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State, Violence, and Security in Mexico: Developments and Consequences for Democracy

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Paul Kenny, Mónica Serrano with Arturo Sotomayor, eds., *Mexico's Security Failure, Collapse into Criminal Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

Wil G. Pansters, ed., *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

George Philip and Susana Berruecos, eds., *Mexico's Struggle for Public Security: Organized Crime and State Responses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy* (London and New York: Zed, 2012).

Key words: Felipe Calderón, cartels, corruption, democracy, drug trafficking, Institutional Revolutionary Party, military, organized crime, police, security, state.

Palabras clave: Felipe Calderón, carteles, corrupción, crimen organizado, democracia, ejército, estado, narcotráfico, Partido Revolucionario Institucional, policía, seguridad.

Felipe Calderón's presidency (2006–2012) enjoyed a boost in the economy that translated into better social policies for Mexicans. Some indicators improved, such as longer life expectancies, better education, and some reduction in extreme poverty¹. From a political

1. See George Philip's introductory chapter to George Philip and Susana Berruecos, eds., *Mexico's Struggle for Public Security, Organized Crime and State Responses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), reviewed in this essay.

perspective, Mexico strengthened its democratic legitimacy and continued travelling along the “rocky” path started when Vicente Fox defeated Francisco Labastida Ochoa, and the seventy-one-year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI*) came to an end in 2000.² Calderón’s effort to legitimize democracy effectively in Mexico, however, clashed with the illegal, but in some parts sadly legitimized, business of organized crime, issue that ended up overshadowing his top policy agenda priorities. Plunged into a wave of increasing gang-related violence, Calderón concentrated on a hard and direct anticrime strategy while trying to show the world that Mexico was not falling into the “failed state” category, in spite of the eloquent inability mishandling of the country’s institutions to cope with the criminal environment.

Most of the works reviewed in this essay directly approach the security crisis in Mexico during Calderón’s presidency. Nonetheless, it is shortsighted to assume that this crisis originated during the last decade. More accurately we could say that during Calderón’s presidency, Mexicans experienced the explosion of a long and historic negligence of the Mexican authorities to make the changes necessary to prevent a crisis of public security of this magnitude.³

The following books concentrate on different but crucial perspectives in understanding how Mexico’s spiral of violence evolved through recent history. Some of the chapters in these volumes intertwine with each other, such as those relevant to military, police, and criminal justice issues that no academic effort can leave out when discussing security outcomes in Mexico. I found the perspectives all complementary and, at the same time, divergent in their own assumptions. Particularly for this review, I have decided to pay attention to some less scholarly and publicized but indisputably related topics to the panorama of security in Mexico. I encourage the reader

2. Roderick Ai Camp uses the term “rocky” when giving his insights about Mexico’s democratic transition and consolidation in his essay “Mexico’s Democratic Revolution, Where Is It Leading,” *MS/EM* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 367–376. For more recent writings from the author, see Roderic Ai Camp’s *The Metamorphosis of Leadership in a Democratic Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Roderic Ai Camp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Mexican Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3. For a detailed qualitative and quantitative account of the rising trends in criminality in Mexico and in Latin America during the last two decades, see Marcelo Bergman and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Criminality, Public Security, and the Challenge to Democracy in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009). For the impact of criminality in state consolidation, see also Daniel C. Levy, Kathleen Bruhn, and Emilio Zebadua’s *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

interested in those omitted topics to obtain a copy of these volumes. The reader may find an answer to his or her queries there.

One common characteristic of most of the recently published material on the topic of Mexico's security happen to be edited volumes. This trend shows that no single academic can easily describe by him- or herself the state of the art of security in Mexico. In fact, what these volumes tend to prove is that to understand the current "crisis," "emergency," "collapse," or whatever we might call the state of Mexico's security today, we need to combine different viewpoints of how things have come to be. These volumes are constructed with the perspectives of historians, anthropologists, lawyers, political scientists, journalists, economists, and other academics, from both Mexico and abroad. I have tried to include footnotes relevant to other newly released single-author books since lately there has been a fructiferous academic interest in analyzing the security narratives in the country and the region.

