatives of disappeared people could receive assistance in pursuing their case via the NGO called The *Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos* (Citizens Supporting Human Rights). CADHAC established a unit that held meetings every two months with the state government attorney in order to push for the investigation of disappeared persons, on a case by case basis. It was the only NGO capable of providing judicial support to the victims of disappearances. Further to CADHAC, FUNDENL provided an alternative path to justice, having been formed out of frustration at the existing available paths. Both NGOs could apply pressure to the authorities and were involved in working groups with prosecutors of the PGJNL. This interaction with the state institution was a big step in the quest for justice, as many of the interviewees involved in the process told me, for years "public prosecutors did nothing in the process of searching for our relatives". This view is reinforced by Gallagher (2017, p.1680), who suggests that these groups guaranteed that cases would at least be reopened after their initial filing, rather than being left on the shelf. I will explain the development of these state-society interactions more in the next section.

6.4 Navigating the decrease of violence: The continuation of collective action and the first independent governorship (2012-2016)

In this section, I explore how communitarian and civil society measures were implemented. During this period, violence in general decreased, except for cases of disappearances. Data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) shows a significant drop in homicides in Monterrey from 2011 to 2014. In 2011, there were 791 homicides, and by 2014, this number decreased to 177, a reduction of about 77%. This trend was also seen in the broader region of Nuevo León. Many groups in society focused on creating ways to hold people accountable for their actions. They also worked on coordinating with local authorities to put in place policies that could influence patterns of violence. Various sources of support were available for bringing about these changes including support from activists, existing organisations, business, and visible assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), that played a role in delivering training packages to communities and for the coordination of the municipality of MMA.

There are notable examples of social collective actions, restructuring of collectives and outcomes that occurred during this period. The Civic Council of Institutions (Consejo Cívico de Instituciones), a group covering various civil society organisations, became more involved in public security, creating measures for accountability, transparency and coordination of municipalities. Societal groups focused on social measures as part of violence prevention which led to changes at a state gubernatorial level that were expanded upon later as the Law of Social Prevention of Violence (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 2016), which aimed to address the root causes of violence rather than just reacting to violent outbreaks.

Towards the conclusion of this period, interviews conducted indicated that the impact of business influence at the gubernatorial level facilitated another transformative development in Nuevo Leon. In 2015, Jaime Rodríguez Calderón, widely known as "El Bronco," assumed office as the first independent governor in the country. This underscores the continuing influence of *El Grupo de los Diez* in shaping political trajectories. Despite this influence, participants indicate that this political alternation to an independent candidate was a success for democracy, as it provided citizens an alternative beyond the long-standing PRI or the previous PAN parties, two political forces that have consolidated in a unique alliance over time in Nuevo León.

The subsequent administration, under “El Bronco”'s leadership from 2015 to 2021, prominently prioritised the "citizen" element, establishing it as a central theme in his administration. Outlined in the State Development Plan 2016-2021, the key priorities encompassed security and justice, citizen government, effective government and transparency, inclusive economy, sustainable development, and human and social development.

6.4.1 Actions influenced by the private sector between 2012-2013

The interview dataset provides valuable insights into the transformative impact of the crisis of violence on Monterrey's collective consciousness, contributing to the sharing of pain and moments of reflection. This served as a catalyst in two ways. First and foremost, it gave the fuel for Monterrey to undergo a series of transformative changes that may not have been possible without the shared

experience of the crisis. Secondly, it allowed the city to uncover and focus on what truly mattered to the community.

A poignant illustration of this shift is articulated by a representative of an NGO, who emphasised Monterrey's evolution over the last decade. In his words:

> *It is a metropolis in a process of transformation and I think that opens up important opportunities for civil society to influence the public sphere and also contribute to changing the local political culture.* [Christian, P2-14].

The community found a powerful avenue for instigating change through the establishment of platforms driven by the private sector. Among these, *Alcalde Cómo Vamos* (Mayor, How Are We Doing?), created in 2012, emerged as an important tool for enabling accountability. The basic idea was adapted from Medellin, Colombia, and the platform's primary objective was to evaluate and expose government wrongdoings, generate information, and bring citizen concerns into the public agenda.

Initially met with resistance, the platform sought to facilitate coordination and collaboration among municipalities within the MMA. Notably, its approach was critical and constructive rather than confrontational. Its independence from political parties provided an autonomy that shielded it from being dismissed as being purely politically motivated. A representative of the NGO involved in this initiative explained that "the initial challenge was to articulate as a civil society and [work] closely with the team of each mayor at that time". Christian noted that since the period of violence, there has been a transformative process in the MMA, marked by an increased demand for mechanisms of accountability and civil society's desire to influence the public sphere.

In addition to "Alcalde Cómo Vamos," the private sector supported other platforms tailored to the entrepreneurial system. One such initiative was the "Pulsómetro de Seguridad" (Metropolitan Security Pulse), designed to collect data on citizens' perceptions of security and trust in MMA institutions. This survey served as a valuable tool for municipalities to assess their progress in enhancing security (Ley, 2015, p. 164). Another platform, "Hagamoslo Bien" (Let's Do It Right), focused on cultivating a culture of legality within the entrepreneurial sector and specific segments of civil society. These

platforms are all examples of private-sector-driven initiatives that played an important role in shaping a landscape of accountability and collaboration within Monterrey.

Como Vamos has been the form of organisation in which other societal actors can advocate for beneficial causes. One of the most relevant examples of this is the actions by long-standing advocacy NGOs that defend women's rights. *Como Vamos* uses various indicators to evaluate municipalities. Since 2015, the gender topic became a central indicator applied by *Como Vamos* with the Units of Multi-agencial Attention to Women (Umas) (Christian, NGO; Evelyn, NGO). This would later be helpful in the fourth period the work with another NGO called Alternativas Pacificas that resulted in the establishment of the first Puerta Violeta (Purple Door) in the MMA in 2019 which is a project to allow women facing domestic violence to have spaces of integral attention and protection with gender perspective (Evelyn, NGO representative). Puerta Violenta was then replicated at national level.

6.4.2 Feminicides and Sexual Violence

The Embroidery Movement for Peace served as a platform for collective action, shedding light on an organisation that condemned the rising incidences of female killings and disappearances associated with suspicions of sex trafficking. Women's rights and feminist groups played a crucial role in highlighting the surge in feminicides and violence against women during this period, marked by criminal warfare. The escalation and distinct nature of violence against women linked to organised crime prompted the mobilisation of women and feminist groups to expose feminicides and female disappearances related to human trafficking.

In contrast to Ciudad Juárez, Monterrey witnessed criminal organisations employing an active strategy of targeting women's bodies. This approach aimed to convey messages to rival groups and instil fear in the local population. A major grievance was the lack of investigations into the murders of women, as authorities swiftly attributed them to alleged connections with organised crime, fostering impunity (Various Signatories, 2011). This lack of inquiry, compounded by the absence of reliable data documenting these violent deaths of females, further perpetuated a climate of impunity, as illustrated in Figure 8.

These organisations of women and feminists strategically leveraged their legal expertise and documentation to bring attention to the intensity of the inter-cartel war and state crackdown at local, national, and international levels. A discernible shift in patterns emerged, marked by increased use of physical force, signs of sexual violence, and a growing prevalence of firearms in crimes, including human smuggling and trafficking.

In response to these alarming trends, pressure was exerted on the gubernatorial government of Rodrigo Medina to implement a Gender Alert in the state of Nuevo León. This advocacy ultimately succeeded, with the adoption of the alert in 2016. During the negotiations, an activist revealed that public servants from Rodrigo Medina's administration perceived the gender violence alertas being driven by a "political issue, rather than a human perspective" (Juliana, P2-17, activist).

Violent deaths of women, presumed to be feminicide, by year.
Nuevo León: 2000-2017

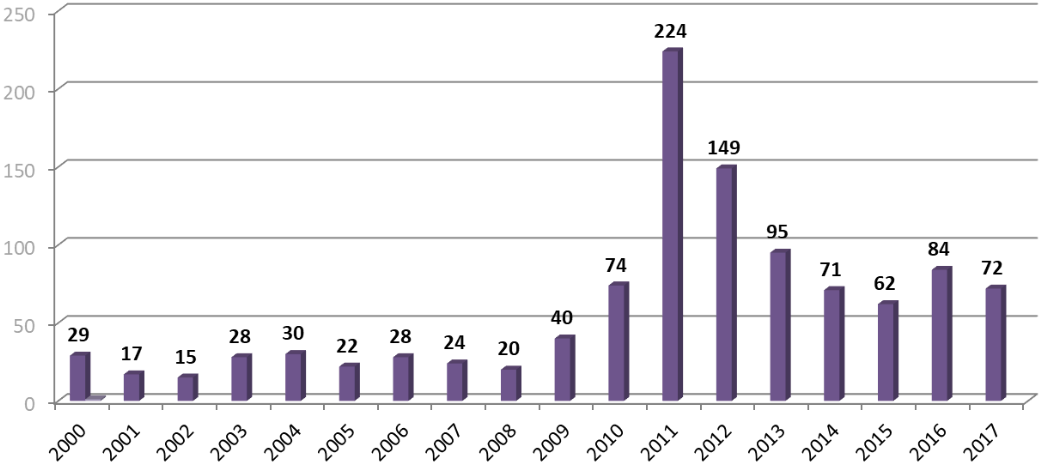

Figure 8. Violent deaths of women, presumed to be feminicides, by year. Nuevo León: 2000-2017. Source: Arthemisas por la Equidad, A.C. 2017.

6.4.3 Fuerza Civil operation

As a model of unified state command, FC's main actions included safeguarding the MMA and managing security in the municipalities adjacent to Tamaulipas. From the policy standpoint, this police model achieved national recognition and admiration and, more importantly, paved the way for police reforms in the country. Yet, there is a delicate balance between the need for order, security, and

the protection of human rights which poses today a formidable challenge. Analysis of the interview dataset confirms the efficacy of FC's intervention in addressing security concerns; however, this success is accompanied by the acknowledgment that excessive force was employed during its early interventions. There was a noteworthy surge in human rights complaints recorded during the period spanning from 2012 to 2015, as indicated by the relevant literature. This may have partially been a consequence of the insufficient training of recruits at the start of the conflict, who only received three months of instruction before assuming their duties (Buderath and Heath, 2021). However, these actions have perpetuated, albeit at reduced levels, and this has resulted in frequent tensions with communities from poor neighbourhoods. It is perhaps for this reason that the mission of Universidad Ciencias de la Seguridad explicitly includes the study of human rights and community. However, considering the strong marketing engine behind FC and the power of the Monterrey Group, one should probably always question whether messaging like this is careful brand management or actual policy implementation.

In terms of its perceived effectiveness, several interview participants underscored the effectiveness of FC at altering the prevailing perception that corruption was less possible than before its inception. This is probably a combination of the success of the purge of the former police force along with careful marketing strategies. Having said that, there is a lack of clear indicators to quantify the effectiveness of the formation of FC on the reduction of violence. However, many scholars have emphasised the correlation between the formation of FC and a clear reduction in homicides starting in 2012. INEGI data shows that from 2011 to 2014, there was a downward trend in homicides in the city of Monterrey by approximately 77%. In 2011, there were 791 homicides, by 2012, that number dropped to 685 and in 2013, to 341 and 2014, 177. By the end of 2015, the homicide rate recorded 13 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. This trend was also seen more generally for the state of Nuevo León.

One of the problems faced by FC that was stated by interviewees was the high turnover rate of police officers. This is despite enjoying very competitive salaries and opportunities for educational training. Since its creation, the goal of the corporation was to hire 14,000 police officers. However, at the time of writing, that goal has not been met. It is not even half of that number with 4,239 police

officers in 2015 and 5,680 in 2021 (Telediario, 2021). The most obvious reason why it was difficult to recruit people initially was that it was perceived as a dangerous job. The interview data shows that one potential explanation for the high turnover is that the majority of the police officers in FC came from disparate parts of Mexico and in particular, the south where there are not many job opportunities. This form of hiring was perceived as reducing the chances that they were affiliated with local gangs, but it also means that they do not have roots in Monterrey. There is nothing tying them to the local context like existing family or history which was backed up by the interview data.

Another possible explanation is that the police force deviated from its original duties. The interview dataset shows that during the new independent administration of Rodriguez Calderón "El Bronco" (2015-2021), the state police force was fragmented in its activities, as it was compelled to cover the duties that were normally assigned to the municipal police that had been disbanded in many municipalities of Nuevo León, particularly in rural areas. Added to the limited number of police agents, this likely limits their outreach capacity to contain violence.

There are different opinions about the sudden reduction of violence in Monterrey. Some have argued that it was due to the federal strategy (Marquez, 2015), the implosion of the Zetas group (Cedillo, 2018) or other due to the civil action of business elites against violence (Moncada, 2013). The evidence shows that the civil action carried out by different groups was crucial to manage the course of violence.

Following the alternation at the gubernatorial level, journalistic evidence indicates that economic measures took centre stage in the aftermath of the crisis of violence. This stems from the role that foreign direct investment has played in the development of Nuevo León. In fact, during the tenure of the previous governor, Rodrigo Medina, controversy arose over incentives extended to the Korean corporation Kia Motor, which included the grant of state-owned land and tax exemptions for the next 20 years (Gallegos, 2017; Garza, 2015). The legal actions that unfolded from this case shed light on the perceived lack of transparency and accountability when it comes to political-economic investment agreements at local level.

A cynical perspective of FC is that it was largely constructed by the Monterrey Group to improve the investment climate which had soured as a consequence of the security crisis. Though this happened to also correspond to a drop in homicides, there is always the question of whether approaches with other priorities could be more effective. The Monterrey Group pushed for FC to be perceived as a community-friendly police force, and this may have just been a marketing tool to improve the perception of success in rooting out corruption. However, it laid the ground for genuine participation from the communities that organised themselves in tandem with the new police force.

6.5 A new government: The change of state and citizen relations.

This period corresponds mostly to the tenure of Jaime Rodríguez, the independent governor, whose leading campaign was to focus on a "citizen government". The intricate journey leading to the advocacy and approval of state laws unfolded, such as the 2016 Nuevo León's Social Prevention against Violence Law and its challenging execution. In terms of OGCs, they continued with an aggressive response towards the federal military crackdown with several new ingredients thrown into the mix: there was a new aggressive actor, Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, and the splintering of groups from the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, and Sinaloa OCGs. Against this backdrop, Monterrey continued to be considered an attractive hub for its access to wealth and money laundering through casinos. While the criminal war had experienced a resurgence in some parts of Nuevo León, the interview dataset indicates effectiveness of the actions taken by civil society to curb violence, noting a shift in targets and frequency of violence compared to what was observed in the previous periods.

In this fourth period, my focus is on re-examining the existing societal structures that were implemented in previous periods to understand the long-lasting effects of policies. Furthermore, this period is much closer to the current state of affairs that my interviewees experienced at the time of the interviews, and so their accounts are more current and less based on hindsight. However, as usual I support these experiences with triangulation of publicly available data.

Obviously, the COVID 19 pandemic brought new challenges to the work of civil society groups as it did to Mexico as a whole. Mexico was particularly badly hit by lack of resources and support.

There was no furlow scheme / financial support as the majority of the population works hand to mouth in informal situations. Clearly there would be challenges in meeting collectively physically but Monterrey is a digitalised city and so most people would have an internet connection of some kind to communicate. Having made these points, further investigation would need to be done to examine the effects of the pandemic on the capacities of the local societal groups to respond to violent crime.

6.5.1 Trends and patterns of violence

There was a steady increase in homicides in Monterrey during this period, though it should be noted that violence in Mexico as a whole increased, and so it is difficult to assess whether these effects were local, regional or federal just based on raw homicide data. What lends evidence to the fact that the local problems had resurfaced is the perceived return to similar patterns of violence as those analysed in the second period (Section 5.2. 2007-2012) that are reported in the interview dataset which is backed up by publicly available data.

Though Monterrey did not register the same levels of predatory violence (kidnappings and massacres) as during the peak of the crisis, there were reports of a dramatic increase in extortions for businesses among municipalities. This is backed up by data from the Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security (SENSP); between 2011 and 2018, the extortion rate increased from 1.27 to 10.11 cases per 100,000 hab, marking a 700 per cent rise (Mendoza, 2019)[62]. One of the most striking shifts was the rising cases of disappearances[63], domestic violence and violence against women.

---

[62] Notably, there have been more tools available for citizens, particularly by the local private sector, to report crime (i.e. the platform Centre for Citizen Integration). The reality is that crime statistics of extortion and kidnapping are often unreliable, as the vast majority go unreported (Ley and Guzmán, 2019, pp. 147-177).

[63] Based on figures from the National Register of Missing and Unaccounted for Persons, Nuevo León occupies the fourth place in Mexico in cases of disappearances. The total number of missing persons in Nuevo León is 6,482. "Of these, 2,165 are from October 2009 to September 2015, and 2,999 from October 2015 to September 2021". (El Porvenir, 2023)

This is not a quantitative thesis and drawing concrete conclusions based on limited quantitative data would probably be misleading. However, where there are very clear trends and obvious relationships to explore, it is still worth doing so. One way to explore the relationship between fine-grained public perceptions of security with official figures on violence and homicides using INEGI data. This data captures perceptions among the population of different problems at a federal level in Nuevo León. I focus on the perceptions of insecurity, corruption and drug trafficking as these are relevant to my topic.

In Figure 5.3, there is a general decline in each of these perceived problems over time though perceptions of corruption did not reduce by much until 2018 and so perhaps this was only addressed by actions taken in this period. I show that the perception of insecurity and drug trafficking in the state of Nuevo León are at their highest when homicides are also at their highest in 2011 and 2012 (43 and 31 per 100,000 hab, respectively). The perception of insecurity then decreases before arriving at another peak in 2019 which is in line with the trend for homicide rates (17 per 100,000 hab). The exception to this is the period after 2019 where homicides continue to increase above the 2019 peak while perceived insecurity is significantly below its 2019 peak. I cannot explain this discrepancy but it would be interesting to understand what the cause of this is.

The trends look quite similar for drug trafficking and insecurity, though the population seem to be much less concerned about drug trafficking. It is also notable that the perceived insecurity is still high in 2019 though the number of homicides are much lower than in 2011. It is very hard to know whether this is just because security concerns become saturated though, as 85% concern is already very high and it is unclear how bad a situation has to be to push up percentage points given that violence is not equally distributed in Monterrey, being focused more around major transit routes.

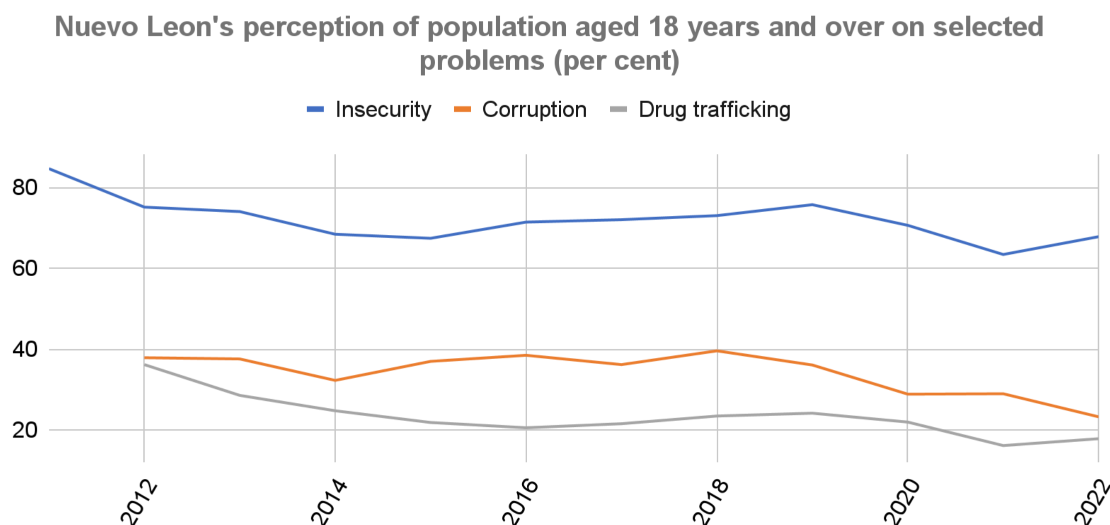

Figure 9. Population of 18+ years of age who perceive insecurity, corruption and narcotrafficking to be a problem from 2011 to 2022. Data for corruption and narcotrafficking are not available for 2011. Source: Own elaboration with data from INEGI. ENVIPE 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

6.5.2 Collective mobilisation for cases of disappeared persons

Despite having made many advances in the state in terms of accountability and transparency measures, the situation of disappearances remains serious without a clear plan for its prevention and attention. The experience of the interactions of groups looking for their disappeared relatives with the PGJNL was beneficial for the later organisation and creation of a strong resonance at a national level. The push of the families led to the approval of the 2017 General Law on Disappearances, and thus the creation of the National Search Commission (CNB, in Spanish).