In their edited volume, Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano emphasize the concept of "state failure." This term became familiar in Latin America after it was coined by the US Defense Department to launch the militarization and securitization of Colombia during the early and mid-1990s.⁴ Kenny and Serrano draw a clear distinction that, in Mexico, unlike the precedent of Colombia, we are not in the presence of "state," but rather "security failure."⁵ They believe that by "state failure," one should understand the Mexican state's inability to control security threats.⁶ No more, nor less. The distinction between "state" and "security" failure becomes blurred, however, because of the political strategy followed by President Calderón and the US government to re-create 2000s' Plan Colombia on Mexican soil, a plan referred to as the Merida Initiative.⁷ The authors argue how the

4. To get a real sense of the "failed state" terminology and its conceptualization, see Stewart M. Patrick's *Weak Links: Fragile State, Global Threats and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

5. Scholars like Paul Kenny and Mónica Serrano, as well as George Philip, refute including Mexico in a "failed state" category with convincing and solid arguments. See especially the introductory chapter written in Kenny and Serrano *Mexico's Security Failure*.

6. Another relevant publication on the Mexican state's capacity includes Claudio A. Holzner's "Mexico: Weak State, Weak Democracy," in Daniel H. Levine and José E. Molina, eds., *The Quality of Democracy in Latin America* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2011).

7. Peter Chalk's *Latin American Drug Trade: Scope, Dimensions, Impact and Response* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), delivers a discussion on counternarcotics strategies in Latin America, emphasizing the Colombian and Mexican cases and the US foreign aid assistance under which the Merida Initiative was framed.

strategy to have the armed forces, with Washington's training, equipment, and intelligence, do the policing of highly violent organized crime, revealed that Calderón's political narrative was closer to a demonstrable risk of state failure, rather than a failed security agenda. Kenny and Serrano shed some light on these security narratives and deliver two lenses to visualize this security failure. They do so first with a series of articles related to the Mexican state's failed obligation to protect its citizens from internal insecurity, and second, through chapters devoted to the analysis of the country's spillover of violence abroad, north into the United States and south to Central America.⁸

In the second part of the book, contributors review key actors and issues that played a protagonist (or perhaps, antagonist) role when trying to overcome organized crime: a weak criminal justice system, an inefficient police force, and a vilified respect for human rights. Contributor Ana Laura Magaloni answers why Mexico's criminal justice system has failed so "spectacularly" in tackling serious crime in the face of public indignation and an increasing demand for a change in the system.⁹ Magaloni uses a statistical approach to correlate two variables: inefficiency and arbitrariness. Both results were positively correlated. The author asserts truly how "democratic Mexico has a criminal justice system that is only equipped to work for authoritarian Mexico" (2012, 90). She also argues that getting tough on crime will not work in a judicial system characterized by an unprofessional criminal investigation apparatus, high impunity, and institutional inertia. She concludes that the unwanted institutional legacy of the Mexican authoritarian era is far from slipping away if drastic changes to the public prosecutor's offices, incentives for system operators, and proofs of incorruptibility are not taken seriously and put into action.¹⁰

8. Issues of violence and crime-related crises in Central America has been covered recently by Luis Roniger in *Transnational Politics in Central America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Thomas C. Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (eds.), *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); and Julie Marie Bunck and Michael Ross Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets and Intimidation: Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

9. For an exhaustive examination of the political evolution of the judiciary in Latin America, see Juan Carlos Calleros-Alarcón's *The Unfinished Transition to Democracy in Latin America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); and also Gretchen Helmke and Julio Ríos-Figueroa, eds., *Courts in Latin America* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

10. Issues on corruption in Mexico are finely explained in the works of Stephen D. Morris and Charles Blake, eds., *Corruption and Democracy in Latin America*

Ernesto López-Portillo, a specialist in public security issues, puts his insights into what road a successful police reform process should take.¹¹ Like Magaloni, his diagnosis starts by pinpointing what is wrong with the current police agencies. His approach reveals two issues of neglect: one of salaries and the other of supervision. The first is the well-recognized problem of the low wages that police officers earn, especially those at the municipal level. This situation has led to police agents not only not taking risks to confront crime for a miserable paycheck at the end of the month, but also, and more seriously, colluding with organized crime for a second payroll. López-Portillo's second observation refers to the lack of accountability and transparency in the agencies. Mexico has not resolved the issue with the supervision of standards and practices of its police, resulting in a chronic inconsistency within law enforcement, where today "the rules of the game for the police are geared towards incentives of their own opportunity, not towards defending society's rule of law" (2012, 117). Mexican police forces' known complicity with drug traffickers ignited Calderón's decision to order the military to step in to the fight against organized crime groups, assuring that the police had been permeated with corruption and was incapable of confronting the increasing wave of crime and violence in the country, especially at the Mexico-US border.¹²

In the third part of the book, Jorge Chabat's chapter clarifies the situation as he reviews the last forty years of conflicts and responses related to drug trafficking in the shared frontier.¹³ As his analysis

(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); and *Corruption and Politics in Latin America: National and Regional Dynamics* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2010).

11. Daniel M. Sabet's *Police Reform in Mexico: Informal Politics and the Challenge of Institutional Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), is an excellent account of the obstacles Mexico's police confronts and the way to overcome them. See also Markus M. Müller's *Public Security in the Negotiated State: Policing in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

12. To understand the relationship between the United States and Mexico and their border interactions, see Joan B. Anderson's "The U.S.-Mexico Border: A Half Century of Change," *The Social Science Journal* 40 (2003), 535–554. For a historical perspective, see Mark Eric Williams's *Understanding U.S.-Latin American Relations Theory and History* (New York: Routledge, 2011); and José Angel Hernández's *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century: A History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

13. Other valuable information related to border drug trafficking and violence can be found in Miguel Antonio Levario's *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012); Robert J. Bunker's *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels and Mercenaries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Tom Barry's *Border Wars* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); and in Elaine Carey

shows, from the half-dozen cases, operations, or scandals that have led to combined responses from Mexico and the United States, the most frequent provoking factor in all of them has been a crisis of corruption either in the Mexican government or in its police forces because of complicity with the drug-trafficking world. The author argues how since 2005 (when negotiations for the Merida Initiative started) Mexico increasingly granted support to the US government, not because of the volume of drugs going from Mexico to the United States, but from collateral damages such as violence and the perceived paramount corruption. Chabat explains how, in his opinion, the US intervention has meant not only responses that have not always been accurate, such as the “failed state” approach promoted by certain sectors in Washington’s government and public opinion circles, but also a misidentification of the factors needed to curb the drug-trafficking problem. According to Chabat, the key to reducing the conflict between Mexico and the United States on the issue of drug trafficking is the ability of the Mexican government to curb corruption in the forces fighting the traffickers (2012, 155). In this vein, Athanasios Hristoulas provides solid arguments for how “the disconnection between the rhetoric and practice of Mexican security policy” severely affects the country’s security picture. He explains this latter issue through the study of the antiterrorist post-9/11 security policies that Mexico, the United States, and Canada imposed to secure their borders. He concludes that the country “faces an uphill battle in its efforts to be a good ally in the war against terrorism” (2012, 172).¹⁴ The analysis recalls, again, the Merida Initiative. The US\$1.4 billion-dollar plan approved by the US Congress in a bilateral and multilateral aid package for the professionalization and modernization of equipment for Mexico and Central America unintentionally highlighted Mexico’s inability to improve its security sector. The “disconnection” approach Hristoulas proposes makes sense: the political

and Andrae M. Marak, eds., *Smugglers, Brothels, and Twine: Historical Perspectives on Contraband and Vice in North America’s Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011).