Despite the creation of the National Search Commission, FUNDENL was critical of the progress of the National Search Commission saying: “If we families do not go out to look for them, no one else will; For example, the National Search Commission of Nuevo León has been created for more than a year, with a budget of 22 million pesos, however, not a single field operation has been carried out.” (FUNDENL, 2022). Given the frustration and long wait of the demands of justice for the relatives of disappeared persons, many have decided to form collectives of people in order to make their voices louder and pressure the public prosecutors to revise pending and new cases (Angeles, searching group).

Diana, who is a member of a searching group that look for two of her relatives who disappeared in 2011, echos these remarks:

> *If you realise, to be able to make search actions and have the weight for the authorities to listen to you, you have to be with someone. You can't do it alone. I mean, you go [to the prosecutor's office], but they don't listen to you. They take advantage of the fact that you don't know about procedures because you don't have the knowledge that, unfortunately, women colleagues have, not because they wanted to, but because they had to make a breakthrough and a path due to their own story.* (Diana, searching group)

In saying this, Diana underscores the importance of collective action and collaboration over time when trying to take action with the local authorities, particularly with the attorney's office of Nuevo León.

These search groups replace some of the expected functions of government. For example, FUNDENL — as occurs with other groups in Mexico — received training on following necessary protocols to carry out forensic fieldwork to help identify disappeared people in clandestine graves. Further to this, FUNDENL also created a platform called "Huellas de Vida" to aid in finding disappeared people (Tovar, 2022). This platform is a database of information related to clandestine burials to be searched online to identify the location of burial sites and items found in burial sites to better understand patterns of violence.

Finally, as well as taking direct action, indirect action continued to take place in the form of public displays of activism. The act of embroidering (inspired by the embroidery for peace movement) persisted in the centre of Monterrey during this period. Decorated with artistic expressions, these public spaces became a point of artistic craft and political manifestation. These public demonstrations help to keep alive the collective voice that demands truth and justice for the disappeared.

a) Fuerza Civil: further work with the community and its re-structure

At the time of writing, the Universidad Ciencias de la Seguridad, that provides training to FC recruits state their mission to be to “contribute to the construction of peace through the training and specialisation of people dedicated to security, committed to the community, maintaining a focus on innovation and adaptation to social dynamics and respect for human rights” (UCS, 2023). Given that the University of Security Sciences is core to the training of FC, this is an important statement regarding the role that FC wants to adopt in society. This may be a response to their human-right’s violations at the start of the police force, or may simply be part of the marketing image that the Monterrey Group wants to present to the public. Either way, stating goals for recruits sets a perceived expectation that requires some amount of effort to maintain.

On asking which mechanisms police officers consider to have worked in their interaction with police and society, a police officer responded:

> *I believe it is the neighbourhood committees, which is the most important element in Nuevo León. We have been moving from [traditional models of] proximity policing to a police that assumes their functions. So I think the most important part is to get citizens involved and also the contact with the commanders and with the police [institution] helps a lot.* [Alex, state government police]

This suggests that the closer collaborations between neighbourhoods and the police are actually appreciated by the police officers. It also suggests that the community strategies seen in the third period, to implement infrastructure to support direct and reliable communication with the police force, were also seen as advantageous from the side of the police.

One constraint for local public security in Monterrey, including for FC, is that key positions in institutions were led by people with a military background. During the administration of the independent governor, CADHAC issued a report indicating that 13 commanders with military careers were running public security in Nuevo Leon, including the General Cuauhtémoc Antúnez, Secretary

of Security, [64] and two Commissioners of the FC. When the military withdrew from Monterrey, the underlying military structure was removed and civilians took over the security agencies. Another constraint is that FC had to take over everyday municipal level activities that were previously run by the disbanded former police force. Thus, FC deviated from its original project. Alex, who is a state police official, indicated that this was discouraging to some police officers "I think the security strategy was very fragmented in the last six years and now you have these dropouts because you also fragmented the police." This shift from military to civilian and change in vision is something that FC has to contend with into the future. This was echoed by Alex saying "the understanding of police discipline and command is not the same" and "the vision of the leadership and discipline between the police and soldiers are different".

b) Consejo Cívico de Instituciones

Consejo Cívico de las Instituciones (*Civic Council of Institutions, CCINLAC*) is an umbrella organisation formed in 1978 by a group of local business leaders. Since the insecurity crisis in Monterrey the CCINLAC became one of the most active civic organisations in articulating other civil organisations, members of academia, enterprises, and representatives of the government at different levels. In an initial set of goals, the organisation focused on strengthening police institutions, coordination between municipalities and accountability. However in December 2021 they reoriented their focus in an area called *Construccion de Paz* (Peacebuilding).

In order to articulate the works of this goal, it reactivated the multisectoral network for the prevention of violence in MMA, which had remained inactive during the independent administration of "El Bronco". In total, there have been around 20 civic organisations participating in this network with different common activities related to violence prevention. The network has put pressure on the

---

[64] Gral. Cuauhtémoc Antúnez was in charge of the operation of the military that in Monterrey, received a promotion to Secretary of Public Security in 2015 for then-governor of Nuevo León, Jaime Rodríguez.

Nuevo León's Congress, Secretary of State and the state Prevention Centre for the design and implementation of the State Programme of Social Prevention of Violence.

With the administration of governor Samuel García Sepúlveda, of the Movimiento Ciudadano party (2021-2027), there were delays at the beginning. As with other cases, the delay of not having a key policy tool that articulates your goals, impacts the budget, time and incentives available to realise those goals (Andrés, P2-02, state government official).

The interview dataset illustrates that the motivation to continue in the coordination and communication with other societal groups was to address the issue of violence prevention that was not recognised in the law at that time (at least at the state level). This was then passed into law in 2016 and called the Law of Social Prevention of Violence (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 2016). However, after the law passed, it had a clear gap in implementation capacity for various reasons, from the lack of a main official appointed to be in charge of Social Prevention to the lack of resources, incentives and capacities to attend to the biggest issues in the state such as domestic violence. In the words of a representative of CCINLAC (P2-02), the approval and then implementation of the legislation was challenging: "the first motivator was the absence of legislation and, later, there was a law, but nobody made it work". Though there were challenges, there was at least transparent governance and clear common objectives.

6.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I showed the results from a micro-level analysis of the case of Monterrey, focusing on the responses of civil society to violence caused by OCGs and the local version of the "war on drugs" called Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon. This was presented chronologically across the four temporal periods and themes identified in my methodology. In my analysis of Monterrey I have identified two main actor pathways. These serve to better group together similar actors to analyse their actions over time. A more detailed analysis of these pathways will be given in Chapter 7 including a comparative analysis between both cases.

The first of these pathways is the **elite pathway (EP)** that consists of high-level business individuals, including the Monterrey Group. This pathway could rely on resources of professionals

and financial capacity creating tech platforms, exerting power and influence and using marketing approaches to convey their messages. Their main activity was the creation of Fuerza Civil by using their high level horizontal connections with the government to coordinate in the purge of the former police force and the construction of a new police force with careful vetting practices.

The second pathway is the **communitarian pathway (CP)** that consisted of university assemblies, protesters, alliances and neighbourhoods. They have much more limited professional experience and financial support and so must find this externally or crowd-source them from within their community. They participated in legal reforms, protests for disappeared people, reshaping the urban environment, political participation, neighbourhood meetings with the communitarian police,

In the first period (*onset*), the disruption of old networks caused issues of organised criminal violence in the northeast that was soon expanded to the capital *regiomontana*. There was a lack of inclusiveness in political participation as well as the limited state capacity to protect the lives of citizens. To some extent, the EP is shielded from the same human tragedy that affected vulnerable people from the CP. However, maintaining an image of directing the development of Monterrey had been an important part of the EP historically.

In the second period (*intensity*), Monterrey became one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico caused due to the turf war between Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel leading to the implementation of the Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon[65]. Criminals were operating reactively as "roving bandits" (Olson, 1993) as a consequence of operating within short time horizons. Citizens mobilised to take high-risk collective action in response to this violence in the CP. Structures, such as assemblies of students and neighbours emerged. In this period the EP were concerned about the instability of the city and people beginning to move away. The EP had the political (via horizontal connections), financial

[65] The Joint Operation Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon was implemented in January 2008 with approximately 6,000 elements from the army and the federal police. Similar to other local interventions across the country and as a response to the dire turf war between the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas, in 2010 the strategy was then rebranded as "Operative Northeast", which included the states of Coahuila and San Luis Potosí.

and professional capability to purge the former police force and construct a new police force Fuerza Civil, with careful market-led branding to gain trust and inclusion among the civilian population.

In the third period (*reduction*), many societal organisations in the CP oriented their efforts to the development mechanisms of accountability and governance mainly between municipalities such as Alcalde Cómo Vamos, which created platforms for assessing the performance of the municipal institutions, their coordination as well as indicators for the security level. The collectives of mothers and relatives looking for their disappeared family had a strong resonance locally and nationally to create searching protocols and working groups directly with state public prosecutors. Furthermore, with the work of feminist and women's rights groups, an official alert of gender violence against women was issued for the first time in the Nuevo Leon state. This is a mechanism established by law to address the security issues facing women and girls. The changes brought about during this period heavily involved the engagement of the CP, who influenced the historical selection of the first governor for an independent party.

In the fourth period (*continuation*), civil society groups and collectives in the CP were key in not only changing the course of the security policy, but also in shaping the patterns of violence. There was the administration of the independent governor and the path towards the approval and further challenges of the implementation of citizen initiatives. Fuerza Civil continued but was undermined by the new independent governor who did not support Fuerza Civil to the same extent. At the federal level both Enrique Peña Nieto and more recently AMLO tried to replicate Fuerza Civil, as a means to perform interventions and contain violence.

The CP's lasting legacy was a change in society's capacity to form communities and take more assertive attitudes towards violence, along with the willingness to express themselves through other formal and informal arrangements, beyond political-electoral institutions. The CP also found the capacity to push for justice and even perform some of the duties of the state (such as excavating clandestine graves) by crowdsourcing abilities where they lacked knowledge.

Prior to the creation of Fuerza Civil there were protests against the governor at the time, asking him to resign due to the security crisis. This is an example of the weak state capacity where the

criminals had won the monopoly of violence against the state. The ability of the EP to inject themselves into the situation comes from both their strong capacity as business leaders but also their high degree of legitimacy as the EP was an established part of Monterrey; they were successful business elites in a city with a culture of entrepreneurship. This is an example of the public-private cooperation of Milward and Provan's (2000) "hollow state", where fundamental aspects of government are outsourced to third parties. Public-private partnerships are not unusual, but what is interesting is that in many ways Fuerza Civil closely mimicked the government's strategy, with heavy involvement of the military, but it was much more successful.

Where Fuerza Civil differed is that the legitimacy and capacity found in the EP were consistent and sustainable features of Monterrey rather than a temporary 'foreign' intervention from the federal level. Moreover, the ability to carefully market the new police force was crucial in transferring their legitimacy to Fuerza Civil and the stronger requirements on education likely improved the awareness of Fuerza Civil surrounding their policing duties in the community rather than the militarised forces that had been trained in counterinsurgency operations outside of civilian contexts. Having said that, the susceptibility of Fuerza Civil to the electoral cycle might not make it the best candidate for lasting peace. Fuerza Civil was not created as a lasting institution.

Chapter 7: The role of local civil society to curb criminal violence in Mexico

7.0 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I explored the process of democratisation and decentralisation in Mexico along with the evolving security crisis from OCGs and the militarised top-down approach that was taken. Then, in Chapters 5 and 6, I performed an analysis at a micro-level on my two case studies of Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey. In Ciudad Juárez, I detailed that society formed different formal and informal organisational structures in response to their hostile environment. Confronted with a vacuum of governance, they took charge of the situation into high-risk collective action by de-legitimising the "war on drugs" and steering the federal institutions away from the dire turf war. Local society intervention was crucial in shaping the creation of the 'Mesas' or citizen-led working groups in conjunction with government institutions at multilevel, resulting in funding for varied social programmes. In Monterrey, I detailed that along with varied alliances from local civil society, the business-political elites played a leading role in shaping policy change, albeit with a focus on "the security of their private property rights" (Whitehead, 2010, p.85). In particular, the entrepreneurial elite purged the local law enforcement and created a new police force 'Fuerza Civil' based on careful vetting, education and marketing.

As seen in Chapter 4, there is an overall problem in Mexico with uneven democracy that results in limited state capacity. This is combined with state captured by OCGs in the form of informal networks within institutions such as the police force. This is also the general situation in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey. Against this backdrop Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez both cases faced similar characteristics of criminal violence that demanded thoughtful and unprecedented societal mobilisation. Having said that, both cities are also different in terms of their socio-economic make up and cultural backgrounds. Ciudad Juárez is a US-Mexico border city that grew rapidly partly due to maquilas (factories) and has complex migration from Central and South America while Monterrey's has a

deeply entrenched business culture and business elite with the financial and professional resources that go with that. These differences do alter the enablers and inhibitors of responses to violence in their local contexts and so where these contexts are important I will highlight this.

In this chapter, I will identify and discuss responses to criminal violence in Mexico based on my analysis of top-down approaches in Chapter 4 and my two case studies of Ciudad Juárez (Chapter 5) and Monterrey (Chapter 6). In this sense, I aim to structure my discussion based on identifying outcomes of different approaches and link these to the actions taken by different entities such as alliances, actors and institutions across temporal periods. Though the specific contexts of Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey matter, I do not take a structured comparative approach, but rather apply comparisons wherever it is helpful in contextualising responses. My focus is on the role of bottom-up approaches to respond to criminal violence at the micro-level but is also informed by macro-level approaches as these form part of the big picture of the problem. Thus, my analysis mainly centres on responses to the exacerbated wave of criminal violence, following Felipe Calderón's "War on Drugs" and their local incarnations in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey. In agreement with the past chapters, the periods are categorised as the onset, intensity, reduction and continuation that are based on the homicidal violence. The periods of intensity and reduction vary a little in the two cases, but this does not alter the general capture of the local political dimension.

The results from the two preceding chapters are indicators on the relationships between actors in the process. There are a range of factors that affect the perception of the problem and that creates a space for society groups to become more involved in participation and to activate in social mobilisation. Thus, I take the micro-level view of local politics, in which local civil society adjusts to the dire environment aimed at two actors "specialists in violence" (Tilly, 2003b, p.35): the state and the violence. First, I consider the role of state agents both as a point of contrast where there is alignment in the goals between the state and society, but also where the state acts as a hindrance, particularly when state's security forces become perpetrators of violence (Pansters, 2012, p.15). This repressive side of the state contrasts with the legitimacy that their agents and institutions are supposed to uphold (Ibid.). Second, criminal groups as perpetrators of predatory violence and in collusion with

state authorities. Though OCGs have conducted state-building activities in some areas (Barnes, 2017) and sometimes formed a social base, I mostly focus on them as "specialists in violence" (Tilly, 2003b), and a generic environmental factor that is trying to be managed by both civil society and the government.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. In section 7.1 I first identify the main actors involved in the responses to criminal violence in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey, connect them with the responses from a top-down perspective and trace their paths through the temporal periods. In section 7.2 I explore core outcomes of actors, which might have positive or negative consequences, and identify conditions that become enablers and inhibitors for these outcomes. In section 7.3, I explain the factors that constitute drivers for change. Finally in section 7.4 I make general concluding comments about the role of bottom-up approaches to react and respond to criminal violence and state responses.

7.1 Actors

In this section, I identify the main actors considered in my discussion including a brief summary of the activities at the federal level to tackle OCGs and activities of OCGs themselves. I then describe pathways for actors from civil society in Juárez and Monterrey and discuss their commonalities. This then leads into the outcomes they achieved in section 7.2 and what enabled or inhibited these outcomes before a more general analysis of pathways for change in 7.3.

Criminal Organisations

The OCGs consist of cartels as well as local and transnational gangs that often work as militias for larger criminal groups.

OCG Activities			
Period	**National**	**Juárez**	**Monterrey**
Onset	Initially only a few OCGs focused on trafficking marjuana and cocaine. This was largely driven by informal arrangements by the PRI though eventually law enforcement was used. As the one-party rule of the PRI ends, the gradual state capture of individuals and institutions across multiple levels of government occurs		

	until today. This is mostly local law enforcement but includes political actors,police and the military.		
Intensity	The war on drugs destabilised cartels causing them to fragment. Confrontations with police and the army.	Turf war between the Sinaloa Cartel and the Juárez Cartel. Confrontations with local police and the army. Predatory violence against citizens	Turf war between the Gulf Cartel and their former paramilitary style wing, Los Zetas. Confrontations with local police and the army. Predatory violence against citizens
Reduction	Less frequent confrontations with the military following changes in federal policies.	New informal agreements of the turf war, with the Sinaloa Cartel coming out on top. Changes in pattern of behaviour away from overt and predatory violence. Reduction in homicide rate to slightly above the national rate.	Los Zetas loses dominance in Monterrey. Reduction in homicide rate to national levels.
Continuation	Fragmentation of OCGs and diversification. Increase in violence to 2018 before flattening out.	OGCs, transnational gangs & criminal cells Gradual increase in violence up to 5 times the national average in 2020 with inter-cartel tensions over crystal meth trafficking. Perception of less predatory violence against local citizens	Further fragmentation into networks & criminal cells Homicide rate remains in line with the national average. From 2016, increase in extortion to small and medium sized enterprises

Table 1. General activities of OCGs across key temporal periods.

Federal Level

At the federal level, the principal actor considered is the President. The armed forces are also a federal level actor that is under executive control but that largely organises itself autonomously. There have generally been two approaches to respond to criminal violence: militarised responses that consist of containing, beheading and dismantling OCGs and approaches at democratisation that consist of decentralisation, and strengthening state capacity as well as constitutional and legal reforms as described in Chapter 4. However, the increased reliance of militarisation is paradoxically supplanting local level (civilians) security forces which prevents them from developing their capacities to fulfil their duties to society.

Federal Level Processes			
Period	**Militarisation**	**Decentralisation**	**(Political) Democratisation**
Onset	Initially limited military usage in conjunction with local law enforcement.	A gradual movement toward decentralisation that consisted of constitutional changes and greater funds being assigned to states and municipalities.	A movement towards political-electoral democracy starting towards the end of the PRI's one-party rule. This included greater scrutiny of constitutional violations. Initial suggestions for a reform of the judicial system to a more adversarial approach.
Intensity	Felipe Calderón's War on Drugs adopting the kingpin strategy against OCGs in collaboration with the US under the Merida initiative.		Focus on human right's violations. Further drives towards adversarial approach.
Reduction	Movement towards containment under Peña Nieto. Attempt to build a military-civilian force called the gendarmerie.	The conclusion of the turf war. Reduction in violence to slightly above the national average.	Constitutional changes to the role of the military.
Continuation	Increased militarisation under Peña Nieto and AMLO despite both initially claiming they want to reduce militarised responses. Increasing use of the military to fill non-military positions like operating airports. Creation of National Guard (a continuation of the gendarmerie) under control of the army.	Further decentralisation during PAN, but under Pena Nieto a centralisation of power and then a move towards greater (re)centralisation under AMLO.	Proposal of PRONAPRED to rebuild marginalised urban centres by Peña Nieto. Emphasis on fighting corruption by AMLO.

Table 2. Activities at the federal level during the key temporal periods. Source: Own elaboration.

Local Level

The local level largely consists of civil society that is made up of:

- Elites - business elites and ruler class (government officials). Often capable of interacting with the regional and federal level.

- Organisations - Various NGOs, other (civil society organisations) CSOs. A point of communication between civilians and the regional level.
- Academics - That provides research and expertise.
- Professionals - Such as doctors that have a good social standing and place in their communities.
- Social movements - tend to be more left wing and often have no dialogue with regional or federal levels.

Beyond these broad categories there are multitudinous actors involved from all parts of society and they often interact with and support each other. The informality provides flexibility and trust-based relationships.

7.2 Actor Pathways

This section demonstrates not only how it was possible that local communities activated in collective mobilisation to press the authorities amid the crisis of insecurity, but in doing so, they also advanced in two aspects at the local level. First, they helped to further institutional advancements at the local level. Second, they leveraged the opportunities to develop new forms of political participation beyond elections (Ley, 2022), which became significant influence for developing new societal structures and ties with the municipal and gubernatorial authorities to create means for upholding rule of law. This does not mean that challenges do not persist; on the contrary, but it provides another reading to the realities that operationalise formal and informal practices in the uneven Mexican democracy.