14. To review the relationship between the countries, see Jorge I. Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro’s essay “U.S.-Mexican Relations in the Twenty-First Century,” in their edited book, *Contemporary U.S.-Latin American Relations: Cooperation or Conflict in the 21st Century?* (New York: Routledge, 2010). Also see Arturo Santa-Cruz’s *Mexico–United States Relations: The Semantics of Sovereignty* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); and Jordi Diez’s *Canadian and Mexican Security in the New North America: Challenges and Prospects* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).

will to improve exists, but, among other causes of frustration, actual responses have been affected by corruption, interagency competition, the capacity of the Mexican government to respond, nationalist fears in public opinion, and a weak professionalization of the Mexican security forces.

In another edited volume, *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, Wil G. Pansters acts as team leader of a renowned group of contributors debating the coexistence and connections during the twentieth century between Mexican institutional consolidation and insecurity. To approach such a task, Pansters found it necessary to review the understanding of state-making and power, especially from the post-revolutionary era to the early twenty-first century. Unlike Kenny and Serrano's volume, Panster's approach utilizes a much broader contextualization of the different manifestations of violence seen through Mexico's political changes from 1900 onward.

Reading this volume offers an innovative and original framework to analyze crime and power historically in Mexico. It also refreshes how research on the hegemonic post-revolutionary Mexico has been done. Pansters proposes that the theory of Mexican exceptionalism—having had a pragmatic and moderate authoritarian regime with essentially nonviolent conflict resolution—prevented and overshadowed the study of violence and coercion during those decades. By rejecting and criticizing this approach, and taking into account the changing political conditions in the country, Pansters unveils how Mexico had, for years, consistently moved in two, rather opposite, directions: one toward democratic consolidation and rule of law, and another toward insecurity, militarization, multiplication of non-state-armed actors, and a growing consolidation of obscure forms of violence.

Chapters in Pansters's volume focus on the various relations resulting among coercion, violence, and state-making. Since contributors propose that a multiplicity of actors are involved in these relations, the book is divided into the study of state actors, such as the police and the army; societal actors, such as society, markets, and indigenous communities; and the informal practices these can adopt, such as corporatism, and clientelism.

Paul Gillingham, who has specialized in state formation and nationalism in modern Mexico, details the high levels of violence in the countryside after 1940. He argues how rural Mexico remained a profoundly violent place, where homicides, rebellions, riots, rapes, petty massacres, and forced migrations were key commodities in the perpetrators' economic, social, or political strategies when bargaining

for social capital.¹⁵ In a post-revolutionary context in which society was left in arms, the emergence of violent entrepreneurship swept away all attempts by the following governments to demobilize regional caciques, peasant militias, or right-wing paramilitaries. He argues how state and local actors were left to negotiate the control of high-level violence with the main violent agencies: the army, the *defensas rurales*, the police, and the *pistoleros*. Gillingham's analysis provides a good understanding of how the Mexican state since the early post-revolutionary era has been incapable of managing public order without, from time to time, relying heavily on the army's assistance.¹⁶ The army's institutionalization, unity, and professionalization distinguished themselves from other forms of corrupt, factional, and entrepreneurial violence. Anyway, it was not until the mid-1950s that the military reduced their police functions and consequently moved away from a politicized relation with the local elites that had put troops in close relation with corruption and the criminal networks of local societies. In Veracruz and Guerrero, where Gillingham collected his main evidence, social control started to rely on functioning police agencies, courts, and the penitentiary system only by the second half of the twentieth century. This move also came together with the decentralization of state and political violence. He argues that even though gunmen remained under the order of state and local politicians, assassinations were accepted as long as they were disguised, covert, and suspicious. Authorities wanted to diminish their visibility in state violence, withdrawing the army from violent repression, but keeping less explicit control by using non-state privately armed groups to maintain their privileged order.