In this section, I group together actors into pathways and consider their trajectories. These pathways either group actors together that have consolidated power / status / experience in similar ways (such as businesses and long-running or powerful organisations), or that group together smaller actors and individuals (such as activists and artists). I detail these pathways for the cases of Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey, highlighting the mechanisms and strategies used for the activation of bottom-up approaches to respond to violence in their cities. I then compare and contrast these pathways across both cases. In terms of temporal periods, my case studies focus on the increase in violence and

responses to violence and so I focus on the period of increasing and then decreasing violence and a little into the continuation period.

7.2.1 Juárez Pathways

In Ciudad Juárez, there are three main main actor pathways:

- **Politico-elite pathway (PEP)** - The actors in this pathway are traditional and economic power figures of the city. They usually have a more direct line of communication with members of the government. These include leaders of cooperatives, maquilas, politicians and the clergy.
- **Dialogical nexus pathway (DNP)** - The actors in this pathway have long-standing experience in human rights, citizen participation and community. For example, the Juarese Observatory for Public Security and Social Security, the Citizen Medical Committee, and Plan Strategico. This pathway facilitated communication between different actors. Some of these actors are shown in Table 3.
- **Social resistance pathway (SRP)** - The actors in this pathway consist of various actors such as academics, human rights activists, feminists, smaller NGOs and others. These actors took high-risk participation activities amid organised crime violence, collective fasting and strikes, marches and other approaches. Their drive is grounded in society and injustice and grief. Some of these actors are shown in Table 3.

These pathways adopted various approaches to try and respond to the increases in violence in Juárez. However, many of these failed and efforts were brushed aside by the federal military intervention. That was until the Villas de Salvárcar massacre and subsequent public outcry that led to the federal initiative ‘Todos Somos Juárez’, implemented by Felipe Calderón. From this initiative, various mesas (working groups) evolved, covering security, labour, health, economy, education, and social development. These working groups combined civil society and the three layers of government that served as a point of alignment for the PEP and DNP and indirectly for the SRP via the DNP.

Principal Social Actors and coalitions of actors in Ciudad Juárez			
Actor	**Description**	**Objectives**	**Approach**
Pacto por la Cultura	A movement that explores culture as a means of activism made up of actors, writers, filmmakers, and musicians.	Impact social reality through art and culture by providing opportunities for communication, exchange and empathy.	Artistic and cultural activities.
Citizens' Medical Committee	A committee of doctors that formed in 2008.	Combatting extortion and kidnapping of doctors.	Create social networks that would encourage civic participation to address insecurity.
Juarese Observatory for Public Security and Social Security	Made up of a coalition of actors including academics from UACJ, Colegio Frontera Norte, Juarenses for Peace (Entrepreneurial vision), the Citizen Medical Committee, CASA Promoción Juvenil (a youth association) and maquiladoras (factories).	Addressing emergencies of victims, especially in the crimes of kidnapping and extortion.	Various activities including establishing communication ties with local and state authorities and then to request help from the Federation.
Paso del Norte (Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte)	Paso Del Norte has an interdisciplinary team made up of psychologists, lawyers, sociologists and social workers.	Promotes and defends comprehensive human rights with the participation and organisation of people, especially the most violated, building a purposeful and respect for life.	Providing legal advice and psychosocial care to people who come to the Center seeking support in situations of violation of their rights. In addition, the organisation carries out training work on rights and popular committees, which allow the organisation of people in the communities to defend their rights. Paso Del Norte decided to fill that void and accompany processes of violations committed by the armed forces and police during the "war on drugs".
The Strategic Plan of Juárez (Plan Estratégico de Juárez)	Non-partisan. Non Profit Organisation.	To support citizen participation in pursuing a better quality of life.	Transform citizen participation into government decision-making. Business and civic leaders emerged that later joined the 'Mesas'.

Table 3. Main actors in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Source: Own elaboration with information from Díaz Ed. 2015.

The PEP consisted of actors that included the political-elite of Juárez, usually the leaders of cooperatives, maquilas, politicians and the clergy. These actors consist of the traditional and economic

power figures of the city and usually have a more direct line of communication with members of the government. At the government level, there were some efforts to replace corrupt municipal police by former and active military personnel. However, this was pushed aside by the militarised approach. The clergy played a role in calling for a curfew for young people, to avoid recruitment opportunities by OCGs. Unfortunately, the police started extorting young people who were found outside of this curfew, especially from the poor slums of the city, leading to this scheme being abandoned. On the business side of the pathway, extortion was a big problem in the private sector, and many companies had closed down and their facilities were abandoned and there was deep mistrust of municipal and state authorities, some of whom were colluders (Fondevila and Vilalta. 2021). For example, similarly to the business pathway, doctors faced extortion and kidnapping. The Citizens' Medical Committee responded to this by setting up a call-in number staffed by doctors to report these crimes and also provided a bridge to authorities (International Crisis Group, 2015).

After seeing the level of extortions in the city, the business and clergy later joined the demands for the withdrawal of the federales. Many of the the PEP pathway aligned with the dialogical nexus pathway in the Observatorio Ciudadano and their organisation evolved within the working group Mesa de Seguridad. For example, regarding extortion and kidnappings among business actors, the Mesa de Seguridad introduced measures to promote crime reporting consisting of trustworthy procedures and trusted points of contact (Fondevila and Vilalta, 2021). This pathway later evolved into the Trust for Competitiveness and Citizen Security (FICOSEC) in 2012, along with the Citizen Observatory for Prevention, Security and Justice and the Citizen Security and Justice Council. These had influence within the private sector initiative.

The DNP represents those actors who had a long-standing experience in human rights, citizen participation and community work. This strand already had an established reputation or a previous interaction with the society. A good example of this pathway is the citizen-led Strategic Plan for Juárez, which was a pre-existing NGO in operation since 2001 whose goal was to create a development plan for the city. By the time of the period of violence, this pathway could offer its experience and connections in planning. Another example is the doctor's movement. From the very

start of their organisation (The Citizens' Medical Committee) in 2008, their social standing in Mexican society was that of respect and trust. Though this was a newer organisation, it had the respect of the citizens.

The DNP pathway chose a form of dialogue, communication and connection between the actors who supported the PEP pathway, as well as with authorities and society in general. For example, the human right's organisation, Paso del Norte, besides providing legal advice and psychosocial care, served as an initiator for protests in the form of hunger strikes with other organisations. The actors in this pathway represented those who had more experience in Juárez in themes such as women's rights, minority groups, human rights and citizen participation (many NGOs had formed since the early 2000s and they were already known by the locals). Also, there were pre-existing relationships since the mobilisations to denounce feminicides. Overall, the dialogical nexus pathway not only did they facilitate the interaction and initial citizen articulation to face the authorities in the Mesa de Seguridad, but they also connected with the "social resistance pathway" and represented the voices of the most marginalised and who were looking for justice in the middle of that bloodshed.

The GSRP is the pathway of reactionary responses, which was more (openly) antagonistic to the Mexican government's war. It largely consisted of people from the middle to poor backgrounds, whose actions can be framed under Scott's (1985) notions of the "weapons of the weak". This strand was followed mainly by collectives and groups aligned to the left socialists and anti-capitalists that included university students, feminists groups and, to lesser extent, academics. Their mobilisation responded reactively to the short horizon actions of the criminal violence and in everyday resistance, mainly to the military and the municipal police. This pathway is notable for their consistency, autonomy and capacity to build networks with other individuals at the grassroots and gain support at national and international level. Through risky public and private manifestations, they reclaimed public spaces, increased public awareness, reshaped their urban environment, increased political participation in municipal decision-making, and pushed for institutional change. They openly denounced the abuses of the militaries and demanded their withdrawal from the city (Villalpando,

2010), which made their members exposed, but at the same time, they were actors to trust in navigating the situations of risk.

Actors in this pathway present a more parallel activity from the *Mesas*. One of the most representative complex collective mobilisations occurred in February 2010, in response to Villas de Salvarcar, which forced President Calderón to go to Juárez. After the period of intense crisis, some actors continued to receive reprisals from municipality authorities. In addition, this anti-military pathway evolved in communities of collectives and assemblies of feminist, cultural, and anti-capitalist resistance for the recuperation of public spaces and more informal forms of approaches, as well as the accompaniment of vulnerable populations in Juárez: women, girls, migrants, indigenous people, young people and maquila workers.

Overall, all pathways were affected by the influence of the OCGs and had different levels of capacity and capability in attempting to react to the issues they faced. The business actors in the PEP initially demanded the intervention of the federal level after having seen the killing of local policemen. Contrary to the PEP pathway, the GSRP pathway saw federal intervention in the form of military presence, as a further "condition of vulnerability" (Adair, academic), given their past experiences with police abuse and the structural inequalities. At that moment, even without hard evidence, numerous participants were aware of the collusion of the police at municipal and state levels which reduced their level of trust in them. Finally, the DNP consisted of societal facilitators that could serve as a bridge between the PEP and GSRP pathways. This pathway created the conditions to bring the heterogeneous perspectives and concerns of the population together. Their actions together ultimately led to the withdrawal of the militaries and federal forces that participated in the Joint Operation Chihuahua.

The PEP and SRP eventually converged to the Mesas that emerged from the Todos Somos Juárez project. The most prominent of these Mesas was the working group of security and justice (Mesa de Seguridad, MSJ) composed of business associations, professional groups, a youth association, the city's human rights commission, and the local university which is still in activity today, while the others mesas were less effective and stopped their activities. Their goal was to "recover the city by combining all efforts in the attack on crime and violence" (García Z, 2015, p.66). They did this by

strengthening institutions and communication between the three levels of government based on measurable criteria that had to be reviewed regularly. These measurable criteria were "the number of homicides, car robberies, car jackings, kidnappings, extortion and business robberies" and every month citizen-led agreements are made about what to do, somebody takes responsibility and the progress is reviewed the following month. These measurable outcomes correspond well to the general concerns of all the pathways to some extent. As well as reducing the measurable outcomes, the Security working group (MSJ) allowed the build of trust between citizens and the authorities, created new communication channels, and promoted shared further common objectives (i.e. socio-economic measures) between civil society and the three levels of government (García Z, 2015).

7.2.2 Monterrey Pathways

In Monterrey, there were two main pathways:

- **Elite Pathway (EP) -** The actors in this pathway consisted of high-level business individuals, including the Monterrey Group. Actors in this pathway could rely on professional and financial resources to create tech platforms, exert power and influence and use marketing approaches to convey their messages.
- **Communitarian pathway (CP) -** The actors in this pathway consisted of university assemblies, protesters, alliances and neighbourhoods. They have much more limited professional experience and financial support and so must find this externally or crowd-source them from within their community. Some of these actors are shown in Table 4.

Principal Actors in Monterrey			
Name	**Description**	**Objectives**	**Approach**
Elite-businesses	The elite entrepreneurial groups of Monterrey, mainly the Monterrey Group.	Bring investment security to Monterrey to improve the business environment	The creation of various organisations such as Alcalde Como Vamos, Pulso de Seguridad and Hagámoslo Bien. Purge of the former law enforcement and creation of Fuerza Civil via careful vetting, education and competitive salaries.

Alianza Cívica Nuevo León (Civic Alliance of Nuevo León)	Non-Government Organisation	Citizen initiative, plural, non-partisan and non-profit, made up of a group of people committed to the democratic development and peaceful coexistence of Nuevo León society	Civic education and training to generate and disseminate ideas, knowledge and methodological tools of organisation and citizen participation
Asamblea Estudiantil Tec	Collective of students that emerged after the death of 2 students of the Tec de Monterrey.	Awareness of human rights violations and disappearances against students	Bringing attention to disappearances of students and human right's violations. Organising marches
United Forces for Our Disappeared (FUNDENL)	Non-Government Organisation	Support loved ones of disappeared people	Providing support through complex legal procedures. Exhuming clandestine graves and cataloguing them. Cataloguing Disappearances Public activities such as Embroidery for peace (Bordando por la paz)
Citizens in Support of Human Rights (CADHAC)	Non-Government Organisation	Its main objective is the promotion and defence of human rights in the state of Nuevo León and northern Mexico	Providing legal advice, human rights education, documenting cases of human rights violations, research on human rights-related issues, and participating in networks and coalitions for the defence of human rights

Table 4. Main actors in Monterrey, Nuevo León. Source: Own elaboration.

The elite pathway (EP) had a long-standing seat of power in Monterrey and connection to political power which enabled specific communication channels. Their horizontal reach extended from the bottom of society up to regional government officials. As the period of increasing violence emerged, they had the political, financial and professional capability to purge the former police force and construct a new police force Fuerza Civil, with careful market-led branding to gain trust and inclusion among the civilian population. As with the federal strategy, Fuerza Civil was built with the same heavy reliance on the military for training and recruitment. The EP then pushed to implement more structural changes in the forms of NGOs and platforms to gather information and improve communication. Fuerza Civil continued through the period of reduction and continues until today. In fact, it served as a federal blueprint for the formation of the federal civilian-army forces of the gendarmerie under Peña Nieto and the national guard under AMLO.

The actions of the communitarian pathway (CP) were more diverse. There were public displays of solidarity and acts of high-risk visibility throughout the temporal periods, voicing immediate needs of the population such as the trauma and injustice of the events in the public mind and raising the political profile of such events. Civil society provided communitarian expertise for example, in the form of legal aid through complex legal processes, often sharing collective knowledge and experiences of those that had been through the same processes. Furthermore, they arranged public events to reclaim public space such as football matches and set up neighbourhood security measures such as surveillance systems and means of secure communication with the police. As with the EP, the CP also set up their own platforms for anonymous crime reporting.

There is some overlap in the motivations and goals for both pathways. That is, greater stability and a better future, though the EPs consider this abstractly to be greater business potential while the EPs want security and futures for themselves and their families.Where the pathways differ dramatically, is the urgency in the need for personal security and the need to pursue justice for crimes like homicides and disappearances which are persistent sources of trauma. The EPs owns an entrenched entrepreneurial-capitalist identity, which may put some distance compared to the demands (of "the others") for justice; outside of, for example, competition law violation, while the individual voices of the CPs carry weight and strong narrative capacity and details of the local contexts.

Naturally, the EPs can raise capital to research, design and implement societal structures along with the necessary infrastructure and manpower. In a sense, they have the power to inject strong state capacity into their local context in a way that the federal level cannot. In contrast to this, the CPs are lacking in access to dedicated human resources. However, the collective trauma experienced by the CPs bind individuals together with compelling (often tragic) narratives that build strong and authentic support networks. In contrast to this, the EP has to pay and formalise relationships in work contracts.

Concerning the professionality of the actors, the EP often has in-house knowledge across a wide spectrum of domains and additional expertise can be bought when needed. In contrast to this, the CPs rely on individuals sharing expertise with one another and on the advice of NGOs such as CADHAC, and FUNDENL. In the CP, resources and tools are obtained through collective action and pressure on

the authorities, or as well as transnational donors. This last option can be tricky though as many times transnational donors condition their resources to pre-selected indicators. By that, meaning that if they receive funding by an international NGO, they must use it to meet a (perhaps incompatible) predefined indicator to demonstrate that they are using the money as intended.

The current political climate and the alternation of government affects both pathways. With the deeply entrenched historical power, the EPs can exert pressure over the candidate selected for government. This is not true of the CPs, though they might have some ability to shape the perception of candidates and therefore the votes for particular parties. The EPs are composed of individuals that are much politician-like in many ways, operating at a high-level of a complex hierarchical structure within the business world. In fact, in some senses they are almost "alternative" political figures. In contrast to this, the CP might have notable activist figures and spokesmen as well as experience in working with the local government, but generally they do not inhabit the same political spheres as the EPs. The horizontal relationships range more towards grassroots connections and applying political pressure through high visibility actions. The EP also has more access to resources to influence the local congress, inserting urgency to alter the response times of congress. Both the pathways have access to influences beyond Monterrey. In the EP this relates to the regional, multi-regional and multi-national scales of big companies. Whereas in the CP, this relates more to connecting with similar organisations in the rest of the world facing similar struggles. For example, movements applying the artistic expression of embroidering connected victims and different societal organisations, and created a safe space for memory and transformative justice (See Rizzo Reyes, 2015, pp.145–174).

Both pathways are concerned with communication. In the context of the EPs, this communication is professional and focuses on marketing and branding, using all avenues of communication (tv, billboards, etc.), but they are limited in the precise format that can be used. Protests, for example, do not make sense in the context of a marketing strategy. The CPs developed an awareness of the need to communicate and how to communicate over time. The communication objectives of the CPs are to expose the severity and collective trauma of their experiences and to utilise public space as a symbolic way to communicate their pain and connect to other collectives. In contrast to this, the EP marketing

approaches risks being perceived as manipulative and cosmetic if not carefully orchestrated, whereas the CP narratives are more authentic and personal. This has the potential to strengthen their communication. The CP, when well articulated, can become a good counter narrative to curb the excessive use of military force, by making it apparent what the human cost of violence can be. Both pathways meet resistance in people identifying with them and accepting their messages. However, while the EP can carefully construct their messages and have the benefit of existing in a business-positive society, the CP tends to meet more resistance from ordinary local people who do not have a culture of protest.

In terms of addressing security, the EPs prioritise the use of force of the local police (FC), as a tactic to counter the violence of OCGs at that time and bring about stability in Monterrey. Clearly, this solution is available to extremely limited CPs, as vigilantism is extra-legal in most of Mexico and there are few communities based on customs and traditions that can effectively form those structures of protection. Interestingly, in the case of FC, one could argue that the CP is in fact like a customer or user of the police force. This analogy feels appropriate given the deliberate construction of the brand of FC (See Chapter 6). So, to some extent, satisfying the community is heavily incentivized by FC, at least in how it is branded. In this analogy, the EP would be the board/investors in FC. Where the pathways meet, is in the collaboration between Fuerza Civil and the self-organised neighbourhood communities. These neighbours prioritised secure and direct communication with the police force by purchasing a fixed line to trusted contacts. This increase of trust is a major achievement of Fuerza Civil and was one of the main goals of the branding of the new police force.

From the perspective of the communitarian pathway in Monterrey, the improved trustworthiness of the police force is a huge deal compared to the previous police institution and its past of collusion with criminals (and the indifference of the state to their wellbeing). Though the EP have a lot of power over Fuerza Civil, the explicit focus on the police as a community-centric force creates a right among the CP to shape the actions of the police force, at least in theory. In practice, there were various human rights abuses but this increased trust resulted in the desire to create communication channels with Fuerza Civil from neighbourhood contexts.

Despite human right's violations, FC maintained its prestige at a national level and one could perceive the willingness of communities to communicate and utilise the police force, as a belief in the new brand that was marketed to them. Where this reorganisation worked, it was perhaps one of the major successes of FC in its relationship with the CP. This is especially remarkable in Mexico, where trust in the police is often not very high and often for very good reasons.

Beyond Fuerza Civil, there were similar structural outcomes that resulted from the actions taken by EPs and CPs in the form of new organisational structures. The CP managed to create working meetings directly with the local authorities to support actions, such as GEBI that then evolved the National Search Commission, however by themselves, they do not have the individual inherent drive towards solving local problems, but instead to serve a function in some abstract sense. This can be a problem when that function is not well defined and grounded in the real needs and time frames of communities. A pattern I often find is that state-run initiatives prove to be ineffective and so new societal organisations emerge or old groups change their function to fill in these gaps, particularly when change is not realised in the time horizons they expect.

One significant area that differs between the EPs and CPs, is the way the CPs aid in helping citizens navigate through complex governmental systems. It is taken for granted that EPs will have the benefit of a structured network of professionals, but this is not the case with the CPs. Unfortunately the practical and bureaucratic processes involved in seeking justice are out of the depth of typical citizens. The main strategy to circumvent this, is to pool together collective knowledge of processes and support individuals in pursuing justice and societal change. It is reasonable to argue that the systems should be streamlined and accessible to everyday people, but unfortunately they lack the capacity or willingness to provide this assistance. For the latter point, there might be collusion with OGCs in institutions, or an unwillingness to increase the risk of upsetting OGCs by conducting investigations.

7.2.3 Pathway Commonalities and Differences

Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey have a similar population and one would imagine a similar breadth of diverse actors. However, this does not come across in the pathways. Juárez seems much more

disjointed, involving many individual actors attempting different measures from the PEP and DNP while Monterrey consists of a more monolithic and entrenched EP in Monterrey. Moreover, during the security crisis in Juárez the elite actors participated as a more ‘humble’ parts of society than in Monterrey. This includes professionals in general like doctors and lawyers who may be well off, but are not necessarily rich and are more likely to interact with the general population frequently.