More or less a similar story is accounted in Marcos Aguila and Jeffrey Bortz's chapter. Both authors address a particular form of violence: labor violence.¹⁷ During the 1920s, labor's social and political

15. In a similar vein, Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein, eds., *Violent Democracies in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), explain how individuals and institutions in Latin American democracies have systematically relied on violence to impose their own notions of order.

16. For a historical perspective on the army, see Ben Fallaw and Terry Rugeley, eds., *Forced Marches: Soldiers and Military Caciques in Modern Mexico* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2012). For a broader understanding of the updated role of the military in Latin America, see P. W. Zagorski's "The Military" in Richard S. Hillman and Thomas J. D'Agostino, eds., *Understanding Contemporary Latin America* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2011).

17. For more on labor's role in Mexican politics, see Graciela Bensusán and Kevin J. Middlebrook's *Organized Labour and Politics in Mexico: Changes, Continuities, and Contradictions* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2012).

violence was carried out by private gangs. Even though they were supported by the army, “union thugs did the dirty work” (2012, 188). Unions were strong, combative, and consolidated groups of industrial operatives that negotiated power with owners and the state. The authors argue how “a weak state in a society of generalized violence guaranteed that conflict over unions would be settled by guns” (2012, 189). The picture changed thirty years later when the Mexican state decided to respond to labor unrest, not through state-sponsored violence (murder and rape), but this time using strategies such as firings and prison. The authors conclude that if in 1920 the state used allies within the labor movement to impose government control, in 1950, the state could employ the army without risking a rebellion. They reveal that the state’s goal was to have compliant leaders and subordinate unions but leave the formal structures of the labor regime alone. The state could maintain its hegemony and, therefore, a perfectly stable social order.¹⁸ Later on the book, Kees Koonings concludes

the exceptionality of Mexico prior to 1980 did not reside in the absence of political violence per se, or, for that matter, in the hidden nature of this violence. It has to do with the ability of the front-stage regime to continue to lay claims on legitimacy, on its inclusionary and national-popular quality, and on its institutional stability despite the endemic presence of political violence in its backstage corridors. (272, 2012)

The author argues how during the commencing breakdown of the PRI hegemony in the 1980s, violence became a visible and relevant issue alongside political transformation. As the curtain of PRI’s authoritarianism was taken down, a systemic scenario of state and counterstate violence started to be revealed.¹⁹

During the late 1960s through the 1980s, significant political changes at home and policy developments abroad marked the beginning of a rough era for Mexico. In *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*, Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda argue how the U.S. government ban on and eradication of drug crops in Asia made traffickers search for new alternative

18. For a collection of essays explaining Mexico’s state formation in this period, see the edited volume by Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, *Dictablanda: Soft Authoritarianism in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

19. In Larissa Adler-Lomnitz, Rodrigo Salazar-Elena, and Ilya Adler’s *Symbolism and Ritual in a One-Party Regime: Unveiling Mexico’s Political Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), the authors offer a general picture of both the official and the underlying structures of the Mexican political system under PRI hegemony.

routes to satisfy the North American demand. Mexico was the obvious choice. The authors list the key factors that gave traffickers huge incentives for moving their business to Mexico: proximity to the United States (the world largest drug market), a corrupt political class, security authorities involved in the trafficking, proper geography and climate for cultivation, and low-level workers in need of employment and willing to take the risks.²⁰

By the early 1970s, Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976) and Richard Nixon had already agreed on strong links to commence a permanent war on drugs. Years before the Mexican government had associated all political activism, from the student protests to the influence of communism, with criminality and drug trafficking. The authors argue how the use of a populist Cold War rhetoric helped Mexican authorities gain citizen support at home and assured financial support from Washington.²¹ Consequently, it also cleared the way to involving the military in the fight against both insurgency and drug trafficking. Watt and Zepeda argue, however, that no matter what the political reaction to the narcotrafficking was, “the scale of the business and the profits generated for government bodies and corrupt officials meant that its illegal activities would be tolerated” (2012, 57). The PRI controlled the drug business by controlling trade. Traffickers would pay off top politicians who, in return, would provide police and army protection and a secure monopoly of *la plaza*. According to the authors, the system ensured impunity to traffickers and certain state order and control over the trafficking business and violence. State involvement in narcotrafficking increased in the 1980s only to decrease when neoliberal and political pluralization reforms reversed the trend. With the erosion of the PRI’s power, also came the fall of the strict system that controlled and regulated organized crime around the plazas. Watt and Zepeda argue that when the state rolled back, the cartels seized the opportunity to gain greater dominance, commencing a new era for the drug business now that the PRI’s authoritarian rule was disappearing. They argue also that the collapse

20. For more on the expansion of the drug trade in Mexico, see Isaac Campos’s *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico’s War on Drugs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

21. For a comparative study on populist presidential discourse, see Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. Olin Muñoz, eds., *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010). For an account on Mexico’s political violence during the Cold War, see the essays written by Friedrich Katz and Jocelyn Olcott in Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds., *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America’s Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

of the plaza system “led to more turf wars among rival cartels, resulting in even more gang-related violence and more murders than before” (2012, 150).²²

The authors emphasize constantly how since *el cambio* (the change) in 2000, the narco-cartels have flourished and prospered in Mexico. States like Chihuahua, Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Michoacán carry the flag of criminal violence in news headlines, even though the problem seems to be endemic in a majority of Mexican states.²³ In one of their conclusions, Watt and Zepeda argue that the obvious reasons why the cartels operate so violently is the prohibition of marijuana, heroin, and cocaine.²⁴ They reinforce the idea that if the illegal narcotics were decriminalized and stringently controlled, it is likely that cartel profits would be severely constrained, and, therefore, the violent competition for control of the plazas might decrease.

A question that comes to mind when reading this literature is what will happen if the Mexican government succeeds in the long run in its battle to dismantle the cartels? One answer is that this might merely push problems to neighboring countries in Central America and the Caribbean, which are less prepared to tackle powerful criminal networks. This is the conclusion of Diana Rodríguez and Susana Berruecos in a volume edited by the latter author and George Philip. *Mexico's Struggle for Public Security: Organized Crime and State Responses* is a compiled and updated version of a series of presentations delivered at one of the annual conferences on Mexico that have taken place at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). What is distinctive about this publication is that it includes an opening chapter written by Alejandro Poiré, former secretary of the

22. For an account on the emerging cartels warfare, see the special issue entitled “Criminal Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: The Gangs and Cartels Wage War” in *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 5 (2011).

23. For an ethnographic study in Chihuahua’s El Paso/Juárez narco-corridor, see Howard Campbell’s *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). For an specific account of one of the cartels, see George W. Grayson and Samuel Logan’s *The Executioner’s Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs and the Shadow State They Created* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

24. To understand the transformation of the drug market prohibition and the effects on Mexico, see Gabriela Recio’s “Drugs and Alcohol: US Prohibition and the Origins of the Drug Trade in Mexico, 1910–1930,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 1 (February 2002) 21–42. More on the prohibition and drug-related violence is available in Nigel Inkster and Virginia Comolli’s *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States: The Problems of Prohibition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); and Sue Pryce’s *Fixing Drugs: The Politics of Drug Prohibition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Interior in Felipe Calderón's cabinet, who has had senior positions in offices related to Mexico's planned strategy against drug-trafficking and organized crime.²⁵

Poiré's article provides more details on the actions and achievements that the Mexican authorities have introduced to confront, in his words, "this crisis of public security." For the wary reader, Poiré does not recognize explicitly the failings of Calderón's strategy as the other contributors to these volumes do. He does acknowledge some of the obstacles ahead, however. He argues that the problem of drug-related crime can't be blamed only on Mexico. He concludes that

this problem has resulted from and been transformed by globalization. In different countries it has many different expressions: in some countries certain drugs are produced, and in others illegal products are trafficked; in others still, organizations reap the benefits of their links to local gangs or corrupt local security institutions. (2012, 25)²⁶

His narrative defends the strategy adopted by Calderón of ensuring criminal organizations were controlled. He argues that Mexico, rather than conducting a war on drugs, has to fight organized criminality that no longer only dedicates itself to the export of drugs, but that has diversified and expanded into other criminal activities.²⁷ He proposes that the strategy developed under Calderón's presidency aimed to strengthen the state's capacity to weaken the top cartel leadership and to enhance the state's capacity to fight these organizations effectively on the local level to reduce crime.