There was no strong federal militarised strategy in Monterrey and this was partially because the militarised strategy was in effect realised by the creation of Fuerza Civil made possible by the strong capacity of the EP. Moreover, as the Fuerza Civil was a local initiative by respected and established actors, there is not the same sense of driving away a foreign intervention. It is hard to know whether the efforts to purge the police force in Juárez would have helped given that the federal militarised strategy brushed this aside. It is clear though that there was very little trust in Juárez concerning the police or the military in the reluctance of doctors and businesses to report extortion and kidnapping, while in Monterrey civil society created means to interact more with Fuerza Civil.

The importance of the diverse interactions between actors is not as present in Monterrey as it is in Juárez. In Juárez, diverse actors communicated in the mesas while the DNP acted as societal facilitators that could serve as a bridge between the PEP and GSRP pathways. In contrast to this, the main communication entity and facilitator was the EP. The EP had horizontal connections with the government and the elite and delegated social interactions to Fuerza Civil, fostering better communication by branding Fuerza Civil as a trustworthy organisation and also focusing on education programs in Fuerza Civil. There is probably a level of comfort in the business world in creating a brand and leaving actual communication to a carefully constructed organisation rather than engaging in very personal and complex everyday contexts of civil society. This is not the same with many of the actors in Monterrey who are directly embedded in these everyday contexts.

There are differences between the CP and the SRP. The CP in Monterrey is less radical than the SRP pathway in Juárez, which had strong anti-establishment aspects. This could potentially be a cultural difference between the more conservative ‘hard working’ mentality of Monterrey and the

more open Juárez. Having said that, both the CP and SRP worked towards increasing visibility, reclaiming public spaces and in general making the community more assertive in pursuing change.

There was a clear appreciation for the activities in Juárez and Monterrey at the federal, state and municipal level in the temporal periods of reduction and continuation. During the politically complex situation in Iguala/Ayotzinapa following the disappearance and murder of students (covered in Chapter 6), president Peña Nieto used the slogan 'Todos Somos Ayotzinapa' to announce social and economic investment into the area, invoking the spirit of the popular federal plan of 'Todos Somos Juárez'. Peña Nieto's PRONAPRED project for crime prevention spent a lot of money targeting crime prevention of the community with a focus on children, youths and women and "reconciliation between police and society" (International Crisis Group, 2015, pp18-19). This project resulted in the renovation of schools, parks and community centres in neglected neighbourhoods, but ultimately faced the same general problems described in Chapter 4 and eventually the funding dried up. Finally, there were also cases of the transferral of the working group model of Juárez to other cities to respond to their security crises (International Crisis Group, 2015; Conger, 2014, p.205).

In the case of Monterrey, Fuerza Civil was a clear success story. Peña Nieto wanted to emulate this with his National Gendarmerie -*Gendarmería Nacional*-, a carefully vetted paramilitary force made up of former military officers built upon 3 pillars: a mix of military and the police, proximity to Mexican citizens, and rapid mobilisation when necessary . The creation of the National Guard -*Guardia Nacional*- by AMLO through an special presidential executive decree, in March 2019 was also meant to play a similar role (Diario Oficial De La Federación, 2019). It became a way to purge — and dissolve — the Federal Police (FP) with new recruitments and training, a measure of criticism given the progress that the FP had made in the topics of human rights and corruption.

7.3 Factors that shape change

So far, this chapter has discussed the results of the two subnational case studies by identifying core actor pathways (related to Chapters 5 and 6) and discussing the commonalities and differences between them. This section compliments this investigation by understanding the conditions under

which bottom-up approaches are effective in responding to criminal violence. I approach this by identifying the factors that enabled or inhibited responses to violence by civil society. There are many aspects to be considered but my emphasis is on the empirical gaps identified in the literature in Chapter 2, regarding state (in)capacity of uneven democracy and exploring how local civil society filled these voids.

Societal Networks and Alliances between society and state

In Juárez, the historical and political inequalities have contributed to the power imbalances, resulting in many vulnerable and marginalised citizens that go without access to basic rights of liberty and legal protection. Under the extreme conditions of violence from both OCGs and colluded agents in the police and military, a broad spectrum of societal actors reacted by asserting their civil rights. An important factor that facilitated this was the socialisation of actors in societal networks. This allowed them to construct support structures, which were then a factor in helping them to overcome their fears and voice their demands. This laid the ground for more disruptive methods among some actors, in the form of large-scale protests, which were a factor in breaking the status-quo of power structures.

These support structures of accompaniment were also a factor in allowing citizens to be more safe and in confidence in expressing their demands to members of the "dialogical nexus pathway", who were participating in the Mesa de Seguridad, concerning the unlawful detention of their loved ones. The mechanisms which evolved from the Mesa de Seguridad allowed people to take their demands to the law enforcement authorities, in particular, the gubernatorial attorney general. This was of paramount importance and was also a milestone for filling a gap in judicial and police state capacities. Particularly, in encouraging the reporting of human rights abuses and crimes, and pressuring the authorities to undertake investigations which otherwise would have been disregarded. The dialogical nexus pathway in Juárez is also a clear factor in facilitating these exchanges and broadening interactions of micro-level trust between the civil society and government agents.

The community support structures were also an important factor in fostering a sense of mutual care and vigilance. At the neighbourhood level, this prompted residents to collaboratively pool resources for the implementation of local security measures, filling in some of the limited state

capacity in keeping neighbourhoods safe. Beyond the physical aspects of security, communities engaged in the vital exchange of knowledge, sharing effective strategies to respond to violence, including managing various legal procedures. Communal support also came in the form of helping people cope with traumatic experiences, allowing the transformation of collective fear and grief into a shared sense of support and justice. Importantly, these community-driven initiatives were not confined to specific neighbourhoods but instead were horizontally replicated across different communities, creating a broader and interconnected web of mutual assistance and shared resilience.

Micro-level relationships of trust

A major problem when society faced predatory violence was related to the informal networks of collusion between state security agents and criminals. The state and society alliances in the Mesa de Seguridad, in tandem with parallel local communities, were fundamental factors in tackling the high-levels of extortion and kidnappings. From discussions within the Mesa de Seguridad, two core sub-groups were created: the Unit Anti-Extortion and the Unit Anti-kidnappings (Unidad Antiextorsión and Unidad Antisecuestros) groups (See Chapter 5). These units were particularly prominent within the state's attorney general office to prosecute, control and reduce the extortion that at that time could be conducted with almost complete impunity by its perpetrators (Conger, 2014)[66].

An important factor in citizen participation was the creation of micro-level relationships of trust. Citizens carefully constructed — mostly informal — relationships of trust with street-level bureaucrats of the fiscalia (gubernatorial attorney's office), even in the face of possible state-criminal collusion. Their direct channel of communication with the operators of the policies adopted during negotiations within the Mesa de Seguridad, mainly at gubernatorial level, were leveraged by citizens to overcome — at least during the crisis — the frequent changes of high-level staff within institutions. This direct oversight coupled with the commitment of those street-level bureaucrats, drove them to carry on

[66] The measures were also complemented during the Chihuahuan governorship of César Duarte (2010-2016) with tougher laws reforms between 2010 and 2016, demanded by the societal organisations. The law mandated that the homicides related to extortion and kidnappings were punished with life in prison (La Silla Rota, 2011).

investigations and achieve detentions. Members of the Mesa de Seguridad, such as Doctors, lawyers and businesses, accompanied victims in reporting their crimes, preserving their anonymity to avoid reprisals on the victim. Along with these channels of communication, a more assertive and unified society became more confident in reporting crimes, even when these involved the military and the municipal police. Participants agreed that these measures were fundamental in liberating citizens from a predatory version of a mafia-like control (See Gambetta, 1996, p.1).

Challenging Federal Discourse

When the period of increasing violence was at its peak, civil society confronted the federal narrative that homicides were just OCGs "killing each other off" which was used against the victims of the Villas de Salvárcar massacre . This discourse discounted the federal responsibility to protect the young men and women that were victims of the massacre (Monárrez, 2014; Wright, 2011). It was also a factor in allowing for the federal strategy which used excessive coercive actions as it implied that increased homicides would correspond to the social cleansing of society from criminals (Wright, 2011, p.722). This was an inhibiting factor in supporting civil societies actions, as it delegitimised and neglected their local concerns.

An important factor in altering the federal discourse was the public expressions of outrage and grief, particularly in Ciudad Juárez, which contributed to changing the common narratives conveyed in the official narrative. In addition, the public outcry soon reverberated across multiple levels of government, resulting in a significant softening and moderation of the federal discourse. It also raised the need among policymakers for a change of approach to the excessively coercive strategy that had reached international attention (See Olson and Lee, 2012). In Monterrey, coalitions of families of disappeared people and NGOs together put pressure on the local prosecutors for continuing with the investigations of the disappeared people, who previously had been stigmatised.

The Quality of Democracy

Perhaps the most dominant global inhibiting factor in Mexico is the state of uneven democracy and limited state capacity of the country. In democratic systems, the enforcement of laws can be impeded by the existence of multiple levels of governments, as well as fragmented bureaucracies and security

forces (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019) As seen in Chapter 4, when there is this variation, the process of decentralisation, while intended to distribute governance responsibilities, has the potential to diminish certain institutions (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019; O'Donnell, 1993). Partially due to a distance between national policy makers and the different levels of government, there was a lack of communication and coordination between different societal actors and levels of government, resulting in differing enforcement priorities and capabilities as well as different goals and objectives (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019, p.35). This disconnection resulted in inadequate coordination and direction of law enforcement strategies that further contributed to a segmented state.

Furthermore, when enforcement is delegated to different levels of government with distinct Mayors and local bureaucrats in security institutions are likely to have preferences on selectively enforcing the law for certain crimes (O'Donnell, 1993). One of the ways in which communication and coordination was addressed in Ciudad Juárez, was the creation of the working groups. A key factor in the success of the Mesas was the bringing together of multiple levels of government and civil society in monthly meetings to promote communication. Another key factor for their success was the introduction of quantifiable objectives such as reducing homicides, which also made it easier to coordinate around concrete and fixed goals.

As described in Chapter 4, decentralisation also resulted in weak local institutions that often had a lack of resources, personnel, professionalism and procedures. In this context, other actors needed to step in to overcome the limited state capacity of these institutions. At the national level, this lack of capacity was filled by the military, but this was only ever intended to serve as a means for containment of OCGs and interventions. In this sense, the federal strategy was to redistribute resources (the army) to parts of the country that needed them. What is remarkable about the case of Monterrey, is that the business elites managed to construct a new institution as a long-term solution, in the form of a new civil police force.

Fuerza Civil still involved military-style training but also held a generally positive public image. In some sense, Fuerza Civil met the ambitions of the federal strategy, but was more than a temporary fix to limited state capacity and was created and implemented at a local level. However, the

entrenchment and power of the business elite in Monterrey were an important factor in its creation and this couldn't easily be emulated elsewhere. However, one factor in Fuerza Civil's success was their focus on branding and marketing the police force as a pro-civilian force. Undoubtedly, this involved paying for market research, but now that a blueprint for this exists, it could be emulated elsewhere. Another factor in Fuerza Civil's success was the emphasis on educating officers to encourage better conduct and professionalism. This could also be an objective for other police forces, though the facilities to do so might not be readily available to the same extent.

Another example of institutional change was the creation of GEBI. The factors for its creation were quite different from the creation of Fuerza Civil in that it involved applying pressure on officials. GEBI was created by the state prosecutor following the mobilisation of NGOs and family members of disappeared people to put pressure on officials to act. This pressure forced them to act outside of their immediate priorities and beyond their informal loyalties (e.g. partisan, political), where the general narrative at the time was to ignore the problem. Societal mobilisation was core in raising social awareness of the victims of violence, especially about the phenomenon of disappeared people and confronted the initial state rejection of the crisis. Society and local state co-production of protocols for conducting search operations was paramount in addressing state (in)capacities.

Even in the most unequal contexts, such as is the case for Latin America, societal mobilisation proves to generate compelling incentives for the elites to enforce the law (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019, p.37). This is an element to consider in both cases when the business-political elites wield substantial influence over the decision-making processes, widening the gap of the preferences between design and implementation (Ibid). As this condition leaves shorter options for the most vulnerable to make their voices heard, this requires a more optical nuance on forms mobilisation and the incentives that it can create between the potential state operations.

Political Urgency

An important factor in the outcomes in Juárez and Monterrey was the sense of political urgency and how this shaped political actions. The escalating levels of crime in Juárez and Monterrey triggered a heightened sense of political urgency, compelling authorities to take actions that deviated from typical

political time frames and actions. This urgency not only paved the way for the implementation of more extreme and severe measures, such as a militarised strategy, but also encouraged ‘outside-the-box' thinking in addressing the complex challenges.

The adopted measures were a direct reflection of the local situations characterised by state capture by OCGs, soaring crime rates, state incapacity, and unstable government. Faced with this complex scenario, various strands of civil society, including businesses, demonstrated a willingness to mobilise, each to varying degrees. The civic groups emerged as natural advocates for change, having recognised the need for it and, mostly in Juárez, having the presence of pre-existing institutions that were already planning and implementing responses to criminal violence.

The local context of the crisis presented an opportunity for diverse forms of interaction between society and between them and the state. In terms of institutional change, legislative reforms were introduced that significantly influenced the ways in which citizens participated in and organised around community decisions. These changes were accelerated by their proximity to state and federal elections, particularly in Juárez, Chihuahua (2010 and 2012), and in Monterrey, Nuevo León (2012 and 2015). This proximity acted as a powerful incentive for politicians, prompting them to allocate personnel and resources to address the issues affecting the regions.

In the pursuit of immediate results, it became clear that "institutional enforcement efforts are driven as much by political choices as by underlying state capacity" (Brinks, Levitsky and Murillo, 2019, p.36) The outcome of these concerted efforts was accompanied with a drastic reduction in violence (Ley, 2019; Moncada, 2016). The combination of political will, civic mobilisation, and strategic timing around elections played a pivotal role in reshaping the trajectory of these communities and mitigating the security challenges they faced.

Change of Government

A fundamental inhibiting factor for community responses was the change in government that failed to sustain and mature the promising projects underway. The initiatives encountered challenges due to shifts in key government positions and a lack of experience in new elected pundits. In the case of the decision-making process, they were primarily influenced by political preferences rather than a

commitment to enduring institutions. A prime example at federal level is the PRONAPRED, which, if effectively executed, could have significantly advanced crime prevention outcomes in Ciudad Juárez and then in Monterrey. At the local level, the case of Monterrey However, as local officials in Juárez told me, the police institutions (as it occurs in many places of Latin America) hardly survive government changes and autonomy would be required to function independently from political influences (See Chapter 5). On the other hand, instead of relying on external models, society's involvement in alliance with the state, aligned with shared common goals, could pave the way for more localised and sustained plans according to their local needs, structures and context.

7.4 Conclusion

In this discussion chapter, I first identified the principal actors from multiple levels of government and from my two case studies. I then identified actor pathways from my case studies and described the main actions of civil society in response to violence. This serves to explain the multi-faceted role that local societal organisations played in responding to the perpetrators of organised crime violence: both criminals and state authorities. Following this, I described the key factors that inhibited or enabled change by civil society, maintaining a macro-level perspective to complement the bottom-up perspective. This goes towards explaining the extent and conditions under which they managed to respond to violence in the context of my two case studies. This falls within the literature of state, capacity and democratisation.

It is suggested that Fuerza Civil was the main success in the case of Monterrey and was the product of the elite business pathway. Monterrey has a very particular situation, with a powerful and deeply entrenched business elite. In many ways, this elite filled the limited state capacity void and was not only able to construct a functional police force, but to gain the trust of civil society via careful branding and marketing. Though this required a substantial amount of finances, experience and political manoeuvring, an aspect that limits the adoption of its blueprint for other cities. However, there are still problems with this. Less was the attention on individual suffering and people's demands

for justice. Though civil society was less pronounced in Monterrey, the communitarian pathway was essential in addressing issues that weren't in the agenda of the elite business pathway.

The formation of the working groups in Juárez, and in particular the Mesa de Seguridad, were the main success in Ciudad Juárez. The actors in Juárez were much more diverse than in Monterrey, as there was no monolithic power structure in Juárez like the entrepreneurial elite in Monterrey and there was limited state capacity and state capture by OCGs. The initiatives undertaken by civil society were diverse and often enacted out of extreme urgency and desperation. The political urgency made the societal mobilisation effective, in part as a consequence of a change in official discourse about the violence resulting from public outcries and protests. This political urgency created the opportunity for an out-of-the-box solution, which was to include civil society in the decision making apparatus of the state in the form of citizen-led working groups. This proved to be a point of convergence for various actors, with the dialogical nexus pathway often serving as a bridge for communication between different levels. The challenge of sustaining these approaches was to survive change in political agendas across political alternances, by maintaining relationships between key actors that are NGOs. As other works have noted (Carbajal Glass, 2023, p.91), this analysis suggests that changes at the local level are expected to be subject to the multiple dynamics that play at the local level, including how institutions adapt to the political preferences and not the other way around.

How this influenced at a national level maybe? Civil society can facilitate multiple and diverse roles, especially in the context of violence. The ways in which society mobilises can combine formal and informal institutions. Sometimes, their action can escalate with the creation of norms that sparks change.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 and 6 suggest that societal networks and alliances between society and the state were significant in shaping policies and bringing them into practice.

Findings from the comparative analysis of Chapters 5 and 6 revealed the pathways that the networks of actors undertook to mobilise as a reaction and response to criminal violence.

Chapters 5 and 6 that actors undertook in participation in response to crime, highlighting the mechanisms and strategies used for the activation of bottom-up approaches to manage violence in

their respective cities. The chapter also dives into the empirical research contributions that helped to characterise the mobilisation of civil society in response to violence from CGOs and the state. This was represented in line with the temporal periods (onset, intensity, reduction and continuation). The next chapter offers a conclusion for the overall thesis, highlighting study limitations and avenues for future research.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This thesis was motivated by the tragic situation of violence in Mexico in which large parts of the country faces kidnappings, extortion, human trafficking and the death of tens of thousands of people every year due to the activities of OCGs and ineffective security strategies to counter them. Rather than purely focusing on macro-level analysis of the top-down, militarised and heavy-handed approach of the security strategy, I explored alternative pathways to responding to violence. In particular, pathways made up of civil society and the bottom-up approaches that they take to respond to violence. From this perspective, I asked my core research question: "What is the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence in Mexico?" and as an extension to this question: "What are the factors that enable or constrain their responses?".

In Chapter 2, I identified the body of literature that defines my approach to answering these research questions. The overarching concept considered in this thesis is the democratisation process and the quality of democracy (O'Donnell, 1993, 1998, 2004, p.36; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 2013) which extends to factors such as the rule of law, institutional capacity, and democratic rights. This concept underpins the situation that the security policies have to contend with in Mexico and as is often the case more broadly in Latin America. In detailing my literature, I emphasised that the Latin American context is different from the Global North, where the uneveness of democracy captures the varying degrees to which democratic (civic and social) principles have been realised between national and sub-national levels (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016a; O'Donnell, 1993), and which affect the course of action designed and implemented by public officials and political actors. Exploring this uneven democracy helps to fill the gap in understanding the dynamics of violence. In particular, the role that actors play (i.e. mayors, governors, police agents, local institutions, local civil society) and the policy responses inside the country (Giraudy, Moncada and Snyder, 2019).

Fundamental to the concept of uneven democracy, I identified state capacity and legitimacy as important concepts in understanding responses to violence and the way that they undermine the rule of

law (Koonings and Kruijt, 2006). The informal crime-state nexus prevalent in Latin America, exemplified by the case of Mexico, has far-reaching consequences. This crime-state nexus was created by state infiltration of political institutions that followed end to the monopoly of corruption of the PRI, creating a lack of legitimacy which limits the effectiveness of street-level bureaucracy and where selective application of the law undermines the rule of law and also compromises civil society's compliance with public policies (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Auyero and Berti, 2013; Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2012). Highlighting the need for micro-level perspectives, I argued that involving civil society in decision-making processes is important for improving institutional legitimacy and is also fundamental for democracy. The literature on governance further supports the potential of bottom-up approaches, demonstrating how relations between the state and communities can create networks of trust that address complex problems and enhance democratic participation (Milward and Provan, 2000).

In my literature review I outlined how my thesis contributes to existing academic work. One gap in the literature is understanding how, in a context where institutions are weak (as is common in Latin America), society can still come together to respond to violence. This has been evidenced in my two case studies and my analysis of them. My thesis also extends existing literature on power dynamics and the quality of democracy at a subnational level which is often neglected by macro-level perspectives. Within this body of literature, I provide a complementary perspective to Mann's (1984) conception of the "infrastructure of power" which is state-centric, where in the subnational context, and particularly concerning actors from civil society, these structures are decentralised.

As described in Chapter 3, I adopted a historical institutionalist approach as the methodological basis of my thesis, focusing on the evolution of formal and informal institutions over time and their role in responding to criminal violence. I favoured an inclusive study that allowed for a diverse range of participants, including elite actors, street-level officials, and civil society representatives. This provided a heterogeneous set of local experiences and interactions to base my analysis on. This is given additional analytical structure by performing a common temporal analysis of distinct periods grounded in homicide rate data that is centred on the first wave of violence brought

about by Felipe Calderón's "war on drugs". This temporal analysis was applied across my case studies and also at my macro-level analysis that I performed in Chapter 4 to complement my micro-level analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. The approach I take to answering my research questions is fundamentally qualitative and focused on rich and diverse actors and institutions rather than narrowing my exploration to particular variables and detailed processing tracing. This is partially due to lack of available and reliable data and also due to the very heterogeneous actors involved in bottom-up approaches that are difficult to place into precise categories.

Against the identified national backdrop of limited state capacity and legitimacy, the executive of Mexico, that traditionally has very high levels of executive power as captured by O'Donnell's (1994, p.61) concept of "delegative democracy" (particularly during the times of the hegemonic PRI), relied on the constitutional and historical connection and control of the military, to superimpose it over the jobs constitutionally and legally assigned to other parts of the government, such as the police force. The main outcomes of this were increased violence, the fragmentation and diversification of OCGs, and human rights abuses. However, as noted in Chapter 4, what is puzzling is that the executive has also consistently pushed for greater decentralisation to strengthen local institutions and also to strengthen democratic rights.

With this national perspective established and the general backdrop of the general security situation, I moved beyond the macro-level and state-centric perspectives towards the subnational variations (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016b, 2016a). This moved me towards my research questions concerning the role of bottom-up approaches in response to violence and the factors that enable or constrain them. To this end I conducted comparative, micro-level analysis on two different case studies: Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and Monterrey, Nuevo León. I presented the narratives of the different actors and traced their pathways in the form of fieldwork and 57 semi-structured interviews. By doing so, I performed a thematic analysis of the variations in bottom-up responses, and triangulated this with the analysis of primary and secondary sources. The analysis emphasises Mexico's subnational democratisation process, considering the effects of the (un)rule of law and violence.

8.1 Pathways for Change - *What is the role of bottom-up approaches in responding to criminal violence in Mexico?*

In the case of Juárez[67], I identified diverse actors that I roughly considered along three pathways. The political-elite pathway, made up of traditional and economic power figures, the dialogical nexus pathway that consists of actors with long-standing experience in human rights, citizen participation and community and the social resistance pathway that consisted of various actors such as academics, human rights activities, feminists. The social resistance pathway served to bring to the public attention the situation of violence, while the dialogical nexus pathway served as a trusted conduit for communication between pathways, while the political-elite pathway mirrored some of the efforts of other pathways but funded internally. Following the Villas de Salvárcar massacre, there was a public outcry about the situation of violence and the poor appreciate of this from the president, resulting in a melting pot of citizen participation with the formation of the 'Mesas', consisting of citizen-led working groups in conjunction with government institutions at multilevel, which resulted in funding for varied social and economic programmes. The most long lasting of these was the Mesa de Seguridad which continues until today.

In Monterrey, there were two distinct pathways, the Elite Pathway (EP) and the Communitarian Pathway (CP). The EP was primarily composed of influential business figures from the Monterrey Group that had significant political and financial influence that could communicate horizontally with elite political figures. Leveraging their resources, they initiated structural changes to the local police force, purging it and forming a new police force called Fuerza Civil. Using their financial and professional resources, they used marketing-led branding to create a trusted face of this new police force, along with better educational training related to human rights. In contrast to the EP, the CP was represented by university assemblies and NGOs like Alianza Cívica Nuevo León and CADHAC, who operated with comparatively limited financial and professional resources, but arguably have sizable human resources in the form of volunteers. Their actions were diverse, focusing on legal reforms,

[67] My conclusions here draw from a more detailed analysis in Chapter 7.

urban reshaping, and political participation, often relying on powerful and authentic narratives of collective trauma to build support networks, gain public exposure, and put pressure on politicians.

While both pathways aimed at stability and a better future, their motivations and methodologies diverged with the time. The EP influenced government selection and operated within complex hierarchical structures, resembling alternative political figures, while the CP engaged in grassroots connections, exerting political pressure through high-visibility actions. Both pathways faced challenges in communication, with the EP employing professional marketing approaches and the CP relying on authentic narratives of human rights abuses and tragic personal accounts of violence to counter excessive use of force and push for a security solution to the crisis of violence. Structural outcomes, like new organisational structures, emerged from both pathways, with the CP aiding citizens in navigating complex governmental systems. However, the EPs and CPs differed significantly in their approaches, with the former relying on formal networks and the latter on collective knowledge and support to address societal challenges.

Comparing the cases of Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey, there is a noticeable difference in their respective pathways. While both cities[68] have similar sized populations, Juárez had a much more diverse range of actors implementing various measures from the PEP and DNP. In contrast, Monterrey has a more consolidated and entrenched Entrepreneurial Pathway (EP). In their case, there was no strong federal militarised strategy, as Fuerza Civil was functionally very similar to the federal strategy, but sourced locally and sustainably in terms of economic support and institutional legitimacy. During the times of the insecurity crisis, the elite actors in Juárez, often professionals like doctors and lawyers, seemed to be comparatively more 'humble' members of society than the “Monterrey Group”, engaging frequently with the general population and providing support and accompaniment for the victim’s demands with the authorities. To some extent this restores the role of legitimacy and capacity of street level bureaucrats in Monterrey regarding the police force. The absence of a strong federal presence contributes to a sense of local ownership, contrasting with Juárez's struggle and mistrust in the police and military forces.

[68] In the case of Monterrey, this also includes the Monterrey Metropolitan Areas.

The diverse interactions between actors plays a pivotal role in Juárez, where the mesas and the DNP act as societal facilitators. In Monterrey, the EP takes centre stage as the main communication entity, fostering horizontal connections with the government and elites while entrusting social interactions to Fuerza Civil. This strategic approach emphasises branding Fuerza Civil as a trustworthy organisation and focusing on educational programs, indicating a preference for a structured communication model over personal engagement with civil society. The differences between the Communitarian Pathway (CP) in Monterrey and the Social Resistance Pathway (SRP) in Juárez reflect distinct cultural mentalities, with Monterrey exhibiting a less radical approach, potentially due to its more conservative nature and the *regio* focus on individual hard work. Despite these disparities, both pathways aim to enhance community visibility, reclaim public spaces, and empower communities for positive change. At the federal, state, and municipal levels, both cities receive recognition for their initiatives that indicates that there was recognition of their successes. President Peña Nieto drew upon the popularity of "Todos Somos Juárez" when announcing economic support in Ayotzinapa to gain credibility after his blundered response to the kidnapping of students there, ironically drawing attention to a campaign that launched after the blundered response to the Villas de Salvárcar massacre. The success of Fuerza Civil in Monterrey served to influence the federal model, influencing subsequent national security strategies like the Gendarmerie and then the National Guard created by AMLO. Though, the interventionist and containment policy of the federal strategy are fundamentally different from the application of Fuerza Civil en Monterrey.

In both case studies I noticed several key events that led to opportunities for the society to mobilise and change, these moments are similar to the notion of 'critical junctures' in historical institutionalist approaches. In Juárez these were the Cotton Field cases and the Villas de Salvarcar events while in Monterrey, these were the killing of two students of the Tec de Monterrey and the Casino Royale Massacre. Even though it is not nice to think of these events as turning points, they resulted in a political crisis that resulted in rapid policy changes. In a sense the SRP and the CP pathways are experts more prone in capturing the trauma of these events and holding the government and the wider world accountable for these actions.

8.2 Factors for Change - *What are the factors that enable or constrain their responses?*

The responses of civil society to violence in Juárez and Monterrey were influenced by several key factors, allowing for effective bottom-up approaches. These factors underscore the complexity of the interplay between civil society and the state in responding to criminal violence in the context of uneven democracy and state capacity in Mexico. These factors are derived from the empirical gaps identified in the literature, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between civil society and the state.

These factors are either enablers, that facilitated civil society in responding to violence, or constrainters, that prevented civil society from responding to violence. These are distilled from a longer exploration in Chapter 7, in particular in section 7.3.

Indicators: Having reliable means of government assessment in the form of clear indicators allows for greater accountability. This was seen with Alcade Cómo Vamos in Nuevo Leon, which was a platform to evaluate and expose government wrongdoings, generate information, and bring citizen concerns into the public agenda. In the Mesa de Seguridad in Ciudad Juárez, where there were agreed upon metrics and individuals that took responsibility to improve these metrics. Conversely, the lack of clear indicators leads to potentially wasted efforts. This was a common criticism of PRONAPRED, where it was not really clear which projects were funded and why and how their success could be measured. Beyond simply measuring success and holding individuals to account, clear indicators also serve as a concrete point of alignment as the basis for collaboration.

Societal Networks and Alliances: In Juárez, societal actors formed support structures within societal networks, enabling them to assert their civil rights in the face of historical and political inequalities. These networks facilitated large-scale protests, disrupting existing power structures. The "dialogical nexus pathway" emerged through initiatives like the Mesa de Seguridad, allowing citizens to voice demands to law enforcement authorities, bridging gaps in judicial and police state capacities. Community-driven initiatives at the neighbourhood level created a broad and interconnected web of mutual assistance, fostering resilience.

Micro-level Relationships of Trust: In both locations, the creation of micro-level relationships of trust, particularly between citizens and street-level bureaucrats, played a crucial role. The Mesa de Seguridad, with sub-groups dedicated to anti-extortion and anti-kidnapping efforts, provided a channel for citizens to communicate directly with law enforcement, overcoming challenges like state-criminal collusion. The commitment of these bureaucrats, along with citizens' anonymity protection, was fundamental in liberating citizens from predatory control.

A Change in the official narrative: Civil society in both Juárez and Monterrey challenged the federal narrative that dismissed violence as mere clashes between organised crime groups. This discourse not only disempowered marginalised people, but also removed accountability from the federal strategy. Public expressions of outrage, particularly in Juárez, reshaped official narratives and prompted a moderation of the federal discourse. Also, coalitions of families of disappeared people in Monterrey pressured local prosecutors to continue investigations, challenging stigmatisation and prompting a shift in approach.

Improving the Quality of Democracy in Citizen Participation: The uneven democracy and limited state capacity in Mexico presented challenges, leading to decentralised enforcement with fragmented bureaucracies. Working groups, such as the Mesa de Seguridad, helped to overcome some of these features of uneven democracy by facilitating communication and coordination between different societal actors and the three levels of government. In Monterrey, business elites contributed to the creation of Fuerza Civil, a new civil police force, at least on its surface was pro civil society as a consequence of both police education programs but also due to a successful branding exercise by the Monterrey Group. This re-establishment of trust incentivises civil society to use Fuerza Civil as a resource to improve their situation of violence (as one would expect in the Global North).

Riding the wave of Political Urgency: Escalating crime levels triggered a sense of political urgency in both locations, leading to the implementation of extreme measures. Civic groups acted as advocates for change, mobilising society and influencing legislative reforms around elections. The proximity of elections acted as a powerful incentive for politicians to address security issues, resulting

in a drastic reduction in violence. However, urgent solutions implemented by politicians often do not result in long lasting institutional changes.

Political Participation: Activism and acts of high-risk visibility create local, national and international movements that not only provides political will (and pressure) but also encourages political participation among individuals that might otherwise feel afraid and isolated. Participants from both case studies indicated that political participation, when non-political electoral, allowed for greater scrutiny of the government.

Political Alternation: The change in government proved to be a constraining factor at a local and national level, affecting the longevity of promising projects. Initiatives like Fuerza Civil and PRONAPRED faced challenges due to shifts in key government positions and a lack of continuity in commitment to enduring institutions. Autonomy for police institutions, as suggested by local officials in Juárez, was deemed essential for surviving government changes. Moreover, established relationships between members of civil society that hold long-term positions can also be the basis for surviving alterations. The question is how to push successful and positive programs in lasting institutions that will not disappear across political alternation.

A Disjointed State: Vertical fragmentation, where incumbents at different government levels did not cooperate or coordinate, posed challenges to initiative implementation in both cases. Effective collaboration between multiple levels of government is always important as evidenced by the successes of TSJ.

Crime Reporting: Secure channels for communicating situations of crime were fundamental in Juárez and Monterrey. This was particularly important in tackling crimes like extortion and kidnappings. Safe channels of communication are key to this factor such as the Citizens' Medical Committee hotline in Juárez, and the neighbourhood funded phone to trusted members of the police in Monterrey.

8.3 Contributions and Implications for Future Research

My research contributes to the examination of the politics of crime by focusing on subnational democratisation within the context of insecurity. It takes a unique approach that emphasises the importance of uneven democratisation and its complex connection to capacity and legitimacy, particularly in relation to the dynamics and interactions between the state and society at the local level. The analysis, based on primary and secondary sources, provided a micro-level understanding of offering insights into bottom-up approaches and their incentives and responses.

Sections 8.1 and 8.2 answers to my core research questions with more details on these aspects supporting these answers in Chapter 7. These answers are as multifaceted and complex as the heterogeneous networks and alliances present in civil society and the local realities of citizens in hostile environments. I hope that my work can serve as a stepping stone for scholars in the policy arena, providing a more complete perspective of bottom-up approaches and how they try to navigate in the Latin American context where there is uneven democratisation and security issues, particularly with respect to state capture by OCGs.

During my fieldwork it became apparent that there was an under-represented and very serious situation of feminicides in Mexico. This crisis was especially apparent in Ciudad Juárez where various public spaces were covered in purple crosses remembering victims of feminicides. Against the very extreme situation of violence in Juárez and Mexico as a whole, there is a distinctive pattern of feminicides with militarisation which deserves further investigation. Various actors concurred that women's rights and feminist movements in Juárez are the most consolidated with legitimate when it comes to respond to violence, considering their shared identity and ways to press local and national governments for policy, institutional and social change. Even in the early 1990s they were among the first to use their social networks to reach direct channels with the federal levels.

The additional analysis in Chapter 4 allowed me to understand the perspective of the federal level and draw comparisons between bottom-up and top-down responses. In the context of an uneven democracy where there is low state legitimacy and low state capacity, both civil society and the federal strategy are faced with similar dilemmas on how to respond to violence. While the top-down

strategy uses the military as an idealised institution that has strong capacity and legitimacy, which they wield as a weapon in the form of interventions, civil society carefully navigates the existing institutions, trying to build careful relationships of trust. Interestingly, while the state of Mexico struggled to decentralise following democratisation and still relies on a centralised security strategy, my research shows that at a subnational level, the power structures of civil society are already decentralised. However, this structure can be overly fragmented and needs to be better articulated and sustained.

A broad of the formal literature on democracy overly assumes states with strong institutional capacities. I contribute to my research by showing responses to violence where this could not be taken for granted. In particular, I showed how civil society creates careful trust relationships with street level bureaucrats and also support networks among themselves. Importantly, I note that the state may very well be present, but if it is dysfunctional for various reasons, such as collusion, lack of agents, lack of incentives in security agents, etc. it is still weak. This relates to my reflections on the analogy of "swiss cheese" by Alan Knight (1990, p.95). In particular, how top-down control structures might seem uniform from a macro-level perspective, but tend to break down at the local level. This creates a nuanced and varied situation of governance within the Mexican political landscape which is simply too complex for a top-down system to interact with gracefully. However, perhaps as civil society is embedded in those local contexts and they could act with sensitivity to these complexities. Rather than create militarised interventions that have no sensitivity to the local contexts, the federal strategy could engage more with bottom-up approaches to fill the void of weak state capacity and lack of centralised control that are the holes in the Swiss cheese.

A final insight from Chapter 4 is that there seems to be a contradictory set of directions being pursued schizophrenically by the federal security strategy — greater decentralisation and democratisation alongside an increasingly centralised military strategy. This puzzle can be partially explained by a slightly adapted variation of Leftwich's (2005) notion of "institutional incompatibility". Rather than there being conflict between improving the economy and improving democratisation, in Mexico and in the whole of Latin America there is a conflict between improving

the security situation in the context of OCGs and improving democratisation. That is, militarisation is being used as a temporary undemocratic step with the hope that it eventually leads to greater democracy. This is analogous to pursuing undemocratic movements towards economic gains that might lift people out of poverty and result in greater democracy in the long run. Though not directly tied to my research questions, this offers a perspective on why temporary undemocratic objectives might be justified in the minds of even well-intentioned politicians in the Global South, but these ideas need to be developed further.

Appendices

A. Interview materials

Participants for semi-structured interviews.

For the purpose of this thesis, a local society organisation (CSO) involves those who do not identify with or are not officially registered as NGO. They can range from collectives, community-based groups, among others. Due to their professional trajectory, some participants have been included in more than one type of organisation.

Participants for the case of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua

Participant ID	**Pseudonym**	Type of organisation
P1-04	Antonio	Federal government police
P1-06	Leopoldo	Academic
P1-08	Julio	Academic/Journalist
P1-09	Tania	Private sector
P1-10	Silvia	State government official/activist
P1-11	Milán	State government police
P1-12	Amalia	Local journalist
P1-13	Claudia	Municipal police
P1-14	Mónica	Municipal police
P1-17	César	Local business leader
P1-18	Adair	Academic
P1-19	Carla	NGO
P1-20	Valentina	CSO/ACNUR-UN
P1-21	Elán	Doctor/Activist
P1-22	Cris	Federal government official
P1-23	Gabriel	Municipal Police
P1-24	Inés	Municipal government official/Activist
P1-25	Ramiro	Priest/CSO
P1-26	María	NGO
P1-27	Martha	Academic/Activist
P1-28	Mario	Teacher/Activist
P1-29	Pablo	Academic/CSO
P1-31	Juan	Priest/NGO
P1-32	Daniel	NGO

P1-33	Rosa	NGO
P1-34	Marcos	NGO
P1-36	Denis	CSO
P1-37	Fabián	Social leader
P1-41	Ximena	CSO
P2-04	Citlalli	CSO/Teacher

Table 5. Participants for the case of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.

Total: 30 participants

Participant for both cases

Participant ID	**Pseudonym**	Type of organisation
P1-38	Jesús	Journalist

Table 6. Participant for both cases.

Total: 1 participant

Participants for the case of Monterrey, Nuevo León

Participant ID	**Pseudonym**	Type of organisation
P1-01	Guadalupe	NGO
P1-02	Andrés	State government official/Consejo NL
P1-03	Marisol	Academic
P1-39	Andrea	Academic
P1-40	Trinidad	Journalist
P2-02	Tatiana	CSO
P2-05	Alex	State government police
P2-07	Eli	NGO
P2-08	Paz	CSO
P2-09	Ben	Journalist
P2-10	Ariel	Municipal government official/CSO
P2-11	Santiago	Priest/CSO
P2-12	Ángeles	NGO
P2-25	Diana	NGO
P2-26	Alicia	NGO
P2-13	Emilia	Congress/CSO
P2-14	Christian	NGO
P2-15	Rocío	Private sector

P2-16	Pedro	Activist
P2-17	Juliana	NGO
P2-19	Lucian	CSO
P2-20	Judith	Municipal government official/NGO
P2-21	Evelyn	NGO
P2-22	Germán	CSO
P2-23	Beatriz	CSO
P2-24	Claudia	NGO

Table 7. Participants for the case of Monterrey, Nuevo León.

Total: 26 participants

In total, this study takes 57 participants.

Introduction and interview protocol (resumed): Objective: The aim of this project is to understand the extent to which local state authorities and citizens have managed to curb levels of violence in their city, considering the limitations in state capabilities. Information sheet and confidentiality: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. All information will be strictly confidential between you and the researcher. Consent form: Do you agree to take part in the study? If yes, do you agree to your interviews being recorded? (You may take part in the study without agreeing to this.)
Questionnaire (resumed): ● Could you state your motivation/position in this organisation? ● If any, how did previous relations with OSCs/government unfolded? ● If any, what type of relation or coordination have you had with the municipal police? ● Which experiences do you have regarding activities that address violence? ● Could you elaborate on how you interacted during the measures, programmes implemented, (such as policies or strategies co-produced by society and the state)? ● Could you expand on the process of those interactions during TSJ, FC or GEBI? ● Which effects have these measures brought to your community? ● Could you expand on what challenges you encountered in those activities? ● Now that you are more acquainted with the details of this research, could you suggest someone who might offer additional valuable information for this study?

Table 8. Example of semi-structured interview questionnaire used during fieldwork.

B. Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Multilevel democracy: Building responses to violence in Mexico from below

Background

My name is Yael Anahi Lopez Torres and I am a PhD student at the University of York. I am working on a research project funded by the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnologia (CONACyT). The project aims to generate knowledge and insight that can help to better explain to what extent local governments, public officials and citizens in your city have managed to reduce the levels of violence within the context of limited state capacities. Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to understand to what extent and under what conditions bottom up approaches are effective at curbing drug-related violence. Bottom-up is understood as a participatory approach involving community-based actors.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been chosen in this study because of your experience and knowledge in the field, whether as an expert, a public policy implementer or a civil society member. Your participation will be helpful in understanding the interactions that occur at different levels of governance between the state and civil society, the engagement of civil society in policies to prevent and reduce violence and how those interactions towards the management of violence impact the level of trust in society and participation in governance over a period of time. You will be asked about your experience and relations to other local and supralocal actors, in their roles to deal with violence in your communities. The interview (face to face or online) will last 45 min approximately. If you consent, the interview will be recorded electronically. It is possible that the researcher takes written notes during your answers.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a participant information form. It is your right to decline, pause or withdraw from the interview at any time. It is also your right to tell the researcher if there are any topics you would like to avoid.

On what basis will you process my data?

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the University has to identify a legal basis for processing personal data and, where appropriate, an additional condition for processing special category data. In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, the University processes personal data for research

Figure 10. Participant Information Sheet 1.

purposes under Article 6 (1) (e) of the GDPR: *Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest.* Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j): *Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes.*
It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the integrity of the people and organisations that take part in this research. Research will only be undertaken where ethical approval has been obtained, where there is a clear public interest and where appropriate safeguards have been put in place to protect data. This consent will not, however, be our legal basis for processing your data under the GDPR.

How will you use my data?

All information in this interview, including the handwriting notes taken, will be strictly confidential between you and the researcher. With your agreement, this interview will be recorded electronically. All the data that could lead to your identification will be anonymised and your personal information will not be available to any other researcher. Transcriptions of the interview will be destroyed after their use in this research.

Will you share my data with 3rd parties?

No. The researcher will only have access to the interviews and will not share the data with third parties.

How will you keep my data secure?

Information will be treated confidentiality and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. All electronic files will be stored safely with a secure password and encrypted in the researcher's personal computer. The electronic devise for recording audios, handwriting notes and personal computer will be safely stored in a locked room of the researcher's working place. All electronic files will be also transferred to the University of York server, which is completely safe. The transcribed interview information will be anonymous or pseudonymised and will be safely stored at the University of York server. Transcriptions and written notes will be destroyed immediately after the completion of this research. With your consent, the data gathered (which will be anonymised) will be paramount in producing research, academic publications and further research works.

Will you transfer my data internationally?

No. Data will be held within the European Economic Area in full compliance with data protection legislation.

Will I be identified in any research outputs?

No. All the information will be treated confidentiality.

How long will you keep my data?

Data will be retained in line with legal requirements. Retention timeframes will be determined in line with the University's Records Retention Schedule.

Figure 11. Participant Information Sheet 2.

What rights do I have in relation to my data?

Under the GDPR, you have a general right of access to your data, a right to rectification, erasure, restriction, objection or portability. You also have a right to withdraw your data after been collected (limit for withdrawal normally between 2-3 months after interview date). Please note, not all rights apply where data is processed purely for research purposes. For further information see, https://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/generaldataprotectionregulation/individualsrights/.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact the researcher at any moment by using the contact details provided below in the first instance, or contact Prof. Martin Smith at martin.smith@york.ac.uk, Prof. Louise Haagh at louise.haagh@york.ac.uk; or the ELMPS committee at elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University's Acting Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk.

Right to complain

If you are unhappy with the way in which the University has handled your personal data, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For information on reporting a concern to the Information Commissioner's Office, see www.ico.org.uk/concerns.

Contact details

Yael Anahi Lopez Torres (researcher)
Mobile: +44 07802706066; Email: yalt500@york.ac.uk
Supervisors:
Prof. Martin Smith, Email: martin.smith@york.ac.uk
Prof. Louise Haagh; Email: louise.haagh@york.ac.uk
Department of Politics at University of York,
Heslington, York, YO23 2QN

Figure 12. Participant Information Sheet 3.

C. Consent form

Consent form for participants

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

Have you read and understood the information leaflet about the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that the information you provide will be held in confidence by the research team?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that the information you provide may be used in future research?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree to take part in the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
If yes, do you agree to your interviews being recorded?	Yes ❒ No ❒

(You may take part in the study without agreeing to this).

Your name (in BLOCK letters):

____

Your signature:

____

Interviewer's name:

____

Date:

____

Figure 13. Consent form.

D. Example of communication template

Subject: Cordial invitación a entrevista

Buenas tardes,

Estimado (a)

Espero que se encuentre bien. Me llamo Yael Anahí López Torres, soy estudiante de doctorado en Ciencia Política de la Universidad de York. Estoy realizando un proyecto de investigación académica cuyo objetivo es analizar las experiencias y capacidades locales para la atención de la violencia criminal en Ciudad Juárez / Monterrey. Lo contacto como referencia de (**NAME**) quien amablemente me refirió con usted / Mi búsqueda en el tema lo (la) relacionan como un actor clave para este estudio.

Sus experiencias como miembro fundador de la organización (NAME) serán valiosas para avanzar en el conocimiento de las acciones desde la sociedad civil, así como en los desafíos que esto conlleva. Por ello, me permito invitarlo (a) a una **entrevista** como parte de este estudio. La entrevista tiene una duración máxima de 45 minutos. Puede encontrar más información en los dos documentos adjuntos sobre los fines del estudio (en inglés, *Participant Information Sheet*) y sobre el uso de su información (*Consent form*). Si usted desea participar, puede ser en la modalidad de su preferencia (presencial o en línea) y

Será todo un honor contar con su participación. Quedo a sus órdenes en caso de que tenga alguna duda referente a este estudio.

Saludos cordiales.

Yael

E. List of Websites and Sources consulted

Government	Website
Ministry of Interior (SEGOB)	www.gob.mx/segob
Ministry of Citizen Security (SSC)	www.ssc.cdmx.gob.mx
Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP)	www.gob.mx/sesnsp/
National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI)	www.inegi.org.mx
Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA)	www.gob.mx/sedena
Ministry of the Navy (SEMAR)	www.gob.mx/semar
Attorney's General Office (FGR)	fgr.org.mx
Fiscalia Nuevo León	fiscalianl.gob.mx
Fiscalia Chihuahua	fiscalia.chihuahua.gob.mx/
Senate- Upper chamber (Senate)	senado.gob.mx
Deputies - Lower chamber (Deputies)	diputados.gob.mx
Official Daily of the Federation (DOF)	dof.gob.mx
Government of the state of Chihuahua	chihuahua.gob.mx
Government of the state of Nuevo León	nl.gob.mx
Government of the municipality of Ciudad Juárez	www.juarez.gob.mx
Government of the municipality of Monterrey	portal.monterrey.gob.mx

Non-government organisations	
Citizens in Support of Human Rights (CADHAC)	cadhac.org/
United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo Leon (FUNDENL)	fundenl.org
CASA Youth Promotion (CASA Promoción Juvenil)	www.casapromocionjuvenil.org/
Strategic Plan of Juárez (PEJ)	planjuarez.org/
Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte	cdhpasodelnorte.org/
Research and/or academic institutions	
Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS Noreste)	noreste.ciesas.edu.mx
Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ)	www.uacj.mx
Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM)	tec.mx/es/monterrey
El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF)- Juárez	www.colef.mx
México Evalúa	www.mexicoevalua.org
International Crisis Group	www.crisisgroup.org/
Insight Crime	insightcrime.org/
International organisations	
United Nations Development Programme (PNUD)	www.undp.org/
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	www.unodc.org/
LAPOP AmericasBarometer	www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	www.oecd.org/
V-Dem Institute (Varieties of Democracy)	www.v-dem.net/
Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC)	globalinitiative.net/
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)	www.oas.org/en/iachr/
Private sector	
COPARMEX Nuevo León	coparmexnl.org.mx
COPARMEX Chihuahua	coparmexchihuahua.org
CAINTRA	caintra.org.mx

Table 9. List of websites and sources consulted.

F. Federal System of Mexico

Mexico is a Federal presidential democratic republic, whose government is based on a multi-party congressional system where the president, directly elected, is both the head of state and the head of government. The government is made up of three branches, the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judicial branch as shown in Figure 14. The cabinet is multifaceted but given the security orientation of this thesis it is worth mentioning SEDENA (Secretariat of National Defense) that corresponds to the army and SEMAR (Secretariat of Navy) that corresponds to the navy. These

coordinate many of Mexico's internal security responses, are largely autonomous and are under the influence of the president. More on this will be mentioned in section 3.3.

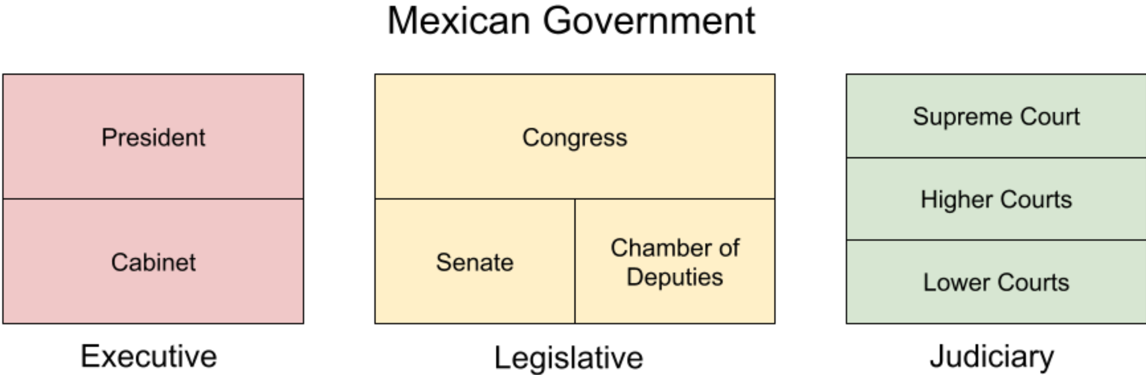

Figure 14. Structure of the Mexican government. Source: Own elaboration.

The regional governance structure is split into 32 states run by governors, which is further divided into 2,469 municipalities run by mayors (INEGI, 2020). These different levels of government have different officials which are shown in Table 10. As with other countries in Latin America, 421 of the municipalities are subject to regulation by indigenous traditions, featuring normative systems, reflecting the influence of long standing traditions and customs.

Level of Government	Executive	Legislative	Judicial
Federal	President	Chamber of deputies and Senators	Supreme Court
State	Governor	State Congress	Higher Court
Municipal	Mayor	(N/A) Councillors /Regidores	Municipal Judge

Table 10. Levels of government. Source: Own elaboration.

G. Varieties of Democracy

This traces the democratic change in Mexico quantitatively by using The Varieties of Democracy Project[69] (V-Dem). Looking at figure 15, there is a general trend towards electoral democracy in the late 80s, as with most of Latin America. The decentralisation policies which began under the last two presidencies of the PRI and continued under the presidency of Vincent Fox (PAN) are clearly visible in the Deliberative Democratic Index trend. This indicates the advances of allowing for more checks and balances via the promotion of deliberation and discourse in politics. However, it comes short of being a liberal democracy as it lacks the legislative judicial scrutiny of executive power, protection of civil liberties and equality before the law (V-Dem, 2023). Unfortunately, the democratic indexes have either decreased or stayed roughly the same since then.

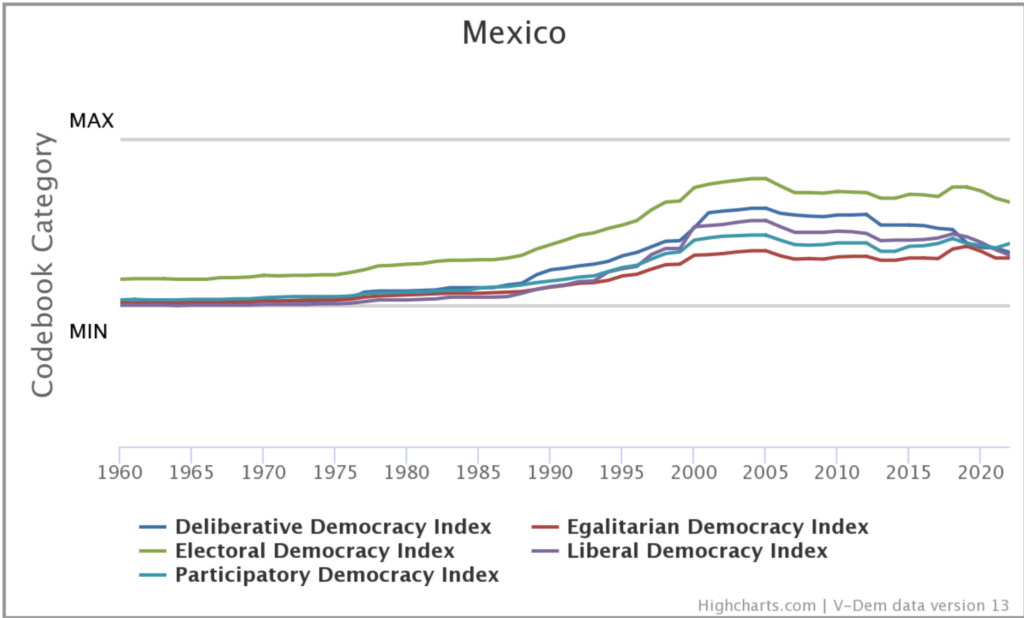

Figure 15. V-Dem Democracy Indexes over time in Mexico. Source: V-Dem Varieties of democracy (2023). Mexico. Country graph: https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/

[69] The Project (V-Dem) generates the most extensive global dataset on democracy, comprising over 31 million data points for 202 countries. This is based on the aggregation of expert assessments on key indicators.

H. Juárez Murals

Figure 16. Building community. Fear transformed into dreams for a better life. Source: La Promesa, 2020, 2016

Figure 17. The faces of feminicide". Source: lluviadelrayo blog, 2021

Figure 18. Ciudad Juárez. Communitarian activity in a park Source: Fomento del Tejido Social

I. Translation of "Ayuno y Reflexión Ciudadana" document

(simple translation)

Fasting and Citizen Reflection

January 29-30, 2011

STOP THE WAR... NO MORE BLOODSHED

The event begins on Saturday, January 29, at 9:00 am and concludes on Sunday, January 30, at 12:00 noon.

In Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, we are experiencing one of the greatest crises in its history. From a human rights perspective, we are a deeply wounded, hurt, and aggrieved city. For three years, the bleeding hasn't stopped. We are living a seemingly endless ordeal. In the past year alone, we have suffered over 3,000 intentional homicides. Children, youth, and adults have been killed. In 2010, over 300 women were murdered.

From this profound pain and in the context of a war that was declared by the Mexican government against organised crime **but not in our name**, and aware that violence begets violence, we want to commemorate, through fasting and reflection, the first anniversary of the massacre of young people in the Villas de Salvarcar neighbourhood (January 29).

We will observe a day and a half of fasting as a nonviolent and political action of personal sacrifice and collective pressure, seeking to create a space for reflection within each individual and in society, to TOGETHER SEEK TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE COMMON GOOD, AS WELL AS TO DENOUNCE AND CONFRONT THE AUTHORITIES FOR THEIR CONSTANT VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, THE CLIMATE OF VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY, AND THEIR LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY IN ENSURING JUSTICE.

We want to offer our violence-ridden and unjust city a sign of solidarity and hope to rebuild our society with human values. We also want to pressure the authorities at all levels of government **to halt this war** that continues to deeply harm our city and publicly denounce the lack of rule of law due to high levels of impunity.

Within this anniversary framework and on World Non Violence Day (January 30: Gandhi's assassination), we are inviting individuals, local, national, and international groups with high moral and human qualities to show solidarity by participating in this day and a half of fasting and reflection, or to join us from their respective spaces and communities in this action during the same days.

We also ask that you send letters of solidarity to the following email address (...) to be read during the fasting days.

We sincerely appreciate your generous and supportive response in advance.

ORGANISERS:

Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre, A.C.; M

Migrant Human Rights Centre;

Pastoral Worker Centre;
Citizen Medical Committee;
Parishes…

P.S.: We would also appreciate it if you could send copies of the solidarity letters to national and international media outlets, as well as to the following addresses.

Lic. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa
President of the Mexican Republic

Lic. Cesar Horario Duarte Jáquez
Governor of the State of Chihuahua

(*The highlights are mine*).

J. Monterrey Murals

Figure 19. Memorial to Jorge and Javier, Tec de Monterrey students. Source: Colectivo Jorge y Javier.

References

Agren, D. (2017). Mexican senate votes to keep troops in police role despite outcry from rights groups. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 15 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/mexican-military-police-drugs-crackdown-human-rights [Accessed 9 May 2023].

Almada, M. (2012). Casa: un modelo de desarrollo juvenil. *Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua: El Labrador*.

Angrist, J. D. and Kugler, A. D. (2008). Rural windfall or a new resource curse? Coca, income, and civil conflict in Colombia. *The review of economics and statistics*, 90 (2), pp.191–215.

Arjona, A. (2017a). Civilian Cooperation and Non-Cooperation with Non-State Armed Groups: The Centrality of Obedience and Resistance. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28 (4-5), pp.755–778.

Arjona, A. (2017b). *Rebelocracy: A theory of social order in civil war*. Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies.

Astorga Almanza, L. A. (1996). *El siglo de las drogas*. Espasa-Calpe Mexicana.

Astorga Almanza, L. A. (2003). *Drogas sin fronteras*. Grijalbo.

Astorga, L. (2009). México: transición democrática, organizaciones de traficantes e inseguridad. *Razón Pública*. [Online]. Available at: https://razonpublica.com/mco-transiciemocrca-organizaciones-de-traficantes-e-inseguridad/ [Accessed 20 May 2021].

Atuesta, L. H. and Ponce, A. F. (2017). Meet the Narco: increased competition among criminal organisations and the explosion of violence in Mexico. *Global Crime*, 18 (4), pp.375–402.

Auyero, J. and Berti, M. F. (2013). *La violencia en los márgenes: Una maestra y un sociólogo en el conurbano bonaerense*. Katz Editores.

Avritzer, L. (2009). *Participatory Institutions in Democratic Brazil*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bagley, B. M. and Rosen, J. D. (2017). *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*. University Press of Florida.

Bailey, J. (2008). Violence, State Formation, and Everyday Politics in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review*, 43 (3), pp.239–249.

Bailey, J. and Taylor, M. M. (2009). Evade, corrupt, or confront? Organized crime and the state in Brazil and Mexico. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 1 (2), pp.3–29.

Barnes, N. (2017). Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence. *Perspectives on Politics*, 15 (4), pp.967–987.

Basu, K. (2018). *The Republic of Beliefs*. Princeton University Press.

Bateson, R. (2012). Crime Victimization and Political Participation. *The American political science review*, 106 (3), pp.570–587. [

Behrend, J. and Whitehead, L. (2016a). *Illiberal Practices: Territorial Variance Within Large Federal*

Democracies. JHU Press.

Behrend, J. and Whitehead, L. (2016b). The Struggle for Subnational Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (2), pp.155–169.

Beittel, J.S. (2020). *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*. Congressional Research Service. [Online]. Available at: https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R41576/45 [Accessed 8 March 2022].

Bejarano, A. M. and Pizarro, E. (2005). From‘ restricted’ to‘ besieged’: The Changing Nature of the Limits to Democracy in Colombia. In: *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks.* Cambridge University Press. pp.235–260.

Benítez, R. et al. (2009). *Atlas de la seguridad y la defensa en México 2009*. México DF: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia.

Bergman, M. and Whitehead, L. (2009). *Criminality, Public Security, and the Challenge to Democracy in Latin America*. University of Notre Dame Press.

Bevir, M. (2013). *A theory of governance*, Studies in Governance 2. Berkeley, CA: Global, Area and International Archive.

Bowden, C. (2010). *Murder City: Ciudad Juarez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields*. Hachette UK.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3 (2), pp.77–101.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11 (4), pp.589–597.

Brinks, D. M., Levitsky, S. and Murillo, M. V. (2019). Understanding Institutional Weakness: Power and Design in Latin American Institutions. In: *Elements in Politics and Society in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Brinks, D. M., Levitsky, S. and Murillo, M. V. (2020). The Political Origins of Institutional Weakness. In: *The Politics of Institutional Weakness in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press. pp.1–40.

Buderath, M. and Heath, M. (2021). Fuerza Civil: Capital Accumulation and Social Control in Nuevo León, Mexico. *Latin American perspectives*, 48 (1), pp.163–183.

Cabrero Mendoza, E. (2000). Los dilemas de la descentralización en México. *Organizações & Sociedade*, 7 (19), pp.123–141.