In his analysis, he explains two major setbacks that remain a significant problem. He first promotes the idea of a "Mando único" or single Police Command to better centralize the command of police activities.²⁸ He argues that it is difficult to tackle criminal activities with more than 2,000 municipal police forces, 32 state police forces, and the federal police force, all of which offer different degrees of

25. Other scholarly work by this author can be read in "Taught to Protest, Learning to Lose," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1 (January 2007), 73–87.

26. For the globalization of the drug-trafficking process, see the outstanding account in Paul Gootenberg's *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

27. Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan's *Studies in Gangs and Cartels* (Routledge, 2013) explains, in detail, the changing nature of organized crime and its relationship with states.

28. On the debate of the Mando Único, see Juan Carlos Montero's "La estrategia contra el crimen organizado en México: análisis del diseño de la política pública," *Perfiles Latinoamericanos* 39 (Enero–Junio 2012), 7–30; and Manuel Villoria's "La infraestructura burocrática importa: el caso de la lucha contra el crimen organizado en México," *Reforma y Democracia* 48 (Octubre 2010).

coordination and cooperation. The second issue is impunity. Poiré argues that impunity persists as an obstacle especially in local jurisdictions where crime remains unresolved. He compares the local to the federal level and concludes that in the latter a majority of criminal offenses are convicted by a judge.

Most murders in Mexico, particularly when the crime seems to have taken place in the context of drug-related disputes, do not lead to an indictment, much less a guilty verdict.²⁹ The historian Pablo Piccato presents a revealing essay on journalism, crime, and impunity in Mexico. He argues that even though only 66 of the 30,000 murders committed during Calderón's presidency were journalists, the numbers shed light on a fundamental problem about violence and the role journalism played during recent Mexican history. He provides details of how newspaper reporting of police news—the *nota roja* (yellow press)—was the most influential and widely read part of Mexican journalism during the twentieth century. He gives solid historical proofs to conclude that “criminal organizations and the public officials who collaborate with them care deeply about what is published as police news; thus, they try to control news reporting with violence or other means” (2012, 50). He argues that public opinion, especially the public's perception of their power, is important for criminal organizations. The result is a constant competition to appear to be the most powerful actor in a particular place and to give credible and thus effective messages. Piccato brings out evidence of how criminal organizations “attack or threaten journalists because they want reporting to have a specific slant.” But also, he claims that journalists are targets of attacks because “they can reveal the structure of local and regional alliances and the weaknesses in a group's control of a city” (2012, 61). He concludes that it has become an essential task that, through the exercise of free journalism, civil society can have access to information and a critical perspective on both state and criminal organizations, especially on the attempts of the former to neutralize violent actors.³⁰

Articles by Poiré and Piccato are consequently related to the essay by Mario Palma. The author observes an important aspect about

29. For an account of the prosecutorial challenge for the Mexican judicial system and narco-related homicides, see Sara Schatz's “The Mexican Judiciary & the Prosecution of Organized Crime: The Long Road Ahead,” *Trends in Organized Crime* 14 (2011), 347–360.

30. For an in-depth review of Mexican journalism and its role in the country's main political, social, and criminal issues, see Sallie Hughes's *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

information handling: the challenge statistical agencies face in producing information on the subjects of government, public security, and justice. Palma looks at the recent experience of the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI), where he acted as vice president of the board of governors. He argues that toward the end of 2008, when the worsening of the public security situation in the country reached high levels of public awareness, from a statistical point of view there was not much quality information available on crime. Palma demonstrates how it was submerged in this scenario that the INEGI had to alter course, first by acquiring legal autonomy from the executive branch, and second, by becoming the official producer of information and coordinator of all government units producing statistical and geographic information at federal, state, and local levels. He details how in order to tackle the challenges in the production of information, INEGI started to produce municipal and state censuses; crime surveys were carried out annually to cover public security, perception, and the performance of the relevant authorities; and a monthly index was built on survey perception to complement the annual crime survey. Even though Palma states clearly some of INEGI's achievements in the last couple of years, he does not address directly what role INEGI's information plays in the making of public security policies. He assures readers that the quantity and quality of the information will be a relevant factor when security agencies evaluate or formulate public policies, but he fails to address any formal mechanisms of networked security governance between INEGI and the rest of the stakeholders.

In conclusion, these books contribute vastly to understanding the role violence and insecurity has played during recent Mexican history. Taken together, they suggest how the Mexican state has been challenged directly for control over the legitimate use of force and reveal the state's inability to rein in the uncontrolled level of violence.³¹ Recently elected president Enrique Peña Nieto inherits a challenging legacy from Felipe Calderón's *sexenio*. Managing economic reforms will not be the same as proposing and applying a new government security strategy. Mexico has seen a boom in policing reforms in the past decades that have shown little success.³² Even though the

31. Fernando Celaya Pacheco, "Narcofearance: How Has Narcoterrorism Settled in Mexico?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (2009) 1021–1048.

32. Anthony P. LaRose and Sean A. Maddan "Reforming La Policía: Looking to the Future of Policing in Mexico," *Police Practice and Research* 10, no. 4 (August 2009) 333–348.

transition from Calderón to Peña Nieto differed vastly from *el cambio*,³³ in structural terms, Berruecos and Rodríguez are right to emphasize in *Mexico's Struggle for Public Security: Organized Crime and State Responses* how the theme of insecurity has highlighted the need to address profound social inequalities, improve the coordination among the different levels of government agencies, and promote a serious push for more proactive and responsible institutions in order to deepen the institutional transformations that have characterized the past few years.³⁴ Peña Nieto will have to adjust his security strategy in a changing political landscape. He will have to deal with the unwanted coexistence of organized crime and adjust resources, behaviors, priorities, and most of all, like Kenny and Serrano propose in *Mexico's Security Failure, Collapse into Criminal Violence*, address the political will, at home and abroad, to formally erase any toleration or collusion with organized crime.³⁵ In this vein, Watt and Zepeda make a vital contribution to the knowledge of US-Mexico security cooperation in *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*. Their stance toward Washington's role in drug policy has come to synthesize other alternative interpretations to the political economy understanding of the war on drugs.³⁶ Literature points to a mutual future where Mexico's rule of law still depends in a considerable way on the decisions taken by its northern partner,³⁷ especially in how to link security and democracy more organically.

33. See Louise Shelley, "Corruption and Organized Crime in Mexico in the Post-PRI Transition," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 17 (2001), 213–231.

34. For some policy recommendations on these topics, see Carlos J. Vilalta Perdomo's "El miedo al crimen en México: estructura lógica, bases empíricas y recomendaciones iniciales de política pública," *Gestión y Política Pública* 19, no. 1 (2010) 3–36.

35. For a discussion on government attitudes toward organized crime, see John Bailey and Matthew M. Taylor's "Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organized Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico," *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 2 (2009) 3–29; and Daniel Sabet's "Confrontation, Collusion and Tolerance: The Relationship Between Law Enforcement and Organized Crime in Tijuana," *Mexican Law Review* 2, no. 2 (2009), 3–29.

36. See Julien Mercille's "Violent Narco-Cartels or US Hegemony? The Political Economy of the 'War on Drugs' in Mexico," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 9 (2011) 1637–1653.

37. For a recent contribution on this topic, see Shannon O'Neill's *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).³⁸