Calderón, L. Y. et al. (2021). *Organized crime and violence: 2021 special report: Justice in Mexico*. University of San Diego.

Campbell, H. (2009). *Drug war zone: Frontline dispatches from the streets of El Paso and Juarez*, The William and Bettye Nowlin Series in Art, History, and Culture of the Western Hemisphere. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Campbell, R. et al. (2020). Assessing Triangulation Across Methodologies, Methods, and Stakeholder Groups: The Joys, Woes, and Politics of Interpreting Convergent and Divergent Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 41 (1), pp.125–144.

Camp, R. A. (2015). Democratizing Mexican Politics, 1982–2012. *Oxford research encyclopedia of Latin American history*. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-12. [Accessed 4 December 2020].

Carbajal Glass, F. (2020). *Where metals meets the flesh: Organized Crime, Violence, and the Illicit Iron Ore Economy in Mexico's Michoacan state. In Illegal Mining. Organized crime, corruption, and Ecocide in a resource-scarce world*. Zabyelina, Y. and van Uhm, D. (Eds). Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Carbajal Glass, F. (2023). The Political Trajectory of Organized Crime in Mexico. In: Vieira, M. (Ed). *Global Approaches on State Fragility & Organized Crime*. The University for Peace. pp.81–98.

Carrizales, D. (1996). *Renunció Rizzo García en NL*. [Online]. Available at: www.jornada.com.mx/1996/04/18/rizzo.html [Accessed 4 December 2020].

Carroll, R. (2009). Death in Mexico. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 19 May. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/20/mexico-drugs-war-juarez [Accessed 8 March 2021].

Castellanos, G. V. (2013). *Historia del narcotráfico en México*. AGUILAR.

Castillo, N. (2009). CAPITAL SOCIAL Y NIVEL DE COHESIÓN SOCIAL EN CIUDAD JUÁREZ. *DIAGNÓSTICO SOBRE LA REALIDAD SOCIAL, ECONÓMICA Y CULTURAL DE LOS ENTORNOS LOCALES PARA EL DISEÑO DE INTERVENCIONES EN MATERIA DE PREVENCIÓN Y ERRADICACIÓN DE LA VIOLENCIA EN LA REGIÓN NORTE: EL CASO DE CIUDAD JUÁREZ, CHIHUAHUA*, p.296.

Castorena, O. et al. (2023). Online Surveys in Latin America. *PS, political science & politics*, 56 (2), pp.273–280.

Cedillo, J. A. (2015). *Éxodo estudiantil por narcoviolencia en la frontera norte*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.proceso.com.mx/reportajes/2015/4/4/exodo-estudiantil-por-narcoviolencia-en-la-frontera-norte-145327.html [Accessed 7 December 2021].

Cedillo, J. A. (2018). *'Pancho' Colorado, pieza clave en la aventura empresarial de 'El Lazca'*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.proceso.com.mx/reportajes/2018/3/12/pancho-colorado-pieza-clave-en-la-aventura-empresarial-de-el-lazca-201435.html. [Accessed 3 December 2021].

Celestina, M. (2018). Between trust and distrust in research with participants in conflict context. *International journal of social research methodology*, 21 (3), pp.373–383.

Centeno, M.A. and Silva, P. (1998). The politics of expertise in Latin America. MacMilllan.

Cerda Pérez, P. L. (2010). *Análisis situacional de la violencia intrafamiliar y comunitaria en Nuevo León: Estudio Longitudinal*. Monterrey, Nuevo León: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León., p.236.

Chabat, J. (2010a). *Combating drugs in Mexico under Calderón: the inevitable war*. Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas. [Online]. Available at: https://cide.repositorioinstitucional.mx/jspui/handle/1011/43. [Accessed 3 December 2021].

Chabat, J. (2010b). La respuesta de gobierno de Calderón al desafío del narcotráfico: Entre lo malo y lo peor. *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas,* División de Estudios Internacionales (196).

Chaparro, L. (2021). *Mexico's war on cartels has created 400 new gangs that are taking on the police and cartels that are left.* Business Insider. [Accessed 13 October 2021].

Chancel, L. et al. (2022). *World Inequality Report 2022*. Harvard University Press.

Chavez, C. (2008). Conceptualizing from the Inside: Advantages, Complications, and Demands on Insider Positionality. *The Qualitative Report*, 13 (3), pp.474–494. [Accessed 17 December 2023].

Chenoweth, E. (2021). *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know®*. Oxford University Press.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12 (3), pp.297–298.

CNDH. (2003). *Informe especial de la Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos sobre los casos de homicidios y desapariciones de mujeres en el municipio de Juárez, Chihuahua*. Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos.

Colak, A. A. and Pearce, J. (2009). ‘security from below’ in contexts of chronic violence. *IDS bulletin*, 40 (2), pp.11–19.

Collier, D. (2011). Understanding Process Tracing. *PS: political science & politics*, *44*(4), pp.823-830.

Collins, J. (2014). Ending the drug wars: Report of the LSE Expert Group on the economics of drug policy. *London: LSE Ideas*.

Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. (2002). *II. VIOLENCIA CONTRA LA MUJER EN CIUDAD JUÁREZ: EXPOSICIÓN GENERAL DEL PROBLEMA*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.cidh.org/annualrep/2002sp/cap.vi.juarez.2.htm.

Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas. (2021). *Búsqueda e Identificación de Personas Desaparecidas*. Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas Mexico City. [Online]. Available at: http://www.alejandroencinas.mx/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/INFORMEB%C3%9ASQUEDA8ABRIL2021.pdf. [Accessed 8 February 2022].

Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos. (2010). *Recomendación No. 45/2010*.

CONEVAL (2010). *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL) Medicion de la pobreza 2010, for 1992-2010*. Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social .

CONEVAL (2022). *Medicion de la pobreza 2022*. Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social .

Conger, L. (2014). The private sector and public security: The cases of Ciudad Juarez and Monterrey. *disponible en: Washington, Woodrow Wilson Center*.

Correa-Cabrera, G., Keck, M. and Nava, J. (2015). Losing the monopoly of violence: The State, a drug war and the paramilitarization of organized crime in Mexico (2007–10). *State Crime Journal*, 4 (1).

Cumaraswamy, D. P. (2002). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Dato' Param Cumaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/39*. UN.

Dávila, J. M. D. (2003). *La Transición mexicana, el cambio político en el Estado de Nuevo León*.

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Dávila, P. (2010). *La guerra perdida.* El Cotidiano. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Unidad Azcapotzalco, pp. 41-46.

Dávila, P. (2014). Un mapa criminal de todos conocido. *Proceso (México, D.F.)*, (1983), pp.14–16.

Declaration of Mexican and US Alliance Against Drugs. (1997) [Online]. Available at: http://www.revistascisan.unam.mx/voices/pdfs/4017.pdf. [Accessed 18 March 2021].

deLeon, P. and deLeon, L. (2002). What Ever Happened to Policy Implementation? An Alternative Approach. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 12 (4), pp.467–492.

Della Porta, D. (2008). *Comparative analysis: case-oriented versus variable-oriented research*. In della Porta, D. and Keating, M. (Eds.) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 198-222

Della Porta, D. and Keating, M. (Eds.) (2008) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Diario Oficial De La Federación. (1997). *PROGRAMA para un Nuevo Federalismo 1995-2000.* [Online]. Available at:https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=4890120&fecha=06/08/1997#gsc.tab=0.[Accessed 9 March 2021]

Diario Oficial De La Federación. (2013). *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2013-2018.* [Online]. Available at: https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle_popup.php?codigo=5299465 [Accessed 9 February 2021]

Diario Oficial De La Federación. (2014). *PROGRAMA Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y la Delincuencia 2014-2018.* [Online]. Available at: https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5343087&fecha=30/04/2014#gsc.tab=0 [Accessed 9 February 2021]

Diario Oficial De La Federación. (2016). *Ley de Participación Ciudadana para el Estado de Nuevo León*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.hcnl.gob.mx/trabajo_legislativo/leyes/leyes/ley_de_participacion_ciudadana_para_el_estado_de_nuevo_leon/. [Accessed 8 February 2021].

Diario Oficial De La Federación. (2017). *LINEAMIENTOS para la integración de los grupos colegiados que en cada entidad federativa supervisarán y evaluarán los programas de prevención que sean financiados con recursos públicos*. [Online]. Available at: https://dof.gob.mx/nota_to_doc.php?codnota=5477936.[Accessed 6 December 2022]

Diario Oficial De La Federación. (2019). *DECRETO por el que se reforman, adicionan y derogan diversas disposiciones de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, en materia de Guardia Nacional*. [Online]. Available at: https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5555126&fecha=26/03/2019#gsc.tab=0. [Accessed 6 December 2022]

Diebel, L. (1997). Macabre murders bewilder Mexicans: More than 100 women slain near border since'93.

Doyle, C. (2019). 'Orthodox' and 'alternative' explanations for the reduction of urban violence in Medellín, Colombia. *Urban Research & Practice*, 12 (3), pp.211–229.

Duran-Martinez, A. (2015). To Kill and Tell? State Power, Criminal Competition, and Drug Violence. *The Journal of conflict resolution*, 59 (8), pp.1377–1402.

Duran-Martinez, A. (2018). *The politics of drug violence: Criminals, cops and politicians in Colombia and Mexico*. Oxford University Press.

Eaton, K. and Prieto, J. D. (2017). Subnational Authoritarianism and Democratization in Colombia. In: *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: Subnational Structures, Institutions, and Clientelistic Networks*. Cambridge University Press. pp.153–172.

Echeverri, A. and Orsini, F. M. (2011). Informalidad y urbanismo social en Medellín. *Sostenible?*, (12), pp.11–24. [Accessed 20 February 2020].

Edmonds-Poli, E. (2006). Decentralization under the Fox Administration: Progress or Stagnation? *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 22 (2), pp.387–416.

El Porvenir. (2023). *Es Nuevo León ´Tierra de desaparecidos´*. [Online]. Available at: https://elporvenir.mx/video/es-nuevo-leon-tierra-de-desaparecidos/607809 [Accessed 18 November 2020].

Esparza, D. P. and Weigend, E. (2015). The illegal flow of firearms from the United States into Mexico: A state-level trafficking propensity analysis. *Journal of Trafficking, Organized Crime and Security*, 1(2), pp.115–125.

Esquivel Hernandez, G. (2015). *Extreme Inequality In Mexico*. Oxfam.

Evans, P. (1996). Government action, social capital and development: Reviewing the evidence on synergy. *World development*, 24 (6), pp.1119–1132.

Evans, P. and Heller, P. (2015). *Human Development, State Transformation, and the Politics of the Developmental State*. In: Oxford University Press.

Faguet, J.-P. (2014). Decentralization and Governance. *World development*, 53, pp.2–13.

Falleti, T. G. and Riofrancos, T. N. (2018). Endogenous Participation: Strengthening Prior Consultation in Extractive Economies. *World Politics*, 70 (1), pp.86–121.

Felbab-Brown, V. (2019). Mexico's out-of-control criminal market. *Foreign policy at Brookings working paper. Brookings, Washington*. [Online]. Available at: https://read-me.org/s/mexicos-out-of.pdf. [Accessed 20 December 2021].

Feuer, A. and Schweber, N. (2023). Mexico's Ex-Top Security Official Is Convicted of Cartel Bribery. The New York Times. [online] 21 Feb. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/21/world/americas/genaro-garcia-luna-guilty.html#:~:text=A%20Brooklyn%20jury%20found%20Genaro,bloody%20war%20on%20organized%20crime. [Accessed 22 Feb 2023].

Flores-Macías, G. (2023). Violent crime and the expansion of executive power in Latin America. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 53 (2), pp.256–272.

Flores-Macías, G. A. and Zarkin, J. (2021). The Militarization of Law Enforcement: Evidence from Latin America. *Perspectives on Politics*, 19 (2), pp.519–538.

Flores-Pérez, C. A. (2019). Contrabando, tráfico de drogas y la configuración de circuitos institucionales para su protección en México. *Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional*, 5 (1),

pp.37–58.

Flores Pérez, C. A. (2020). *Negocios de sombras. Red de poder hegemónica, contrabando, tráfico de drogas y lavado de dinero en Nuevo León*. CIESAS.

Fondevila, G. and Vilalta, C. (2021). *La extorsión empresarial en Ciudad Juárez | El impuesto criminal: lecciones y precauciones*. México Evalúa.

Fonseca, R. C. (2019). Mexico's National Anti-Corruption System: Reaching the Finish Line? *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review*, 50 (2), pp.85–121.

Freedom House. (2019). *Freedom in the World 2018: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*. Rowman & Littlefield.

FUNDENL. (2022). *FUNDENL CREA EQUIPO DE ANTROPOLOGÍA Y ARQUEOLOGÍA FORENSE PARA BÚSQUEDA DE DESAPARECIDOS EN NL*. [Online]. Available at: http://fundenl.org/fundenl-crea-equipo-de-antropologia-y-arqueologia-forense-para-busqueda-de-desaparecidos-en-nl/. [Accessed 15 January 2023].

Gallagher, J. (2017). The Last Mile Problem: Activists, Advocates, and the Struggle for Justice in Domestic Courts. *Comparative political studies*, 50 (12), pp.1666–1698.

Gallegos, Z. (2017). *El exgobernador de Nuevo León, encarcelado por diversos actos de corrupción*. [Online]. Available at: https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/01/26/mexico/1485443054_376643.html [Accessed 14 February 2021].

Gambetta, D. (1996). *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection*. Harvard University Press.

Garay Salamanca, L. J. and Salcedo Albarán, E. (2012). Institutional impact of criminal networks in Colombia and Mexico. *Crime, law, and social change*, 57 (2), pp.177–194.

García Clarck, R. R. (2018). *Human rights crisis in Mexico*. [Online]. Available at: https://ru.micisan.unam.mx/bitstream/handle/123456789/19178/VOM_2011_0089_0010.pdf?sequence=1 [Accessed 4 August 2022].

García Z, J. M. (2015). *Modelo Juárez de participación ciudadana en materia de seguridad*. Secretaría de Gobernación, Grupo Azvi.

Garza, L. C. (2015). *Revela 'El Bronco' contrato 'ventajoso' entre Medina y Kia Motors*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/estados/2015/11/20/revela-el-bronco-contrato-ventajoso-entre-medina-kia-motors-155299.html [Accessed 14 November 2022].

de la Garza Montemayor, D. J. (2018). Alternancia y transición. La experiencia de Nuevo León. In: *Transición, alternancia y democratización en contextos locales*. unknown. pp.53–67.

GIEI. (2015). *Ayotzinapa Report. Research and initial conclusions of the disappearances and homicides of the normalistas from Ayotzinapa*. Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts.

Gill, R., Barbour, J. and Dean, M. (2014). Shadowing in/as work: ten recommendations for shadowing fieldwork practice. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 9 (1), pp.69–89.

Giraudy, A. (2012). *Subnational democracy: Lessons from Latin America*. *APSA Comparative*

Democratization Newsletter, *10*(1), pp.1-8.

Giraudy, A., Moncada, E. and Snyder, R. (2019). *Inside Countries: Subnational Research in Comparative Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

GITOC. (2023). *2023 Global Organized Crime Index 2023*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

Goldstein, D. M. and Arias, E. D. (2010). *Violent Democracies in Latin America*. Duke University Press.

González. (2021). Hace 15 años cimbró al Estado el asesinato de Marcelo Garza. *El Norte*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.elnorte.com/hace-15-anos-cimbro-al-estado-el-asesinato-de-marcelo-garza/ar2252823 [Accessed 25 September 2021].

Grillo, I. (2012). *El Narco: inside Mexico's criminal insurgency*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Guerrero, E. (2013). Towards a Transformation of Mexico's Security Strategy. *The RUSI Journal*, 158 (3), pp.6–12.

Harrell, M. C. and Bradley, M. A. (2009). *Data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups*. RAND NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INST SANTA MONICA CA. [Online]. Available at: https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/tr/ADA512853 [Accessed 13 May 2023].

Helmke, G. (2017). *Institutions on the Edge: The Origins and Consequences of Inter-Branch Crises in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Helmke, G. and Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda. *Perspectives on Politics*, 2 (4), pp.725–740.

Helmke, G. and Levitsky, S. (2006). *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*. JHU Press.

Herrera, J.S. and Martinez-Alvarez, C.B., (2022). Diversifying violence: Mining, export-agriculture, and criminal governance in Mexico. *World Development*, *151*, Elsevier, vol. 151(C).

Hill, S. M., Beger, R. R. and Zanetti, J. M., II. (2007). Plugging the Security Gap or Springing a Leak: Questioning the Growth of Paramilitary Policing in US Domestic and Foreign Policy. *Democracy and Security*, 3 (3), pp.301–321.

Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2001). *Multi-level Governance and European Integration*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Huntington, S. P. (1993). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press.

IACHR. (2009). *Case of González et al. ("Cotton Field") v. Mexico*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_205_ing.pdf [Accessed 12 February 2021].

Institute for Economics and Peace. (2023). *Mexico Peace Index 2023*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ENG-MPI-2023-web.pdf [Accessed 12 November 2023].

INEGI. (2010). *Censo de población y vivienda 2010*. [Online]. Available at:

https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2010/#publicaciones. [Accessed 26 January 2021].

INEGI.. *National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE) 2020*. [Online]. Available at: https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/programas/envipe/2020/ [Accessed 26 January 2021].

INEGI.. *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/ccpv/2020/doc/Censo2020_Principales_resultados_ejecutiva_EUM.pdf [Accessed 20 January 2022].

International Crisis Group. (2015). *Back from the Brink: Saving Ciudad Juárez*. International Crisis Group.

International Crisis Group.. (2022a). Crime in pieces: The effects of Mexico's 'war on drugs', explained. [Online]. 4 May. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/crime-pieces-effects-mexicos-%E2%80%9Cwar-drugs%E2%80%9D-explained [Accessed 6 December 2022].

International Crisis Group. (2022b). *Crime in pieces: The effects of Mexico's 'war on drugs', explained*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/crime-pieces-effects-mexicos-%E2%80%9Cwar-drugs%E2%80%9D-explained [Accessed 11 February 2023].

Justino, P. (2009). Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Micro-Level Perspective on the Causes and Duration of Warfare. *Journal of peace research*, 46 (3), pp.315–333.

Kaase, M. (2010). Political Participation and Democratic Accountability. *Italian political science review*. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1426/31670.

Kalyvas, S. N. (2015). How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime—and How They Do Not. *The Journal of conflict resolution*, 59 (8), pp.1517–1540.

Kapiszewski, D. et al. (2021). *The Inclusionary Turn in Latin American Democracies*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaplan, O. (2017). *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves*. Cambridge University Press.

Klesner, J. L. (2000). Legacies of Authoritarianism: Political Attitudes in Mexico and Chile. In: Camp, R. A. (Ed). *Citizen Views of Democracy in Latin America*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Kloppe-Santamaría, G. and Cruz, J.M., 2023. The "New Wars": security and cooperation in Mexico and Northern Central America. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, pp.1-24.

Knight, A. (1990). Historical continuities in social movements. In: *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. pp.78–104.

Knight, A. (1998). Mexico and Latin America in comparative perspective. In: Dogan, M. & Higley, J. *Elites, Crises, and the Origins of Regimes*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Knight, A. (2013). War, violence and homicide in modern Mexico. *Bulletin of Latin American research*, 32 (s1), pp.12–48.

Koonings, K. and Kruijt, D. (2006). *Fractured cities : social exclusion, urban violence and contested spaces in Latin America*.

Lagarde, M. (2005). *El feminicidio, delito contra la humanidad*. [Online]. Available at: http://mujeresdeguatemala.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Feminicidio-delito-contra-la-humanidad.pdf. [Accessed 8 March 2021].

La Jornada (2013). Chihuahua, considerado un caso de éxito en el combate a delitos de alto impacto. [Online]. Available at: https://www.jornada.com.mx/2013/06/28/politica/017n2pol [Accessed 8 February 2021].

Lassman, P. and Speirs. (1994). Introduction. In: Weber, M. (Ed). *Weber: Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press. p.vii.

Leal, L. G. (2008). Combating Impunity and Femicide in Ciudad Juárez. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 41 (3), pp.31–33.

Le Clercq, J. A. and Rodriguez Sanchez Lara, G. (2021). Global impunity index 2020 (GII 2020). Impunity levels in the world. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.2139/ssrn.3837642. [Accessed 8 October 2022].

Leftwich, A. (2005). Democracy and development: Is there institutional incompatibility? *Democratization*, 12 (5), pp.686–703.

Levitsky, S. (2018). Latin America's Shifting Politics: Democratic Survival and Weakness. *Journal of Democracy*, 29 (4), pp.102–113.

Levitsky, S. and Murillo, M. V. (2005). *Argentine Democracy: The Politics of Institutional Weakness*. Penn State Press.

Levitsky, S. and Murillo, M. V. (2009). Variation in Institutional Strength. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12 (1), pp.115–133.

Levitsky, S. and Murillo, M. V. (2013). Building Institutions on Weak Foundations. *Journal of democracy*, 24 (2), pp.93–107.

Ley, S. (2022). High-risk participation: Demanding peace and justice amid criminal violence. *Journal of peace research*, 59 (6), pp.794–809.

Ley, S. and Guzmán, M. (2019). *Doing Business amid Criminal Violence: Companies and Civil Action in Mexico*. In: Oxford University Press.

Ley, S., Mattiace, S. and Trejo, G. (2019). Indigenous Resistance to Criminal Governance: Why Regional Ethnic Autonomy Institutions Protect Communities from Narco Rule in Mexico. *Latin American research review*, 54 (1), pp.181–200.

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-Level Bureaucracy, 30th Anniversary Edition: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. Russell Sage Foundation.

López Gonzalez, J. A. (2012). Civil-military relations and the militarization of public security in Mexico. In: Philip, G. and Berruecos, S. (Eds). *Mexico's Struggle for Public Security: Organized Crime and State Responses*. Springer.

Loveman, M. (1998). High‐Risk Collective Action: Defending Human Rights in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. *The American journal of sociology*, 104 (2), pp.477–525.

Macaulay, F. (2017). Presidents, producers and politics: law-and-order policy in Brazil from Cardoso to Dilma. *Policy Studies*, 38(3), 248–261.

Magaloni, B. and Razu, Z. (2016). Mexico in the grip of violence. *Current history* , 115 (778), pp.57–62.

Mahoney, J. and Thelen, K. (2010). A theory of gradual institutional change. *Explaining institutional change: Ambiguity, agency, and power*, 1, p.1.

Manaut, R. B. and Deare, C. A. (2021). *Mexican Military Culture*. Florida International University.

Mann, M. (1984). The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results. *Archives europeennes de sociologie. European journal of sociology. Europaisches Archiv fur Soziologie*, 25 (2), pp.185–213.

March, J. G. and Olsen, J. P. (1989). *Rediscovering institutions : the organizational basis of politics*. New York: The Free Press.

Mayntz, R. (1993). Modernization and the logic of interorganizational networks. *Knowledge and Policy*, 6 (1), pp.3–16.

Mendoza, A. (2019). *Sube extorsión 700% en 8 años*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.elnorte.com/sube-extorsion-700-en-8-anos/ar1700345 [Accessed 18 February 2021].

Mendoza, L. N. M. (2006). La travesía de la liberalización política de Nuevo León. *Espiral, Estudios sobre Estado y Sociedad*, Vol. XII (35), pp.65–91.

Mendoza, L. N. M. (2008). Las expectativas democráticas en el ascenso del PAN en Nuevo León. *Fondo Editorial Jurídico*, pp.251–274.

Meyer, M., Brewer, S. and Cepeda, C. Abused and afraid in Ciudad Juarez: an analysis of human rights violations by the military in Mexico. *Ciudad Juarez: Centro de Derechos Humanos*.

Migdal, J. S. (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton University Press.

Migdal, J. S. (2001). Studying the politics of development and change: The state of the art. In: *State in Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.195–230.

Migdal, J. S., Kohli, A. and Shue, V. (1994). *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*. Cambridge University Press.

Milward, H. B. and Provan, K. G. (2000). Governing the Hollow State. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10 (2), pp.359–380.

Monárrez Fragoso, J. E. (2019). Feminicidio sexual sistémico: impunidad histórica constante en Ciudad Juárez, víctimas y perpetradores. *Estado & comunes, revista de políticas y problemas públicos*, 1 (8), pp.85–110.

Monárrez Fragoso, J. E. (2014). Losses of humanity in times of war: The actions of alternative subjects of justice. *Stability International Journal of Security and Development*, 3 (1).

Moncada, E. (2013). The Politics of Urban Violence: Challenges for Development in the Global South. *Studies in comparative international development*, 48 (3), pp.217–239.

Moncada, E. (2016). *Cities, Business, and the Politics of Urban Violence in Latin America*. Stanford University Press.

Moncada, E. (2021). *Resisting Extortion*. Cambridge University Press.

Monterrey, A. (2014). Plan de Desarrollo Urbano del Municipio de Monterrey 2013-2025. pp.10–201.

MUCD. (2021). *Atlas de Homicidios México 2021*. México Unido Contra la Delincuencia.

Muggah, R. (2014). Deconstructing the fragile city: exploring insecurity, violence and resilience. *Environment and urbanization*, 26 (2), pp.345–358.

Munck, G. L. (2023). The state as a determinant of democracy: durable poor-quality democracies in contemporary Latin America. *Democratization*, pp.1–25.

Nassif, A. A. (1987). Chihuahua y los límites de la democracia electoral. *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 49 (4), pp.159–226.

Nuncio, Abraham (1982), El Grupo Monterrey. México: Editorial Nueva Imagen. p. 137.

O'Brien, K. J. (1996). Rightful Resistance. *World politics*, 49 (1), pp.31–55.

O'Donnell, G. A. (1973). *Modernization and Bureaucratic-authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*. Institute of International Studies, University of California.

O'Donnell, G. A. (1994). Delegative Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (1), pp.55–69. [Accessed 11 December 2023].

O'Donnell, G. A. (1993). On the state, democratization and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with glances at some postcommunist countries. *World development*, 21 (8), pp.1355–1369.

O'Donnell, G. A. (1996). Illusions About Consolidation. *Journal of democracy*, 7 (2), pp.34–51.

O'Donnell, G. A. (1998). Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies. *Journal of democracy*, 9 (3), pp.112–126.

O'Donnell, G. A. (2001). Democracy, law, and comparative politics. *Studies in comparative international development*, 36 (1), pp.7–36.

O'Donnell, G. A. (2004). Why the rule of law matters. *J. Democracy*. vol. 15, no. 4, Oct. 2004, pp. 32-46.

O'Donnell, G. A. (2010). *Democracy, Agency, and the State: Theory with Comparative Intent*. OUP Oxford.

O'Donnell, G. A. and Schmitter, P. C. (1986). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*. JHU Press.

O'Donnell, G. A. and Schmitter, P. C. (2013). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. JHU Press.

OECD (2005), *Security System Reform and Governance*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264007888-en. [Accessed 15 October 2020].

OHCHR. (2017) *Mexico draft security law threatens rights and should be rejected, UN rights experts warn*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/12/mexico-draft-security-law-threatens-rights-and-should-be-rejected-un-rights [Accessed 8 October 2023].

Olson, E. L. (2017). *The Evolving Mérida Initiative and the Policy of Shared Responsibility in U.S.-Mexico Security Relations*.

Olson, E. and Lee, E. (2012). The state of security in the US-Mexico border region. *Wilson Center*.

Olson, M. (1993). Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development. *The American political science review*, 87 (3), pp.567–576.

Osorio Reyes, M. D. (2022). *Atlas de homicidios: México 2021 Una Crisis Que No Cesa*. México Unido Contra la Delincuencia.

Osorno, D. E. (2013). *La guerra de los Zetas: viaje por la frontera de la necropolítica*. Vintage Español, una división de Random House LLC.

País, E. (1990). *Vargas Llosa: 'México es la dictadura perfecta'*. [Online]. Available at: https://elpais.com/diario/1990/09/01/cultura/652140001_850215.html [Accessed 24 March 2023].

Pansters, W. (2012). *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur*. Stanford University Press.

Pansters, W. (2018). Drug trafficking, the informal order, and caciques. Reflections on the crime-governance nexus in Mexico. *Global Crime*, 19 (3-4), pp.315–338.

Pansters, W. G. and Serrano, M. (2023). Civil-military Relations in Mexico: From One-Party Dominance to Post-Transitional Insecurity. *Alternatives to laboratory animals: ATLA*, Vol 0(0) 1–19

Pérez, M. E. and Padilla, H. (2002). Interpretaciones locales sobre la violencia en contra de las mujeres en Ciudad Juárez. *Revista de Estudios de Género. La ventana*, (15), pp.195–230.

Pérez R., C. (2019). La kingpin strategy: ¿Qué es y cómo llegó a México? Paz y seguridad. [Online]. Available at: https://seguridad.nexos.com.mx/la-kingpin-strategy-que-es-y-como-llego-a-mexico/ [Accessed 20 August 2021]

Petersen, R. D. (2001). *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, B. J. (2015). How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence? The Case of Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico. *The journal of politics*, 77 (2), pp.324–336.

Piattoni, S. (2009). Multi‐level Governance: a Historical and Conceptual Analysis. *Journal of European Integration*, 31 (2), pp.163–180.

Pierson, P. (2000). Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics. *The American political science review*. 94(2), pp.251-267.

Pierson, P. and Skocpol, T. (2002). Historical institutionalism in contemporary political science. *Political science: The state of the discipline*, 3 (1), pp.1–32.

Plan Estratégico de Juárez. (2021). *Así Estamos Juárez 2021. Indicadores de Calidad de Vida*. Plan Estratégico de Juárez.

Presidencia de la República. (2010). *Estrategia Todos Somos Juárez, reconstruyamos la ciudad*.

Prieto-Curiel, R., Campedelli, G. M. and Hope, A. (2023). Reducing cartel recruitment is the only way to lower violence in Mexico. *Science*, 381 (6664), pp.1312–1316.

Proceso. (2004). *Narcogobierno en Chihuahua*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/2004/3/9/narcogobierno-en-chihuahua-56988.html [Accessed 5 March 2021].

Proceso (2011). *Monterrey, el vuelco*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.proceso.com.mx/opinion/2011/1/17/monterrey-el-vuelco-82751.html [Accessed 10 August 2022].

Przeworski, A. (1991). *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Przeworski, A. (1999). 2 Minimalist conception of democracy: a defense. *Democracy's values*.

Punch, S. (2012). Hidden struggles of fieldwork: Exploring the role and use of field diaries. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 5 (2), pp.86–93.

Quintero. (1997). Está PGR tras campaña contra Canales. *El Porvenir*. (30,357). p.1

Reporte Indigo. (2013). *El oscuro pasado del director*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.reporteindigo.com/reporte/el-oscuro-pasado-del-director/. [Accessed 15 February 2021].

Rizzo Reyes, A. C. (2015). *Derechos Humanos México, año 10*. CNDH.

Rizzo Reyes, A. C. (2017). La nostalgia de la invulnerabilidad: violencia y cultura de paz en Nuevo León. In: Enciso, F. (Ed). *Violencia y paz : diagnósticos y propuestas para México*. Libros Colmex.

Rocha, J. L., Rodgers, D. and Weegels, J. (2023). Debunking the Myth of Nicaraguan Exceptionalism: Crime, Drugs and the Political Economy of Violence in a 'Narco-state'. *Journal of Latin American studies*, 55 (3), pp.519–543.

Rodriguez, S. G. (2012). *The Femicide Machine*. MIT Press.

Rosete, E. (2023). *Sentenciados cinco militares a 90 años de prisión por el asesinato de Jorge y Javier, estudiantes del Tec de Monterrey*. [Online]. Available at: https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-10-18/sentenciados-cinco-militares-a-90-anos-de-prision-por-el-asesinato-de-jorge-y-javier-estudiantes-del-tec-de-monterrey.html [Accessed 8 November 2023].

Salazar, S. and Curiel, M. (2012). Ciudad abatida: antropología de la (s) fatalidad (es). *México: UACJ. Periodismo y violencia: la producción*.

Sánchez, G. R. and Hernández, A. V. (2021). State Capture in Mexico: A Theoretical and Historical Review. *Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional*, 7 (1), pp.105–124.

Sánchez Santana, A. G. and Pérez Esparza, D. (2014). ¿Qué le pasó a Monterrey? Análisis de una crisis urbana de inseguridad a través del duelo colectivo. *Regions & cohesion: the journal of the Consortium for Comparative Research on Regional Integration and Social Cohesion*, 4 (3), pp.98–123.

Sánchez-Talanquer, M. and Greene, K. F. (2021). Is Mexico Falling into the Authoritarian Trap? *Journal of Democracy*, 32 (4), pp.56–71.

Santos, M. L. S. (2019). The violence behind the stigma. *nupri.prp.usp.br*. [Online]. Available at: https://nupri.prp.usp.br/pdf/wp/NUPRI_Working_Paper_01.pdf. [Accessed 11 November 2022].

Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J. and Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative research: QR*, 15 (5), pp.616–632.

Schedler, A. (2014). The Criminal Subversion of Mexican Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 25 (1), pp.5–18.

Schulz, P. and Kreft, A.-K. (2021). Researching conflict-related sexual violence: a conversation between early-career researchers. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 23 (3), pp.496–504.

Schumpeter, J. A. (2013). *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Routledge.

Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press.

Sedra, M., (2017). *Security sector reform in conflict-affected countries: The evolution of a model*. Routledge.

Sellers, J. M., Lidström, A. and Bae, Y. (2020). *Multilevel Democracy: How Local Institutions and Civil Society Shape the Modern State*. Cambridge University Press.

Shirk, D. A. (2011). Criminal justice reform in Mexico: An overview. *Mexican Law Review*, 3 (2). [Online]. Available at: https://biblioteca.cejamericas.org/bitstream/handle/2015/1655/arc1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed 27 October 2022].

Smith, B. T. (2021). *The Dope: The Real History of the Mexican Drug Trade*. Random House.

Snyder, R. (2001). Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method. *Studies in comparative international development*, 36 (1), pp.93–110.

Snyder, R. and Duran-Martinez, A. (2009). Does illegality breed violence? Drug trafficking and state-sponsored protection rackets. *Crime, law, and social change*, 52 (3), pp.253–273.

Soifer, H. D. (2012). Measuring state capacity in contemporary Latin America. *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 32 (3), pp.585–598.

Sørensen, E. and Torfing, J. (2009). Making governance networks effective and democratic through metagovernance. *Public administration*, 87 (2), pp.234–258.

Sorensen, G. (2008). *Democracy and Democratization: Processes and Prospects in a Changing World, Third Edition*. Taylor & Francis.

Sorensen, G. (2018). From Transition to Standstill: Democracy in the New Millennium. In: *aDemocracy and Democratization: Processes and Prospects in a Changing World, Third Edition*. Routledge. pp.55–78.

Souza, C. (2001). Participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities: limits and possibilities in building democratic institutions. *Environment and urbanization*, 13 (1), pp.159–184.

Stahler-Sholk, R. (2001). Globalization and Social Movement Resistance: The Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico. *New Political Science*, 23 (4), pp.493–516.

Steinmo, S. (2008). *Historical Institutionalism*. In della Porta, D. and Keating, M. (Eds). *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 118-138

Steinberg, N. and Human Rights Watch (Organization). (2011). *Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico's 'war on Drugs'*. Human Rights Watch.

Storrs, K. L. (2004). *CRS Report for Congress*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.policyarchive.org/download/167 [Accessed 12 May 2023].

Stott, M. and Murray, C. M. (2023). *The militarisation of Mexico's economy*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/6a119a1c-c251-4909-824d-96bca4d23a91 [Accessed 8 November 2022].

Sviatschi, M. M. (2022). Spreading Gangs: Exporting US Criminal Capital to El Salvador. *The American economic review*, 112 (6), pp.1985–2024.

Telediario. (2021). Violaciones a DDHH, deserción e incremento de delitos, las manchas de Fuerza Civil. [Online]. Available at: https://www.telediario.mx/local/violaciones-ddhh-desercion-incremento-delitos-manchas-fuerza-civil [Accessed 10 September 2021].

Tendler, J. (1997). *Good Government in the Tropics*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

The Economist. (2020) *Politicians step up the fight against Mexico's Coca-Cola habit.* [Online]. Available at: https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2020/10/29/politicians-step-up-the-fight-against-mexicos-coca-cola-habit [Accessed 12 November 2022].

The. (2013). The new face of Mexican policing. *The Economist*. [Online]. 15 June. Available at: https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2013/06/15/the-new-face-of-mexican-policing [Accessed 15 November 2023].

Tijerina Sepúlveda, W. (2018). Estados y desarrollo democrático en el pensamiento de O'Donnell. *Revista IUS*, 12 (42). [Online]. Available at: doi:10.35487/rius.v12i42.2018.386. [Accessed 15 January 2021].

Tijerina Sepúlveda, W. (2020). *Industrial Development in Mexico: Policy Transformation from Below*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Tilly, C. (2003a). Inequality, Democratization, and De-Democratization. *Sociological Theory*, 21 (1), pp.37–43.

Tilly, C. (2003b). *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, C. (2004). *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000*. Cambridge University Press.

Tiscornia, L. (2023). Police reform in the aftermath of armed conflict: How militarization and accountability affect police violence. *Journal of peace research*, pp.383-397.

Topal, A. (2012). Uneven access to local power: Entrepreneurial domination in the design of local development in Chihuahua, Mexico. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 36 (6), pp.1166–1182.

Tovar, O. (2022). *Exigen un padrón de desaparecidos*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.elnorte.com/exigen-un-padron-de-desaparecidos/ar2452846 [Accessed 10 January 2023].

Transparency International. (2023). *Corruption Perception Index 2022*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.transparency.org/cpi. [Accessed 18 November 2023].

Trejo, G. and Ley, S. (2014). Mexico's Drug Wars and the Remaking of Local Order: Why Criminal Organizations Murder Local Officials. *Agustina Giraudy, Eduardo Moncada y Richard Snyder, Subnational Analysis in Comparative Politics*.

Trejo, G. and Ley, S. (2016). Federalism, drugs, and violence. Why intergovernmental partisan conflict stimulated inter-cartel violence in Mexico. *Política y gobierno*, 23 (1), pp.11–56.

Trejo, G. and Ley, S. (2018). Why Did Drug Cartels Go to War in Mexico? Subnational Party Alternation, the Breakdown of Criminal Protection, and the Onset of Large-Scale Violence. *Comparative political studies*, 51 (7), pp.900–937.

Trejo, G. and Ley, S. (2020). *Votes, Drugs, and Violence: The Political Logic of Criminal Wars in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.

Trevino-Rangel, J. (2018). Silencing grievance: Responding to human rights violations in Mexico's war on drugs. *New York Law School journal of human rights*, 17 (4), pp.485–501.

Turati, M. (2009). Ciudad Juárez: vivir y morir en la capital del crimen. 1681st ed. *Semanario Proceso*, pp.8–11.

Turati, M. (2011). *El capo que gana 2 mil pesos…*. [Online]. Available at: https://marcelaturati.wordpress.com/2011/07/21/el-capo-que-gana-2-mil-pesos/ [Accessed 18 January 2021].

United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Human Development Report 2021/2022: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*. United Nations.

UNODC. (2023). *Global Study on Homicide 2023*.

Valdez, D. W. (2021). *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women*. Peace at the Border.

Van Deth, J. W. (2001). Studying political participation: Towards a theory of everything. In: *In joint sessions of workshops of the European consortium for political research*. 2001. [Online]. [Accessed 8 November 2023].

Van Duzer, C. H. and Arendt, H. (1952). The origins of totalitarianism. *The American historical review*, 57 (4), p.933.

Various Signatories. (2011). *THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN NUEVO LEÓN, MÉXICO CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT BEFORE CEDAW*.

Vilalta, C. J. (2013). Towards an understanding of community organization against crime: The case of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. *Stability International Journal of Security and Development*, 2 (1), p.5.

Vilalta, C. and Muggah, R. (2014). Violent disorder in Ciudad Juarez: a spatial analysis of homicide. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 17 (3), pp.161–180.

Villalpando, R. (2010). *Exigen ONG juarenses la renuncia de Calderón*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.jornada.com.mx/2010/02/03/politica/003n1pol [Accessed 2 December 2021].

Vulliamy, E. (2009). Life and death in Juárez, the world's murder capital. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 3 October. Available at:

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/oct/04/mexico-drugs-death-squads-juarez [Accessed 10 January 2022].

Wampler, B. (2010). *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability*. Penn State Press.

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society : An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Cambridge University Press. Berkeley: University of California Press

Whitehead, L. (2006). *Latin America: A New Interpretation*. Springer.

Whitehead, L. (2010). Alternative Models of Democracy in Latin America. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 17 (1), pp.75–87.

Wood, E. J. (2003). *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. Cambridge University Press.

Wood, E. J. (2006). The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones. *Qualitative sociology*, 29 (3), pp.373–386.

World Bank. (2011). *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*. World Bank Publications.

Wright, M. W. (2011). Necropolitics, narcopolitics, and femicide: gendered violence on the Mexico-U.S. border. *Signs*, 36 (3), pp.707–731.

Yashar, D.J., (2018). *Homicidal ecologies: Illicit economies and complicit states in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE.