VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRACY: SECURITY POLICY AND NGOS IN MEXICO

Pablo Estrada

Mexico's transition to democracy by means of peaceful elections and institutional reforms during the 1990´s and 2000´s has paid off.[1] The country is now the 14th economy in the world, measured by gross domestic product.[2] In contrast with the crises of the 1980´s, sound macroeconomic policies produce stable inflation and foreign currency exchange rates, environment that contributed to a quick recovery after the 2008-2009 recession.[3] In addition, the successful hosting of the 16th Conference of the Parts on Climate Change in 2010 and the 2012 Presidency of the G-20 are hallmarks of the country's relevance as an international actor.[4]

At the same time, Mexico faces a major security challenge. During the administration of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), in spite of institutional reforms to strengthen state capacity around 83 thousand deaths were related to organized crime.[5] The Freedom House freedom rating for Mexico fell from 2.0 (free) to 3.0 (partly free)[6] largely because of the excesses committed by security forces and drug cartels, along with the limits

[1] For a more recent picture of Mexico's achievements see Shannon O'Neil, "Mexico Makes It", *Foreign Affairs*, 92 (2013), March/April, pp. 52-63.

[2] *World Development Indicators Database*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, December 21, 2012 (http://databank.worldbank.org/databank/download/GDP.pdf, consulted on 02/23/2013).

[3] Further detail in *OECD Economic Surveys. Mexico*, Paris, OECD, 2011 (http://www.oecd.org/eco/47875549.pdf, consulted on 02/23/2013).

[4] See, for example, Robert Stavins, "What Happened (and Why): An Assessment of the Cancun Agreements", *grist.org*, December 15, 2010, (http://grist.org/article/2010-12-14-what-happened-and-why-an-assessment-of-the-cancun-agreements/, consulted on 02/23/2013), and Jeremy Browne, "Mexico's G-20 Leadership Represents a Global Shift", *The Huffington Post*, February 20, 2012 (http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jeremy-browne/mexico-g20-leadership-represents-global-shift_b_1287617.html, consulted on 02/23/2013).

[5] The yearly peak was in 2011, with 24 thousand deaths. Enrique Mendoza and Rosario Mosso, "El Presidente de las 83 mil Ejecuciones", *Zeta*, November 26, 2012 (http://www.zetatijuana.com/ZETA/reportajez/el-presidente-de-las-83-mil-ejecuciones/, consulted on 02/23/2013). The figures are disputed largely decause of the difficulties in defining when a murder is related to organized crime. The cited source presents figures that tend to be among those that give the highest number of victims.

[6] *Freedom in the World 2012. Mexico Country Report*, Freedom House, Washington, D.C., 2012 (http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/mexico, consulted on 02/23/2013).

to press freedom imposed by this violent entourage. Even more, the United States Joint Forces Command suggested that the Mexican state was in risk of a "rapid and sudden collapse."[7]

Between the consolidation of the Mexican democracy and the security problem we can find non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Their emergence is a clear sign of the new democratic times, as opposed to the co-option of almost all relevant public associations during the authoritarian regime. Also, out of the universe of Mexican NGOs there are a number of them with direct stakes on the security sector reform, wanting to be active participants in this public policy issue.

In this paper I will examine the process by which NGOs have tried to influence the public policy process to attend the security problem in Mexico. The overall topic of this discussion is that of non-state actors trying to influence policy decisions related to a major national challenge in a recently democratized country. Hence, actors that were marginalized or inexistent during an authoritarian rule attempt to gain spaces to be active participants in decision-making processes under an environment that is assumed to be free and that encourages contestation.[8]

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[7] *Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force*, Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 36 (http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyarchive/2008/JOE2008.pdf, consulted on 02/09/2013).

[8] The participation of civil society in policy processes must be seen with the appropriate light. On the one hand, it is not the first time that non-state actors actively participate in reforming state institutions in Mexico. The creation of an independent electoral management body and the push for clean elections in the 1990´s, along with the promotion of government transparency and access to public information laws in the early 2000's occurred with a close involvement of NGOs, networks of independent experts, and the pressure of citizens in general. These reforms were aimed against two central features of the authoritarian regime: election rigging and administrative opacity. (For instance, the NGO Alianza Cívica, Civic Alliance, has participated in both of them. See their website: http://www.alianzacivica.org.mx/Antecedentes.php, consulted on 31/03/2013). On the other hand, the participation of NGOs in security affairs is arguably the first case in Mexico in which non-government actors participate in a process of institutional reform under democratic rules, for which their not implicitly have an anti-authoritarian element. However, by trying to open spaces in the public sphere so that interested citizens can influence the policy process, the activities of NGOs further deepen the quality of democracy in Mexico.

The paper is divided into three sections. First, I present a brief theoretical framework on why non-state actors could participate in public policy processes. Second, I offer a glance to the Mexican transition to democracy and the security problem. Thirdly, I get to the empirical core of the article: the role of civil society in the security policy. I finish with some observations and questions for further research.

Non-State Actors and the Policy Cycle

Before getting to the subject at hand, it seems necessary to answer a question from a theoretical point of view: why could non-state actors (meaning any of the three branches of government) participate in the policy cycle (featuring problem identification and definition, agenda setting, design of alternatives of action, decision making, policy implementation, and evaluation)? A brief discussion of this issue will allow a better understanding the relationship between NGOs and the government in Mexico in relation to security topics.

Two kinds of responses can be offered. One is the "public administration and governance" answer, and the other is the "issue network" answer. Although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they cast light on different aspects of the reasons to open spaces for participation in the policy cycle.

The "public administration and governance" answer focuses on the quasi-need to incorporate non-state actors into state activities given the acknowledged lack of resources, inputs, or capacities of the state or its partners to do everyday public administration activities.

This idea can be found as the basic assumption of the so-called Washington Consensus reforms and the actions to correct them. The goal of the Washington Consensus

was to reduce the scope of the state[9] by selling to the private sector previously public-owned enterprises. Bureaucracies were assumed to be inefficient due to their inflexibility;[10] privatizing some of the state agencies was expected to be a remedy for that.[11] Decisions previously made by governments were now in the hands of businessmen, such as the prices and conditions under which public services would be offered. However, there were some limits to the reduction of the scope of the state. Notably, the private sector was unable to define collective interests due to its natural logic of seeking particular gains and because it was unable to provide any kind of representation.[12]

Hence, it was necessary to revert in some extent the reduction of the state and to involve citizens in its tasks. Accountability, transparency, and re-regulation were some tools that would facilitate the interactions between citizens and public officials: society would provide more timely and adequate inputs for the work of agencies, whereas their outputs would be closer to what their clients needed.[13] Furthermore, the state can actually collaborate with other actors, individual or organized, in the design and implementation of

[9] Synthetizing Max Weber and Theda Skocpol, a state will be defined here as an ensemble of interrelated agencies, states are expected to impose authority over a defined territory, recurring to force if necessary. Within the scope of that definition there are substantial variations of real-world states, usually along the lines of scope, the array of activities a state seeks to accomplish, and strength, the ability to enforce its own policies and laws. See Max Weber, "La Política como Vocación", in *id.*, *El Político y el Científico*, trans. by José Chávez, Mexico City, Ediciones Coyoacán, 1994, p. 8; Theda Skocpol, *El Estado y las Revoluciones Sociales*, Mexico City, FCE, 1984, p. 61; and Francis Fukuyama, "The Imperative of State Building", *Foreign Affairs*, 15 (2004), no. 3, pp. 17-31 (pp. 21-26).

[10] See OECD, *Modernising Government. The Way Forward*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2005, pp. 18-20.

[11] One of the earliest critical visions on the Washington Consensus can be found in Paul Krugman, "Dutch tulips and emerging markets", *Foreign Affairs*, 74 (1995), no. 4, pp. 28-44. A discussion on the range of the reforms can be found in Moises Naim, "Fads and Fashion in Economic Reforms: Washington Consensus or Washington Confusion", *Third World Quarterly*, 21 (2000), no. 3, pp. 505-528 (especially pp. 506-509).

[12] Martin Painter and Jon Pierre, "Unpacking Policy Capacity", in *id.* (eds.), *Challenges to State Policy Capacity. Global Trends and Comparative Perspectives*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 1-18 (pp. 1-2).

[13] B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, "Introduction: The Role of Public Administration in Governing", in *id.* (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, 2nd ed., London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, and Singapore, SAGE Publications, 2012.

policies.[14] Individual citizens or associations of them could do this; they promote values to improve the quality of the government activities, and promote the discussion of topics of public interest which could eventually reach the policy agenda.[15] Ideally, this pattern of power relations, where non-state actors share with it some of its scope and strength, contributes to the democratization of the public space.[16]

The second kind of answer to why non-state actors can participate in the public policy process, the "issue network" argument, focuses on the expertise and stakes of some actors regarding a particular policy issue, reason for which they pressure for being included in its debates or public officers judge necessary to incorporate them in the discussions of that policy.

Issue networks are defined simply as "webs of influence [that] provoke and guide the exercise of power."[17] Issue networks have two characteristics: scope and expertise. Scope refers to all those actors in the private and public sectors that are interested or have stakes in a particular policy issue. The scope of issue networks indicates all the actors that could eventually influence the policy cycle. Ideally, all their points of view and interests could be taken as inputs when designing or enforcing a regulation. The second characteristic of issue networks, expertise, accounts for the knowledge, information, skills, or administrative resources necessary to influence decisions that some actors have. Reasons

[14] See Mark Bevir, *Democratic Governance*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 17-38 (especially pp. 29), and Stephen Goldsmith and William D. Eggers, *Governing by Network. The New Shape of the Public Sector*, Washington, D.C., John F. Kennedy School of Government and The Brookings Institution, 2004, pp. 3-52 (in particular 3-24).
[15] Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, 2nd ed., Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2009, and Michael Walzer, "A Better Vision: The Idea of Civil Society", in Virgina Hodgkinson and Michael Foley (eds.), *The Civil Society Reader*, Lebanon, NH, University Press of New England, 2003, pp. 306-321 (especially pp. 317-321).
[16] Mark Bevir, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[17] Hugh Heclo, "Issue networks and the executive establishment", in Anthony King (ed.), *The New American Political System*, Washington, D.C., American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979. pp. 87-124 (p. 102).

for expertise include specialized training, positions within a private or public organization, or personal experience. The group of citizens that is potentially affected in a positive or negative way by the government changing its policies can always be part of the scope of an issue network. Their expertise could emerge from the fact that they are under a particular condition and can provide inputs for government action.

As can be seen, both answers on why non-state actors can participate in public policy decisions not only are not contradictory, but even overlap. The state and its partners can run out of inputs, resources, or capacities to attend a policy issue ("public administration and governance" perspective). At the same time, other actors might be interested in collaborating because it affects them and can contribute with what the state is missing to act ("issue network" perspective). The above contributes to understand *why* non-state actors could participate in policy discussions. The question on *how* they can achieve that remains. The rest of the article addresses this point in relation to Mexican NGOs advocating for security. Before doing so, it is necessary to offer a background of the two processes within which NGOs have emerged and participated: the transition to democracy and the changes in the implementation of the security policy.

Mexico's Democratization and Security Reforms

Mexico's transition to democracy can be understood as a series of adjustments in state institutions aimed at responding to particular challenges in diverse policy areas. The consequences of those reforms, maybe unintentional at the beginning but certainly intentional in later stages, led to the decentralization of power away from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which first arrived to the Presidency in 1929, and hence to the

democratization of the country.[18] (See Annex 1, Highlights of Mexico's Transition to Democracy.)

For many political actors, notably businessmen, the party was largely responsible for the economic crisis that began in the late 1970´s; cosmetic countermeasures only worsened the situation in the next decade, leading to a major foreign debt crisis, devaluation, and inflation. One of the first attempts to face those problems was the reform of electoral laws for the federal Chamber of Deputies, offering some spaces for opposition parties (which were intended to serve as scape valves), and of the administration of municipal governments (by which the federal government tacitly acknowledged that itself alone would not be able to solve all the problems related to the economic crisis). In fact, the PRI lost the capacity to control all spaces and actors of the political system.

Those reforms opened some real, although initially small, centers for decision-making away from the PRI. During the 1990s, PRI governments and the opposition parties, who were trying to make the best of the representation spaces they had won, deepened the previous reforms. The touchstone for the transition came when the PRI lost the 2000 presidential election to the National Action Party (PAN). As an outcome of the democratization process, the state rearranged power relations in favor of the private sector,

[18] The decentralization was expected to cover all areas of public life: a real separation of powers, de-regulation of economic activity, privatization of state enterprises, the opening of real contestation spaces for parties other than the PRI, financial and administrative autonomy of state and municipal governments, and the autonomous organization of elections. Some of the works that I am making indirect reference to are Kevin Middlebrook, "La Liberalización Política en un Régimen Autoritario: el Caso de México", in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead, *Transiciones desde un Gobierno Autoritario. América* Latina, trans. by Jorge Piatigorsky, Barcelona and Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1994, pp. 187-224; Luis Medina, *Hacia el Nuevo Estado. México 1920-1994*, 2nd ed., Mexico City, FCE, 1995; Nora Lustig, *México. Hacia la Reconstrucción de una Economía*, 2nd ed., trans. by Eduardo Suárez and Peter Lustig, Mexico City, FCE – El Colegio de México, 2002; Mauricio Merino, *La Transición Votada. Crítica a la interpretación del Cambio Político en México*, Mexico City, FCE, 2003; and Soledad Loaeza, *Las Consecuencias Políticas de la Expropiación Bancaria*, Mexico City, El Colegio de México, 2008. Needless to say, this is not a comprehensive sample of academic pieces on the subject; but each of their authors are widely acknowledged as authorities in the specific topic they write about.

autonomous agencies (new or reformed), and other branches and levels of government. Many new non-state actors were incorporated into governmental activities, including NGOs, which emerged as a consequence of the lost of influence of PRI-controlled unions and to the diversification of interests of society, once the party no longer shaped political action.[19] Politics was no longer centralized around the PRI.

What have been the changes on the security policy? Organized crime, understood simply as the association of three or more people to commit crime,[20] has always been present in Mexico. However, the visibility of those organizations and their interactions with the government have been different in time. (See Annex 2, Highlights of Mexico's Security Policy). Until the administration of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), the existing anti-narcotics policies were clearly implemented under the idea of prohibitionism:[21] efforts were concentrated mostly in eradicating drug crops and in seeking and detaining leaders of criminal organizations. The Army has been the primary actor in carrying out those tasks, with some support from the police.[22] The goal was to forestall drug trafficking, not to combat its roots. It was assumed that a larger state strength was essential to meet this goal.

[19] The emergence of NGOs is complex process requiring a deeper explanation than what could fit into this paper. For the time being, it should be enough to sketch the idea that a consequence of the lost of control of the PRI over society was the emergence of NGOs. See Fernanda Somuano, "Nongovernmental organizations and the Changing Structure of Mexican Politics", in Laura Randall (ed.), *Changing Structure in Mexico: Political, Social, and Economic Prospects*, 2nd ed., Columbia University, New York City, 2006, pp. 489-500.

[20] The law provides a detailed list of the crimes than can fall under the consideration of organized crime. Among those are terrorism, drug trafficking, currency falsification, arms storing and trafficking, or trafficking in persons (*Ley Federal Contra la Delincuencia Organizada*, article 2). The most powerful organizations are able to carry out most, if not all, of the activities above, separating its structure into "specialized branches", as divisions of a firm. For this reason, it is possible to talk generically about organized crime, without specifying the kind of illegal activity a group focuses on. However, it should be noticed that in this paper the term criminal organizations will be used in reference to groups whose main, but not necessarily only, activity is drug trafficking.

[21] See Froylán Enciso, "Los Fracasos del Chantaje. Régimen de Prohibición de Drogas y Narcotráfico", in Arturo Alvarado and Mónica Serrano (coords.), *Seguridad Nacional y Seguridad Interior*, Mexico City, El Colegio de México, 2010, pp. 61-104 (especially pp. 83-89).

[22] Raúl Benítez, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations during Democratization", in Andrew Selee and Jacqueline Peschard (eds.), *Mexico's Democratic Challenges*, Washington, D.C. and Stanford, Woodrow Wilson Center and Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. 162-186.

Hence, diverse intelligence and law enforcement agencies were created during the 1990s, mostly within the existing Secretariats (that of the Interior and the Attorney General's office being the most important).[23] Those reforms were supposed to increase the capacity of the state, but criminal organizations were far from being neutralized. Many offenses that the new agencies were supposed to combat (bearing of illegal fire weapons, fiscal fraud, kidnapping, money laundering, piracy, and drug trafficking) actually increased due to the increasing power of criminal organizations (which were capable of more or less easily buying off public officers, effectively infiltrating security agencies) and the poor resources of the existing agencies.[24]

The administration of Vicente Fox, the first post-PRI president (2000-2006), can be thought of as a bridge between prohibitionism and a reform of state scope to attend the security problem. During this period, the most relevant novelty in the combat to crime was the creation of the Secretariat for Public Security. Previously, all actions and resources directed towards the security policy were controlled by the highly politicized Secretariat of Governance. By creating a specialized Secretariat just for security issues, it was expected that the design and implementation of the security policy would gain more autonomy and that the federal police would begin its path towards professionalization.[25]

In 2006, Felipe Calderón took office as President of Mexico, introducing the idea of a "face-to-face combat" to organized crime, as opposed to the previous prohibitionist

[23] Jorge Chabat, "La Respuesta del Gobierno de Felipe Calderón al Desafío del Narcotráfico: Entre lo Malo y lo Peor", in Arturo Alvarado and Mónica Serrano, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-40 (pp. 25-27).
[24] It has also been suggested that some top officials of the government established pacts with the leaders of some trafficking organizations: no aggressions from the government in exchange of somehow supporting PRI candidates or receiving a substantial bribe. See *Estado y Seguridad Pública*, Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005, pp. 39-43, and Froylán Enciso, cited article, p. 84.
[25] Noticeably, the reform plan considered to "promote citizen participation in crime prevention", especially by means of rebuilding the chronically ill trust between society and the police (as an organization and as individual agents). However, it is not clearly stated how this was expected to happen. The reforms are described in larger detail in *Estado y Seguridad Pública*, pp. 47-62.

approach, still under which Fox's reforms took place. The intention was to use military operations to wipe out criminal presence in some parts of the country, while continuing the professionalization of security agencies and personnel. However, as criminals moved from location, they entered into territory controlled by enemy groups. Confrontations began among them, the government being unable to control the consequent violence.[26] This handicap suggests that the existing institutional scope and strength was inadequate to match the firepower of criminal organizations, which was not evident until a change in the security policy occurred.[27]

Violence and NGOs in Mexico

It is within this context that civil society and non governmental organizations (NGOs) enter the scene. With the decentralization of power away from the PRI opening spaces for political participation, and parallel to the inefficiency of security reforms, citizens began to organize in reaction to the increasing irruption in their daily lives of organized crime.

Many of the organizations that would become the national image of the role of NGOs in security issues were created after personal experiences, mainly the kidnapping of

[26] Jorge Chabat, cited article, pp. 29-30.

[27] It is debatable whether or not this represents a shift in the strategy or in the scope of state activities. Some analysts suggest that the goal was still to disrupt the activities of organized crime, rather than attacking its roots (poverty, the lack of state presence in all the territory). Others stress that its novelty relies in the institution strengthening component (professionalization of security forces, polygraph tests to officials, or re-engineering of security agencies) and in targeting the sources of power of criminal organizations. In any case, However, once drug cartels acquired more power, it was clear that the state was unable to deal with it, thus having to reform its security scope and strength. Compare José Luis Piñeyro, "Las Fuerzas Armadas Mexicanas en la Seguridad Pública y la Seguridad Nacional", in Arturo Alvarado and Mónica Serrano (coords.), *op. cit.*, pp. 156-190 (pp. 157-163), Carlos Rico, "La Iniciativa Mérida y el Combate Nacional al Crimen Organizado", *Foreign Affairs en Español*, 8 (2008), no. 1, pp. 3-13 (pp. 5-7), and Felipe Calderón, "Todos Somos Juárez: An Innovative Strategy to Tackle Violence and Crime", *Latin American Policy Journal*, Winter 2013 (http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k85105&state=popup&topicid=icb.topic1090422&view=view.do&viewParam_popupFromPageContentId=icb.pagecontent1084690, consulted on 02/17/2013).

a spouse or a child (hence the origin of their expertise). In addition to these traumas, the victims' relatives sometimes faced law enforcement and judicial systems from which they could not always or not easily obtain the necessary help because of their organizational complexity, intentional or involuntary incompetence, or corruption from officers. The fact that judicial investigations did not always take place or were not always conclusive, which meant that justice was not made, plus retaliation threats from criminal organizations if victims asked authorities for help generated the necessity of pressuring the government to attend security issues.[28]

The influence played and means of action used by NGOs in the security problem changed through time. It went from underscoring citizens' concerns on the issue, so it could be included in the public agenda, to having voice in law making. Here I present two avenues which illustrate these changes: mobilization and dialogue.

Protests for security

NGOs made their appearance in the security issue network by means of demonstrations, first in Mexico City and then in other large cities throughout the country. They took place on November 29, 1997, June 27, 2004, and August 30, 2008. In each case, the objective

[28] As an illustration, I mention three examples of people whose names are widely recognized in the media and in the social advocacy community, and whose stories span over a ten-year period. Maria Elena Morera had her husband kidnapped in 2001. After being mutilated by his captors, he was liberated with the help of the authorities. Afterwards, she became the president of México Unido Contra la Delincuencia (Mexico United Against Crime). Isabel Miranda de Wallace's son was kidnapped and murdered in 2005. Facing a very slow reaction from part of the authorities in investigating the fate of his son and finding the criminals, she made a parallel research that substantially contributed to the work of the police. She created the organization Asociación Alto al Secuestro (Stop Kidnapping Association). The son of writer Javier Sicilia was found dead inside a car along with other seven people. Allegedly, the murderers were related to a drug trafficking organization. He is the head of the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity). See Alberto Tavira, "María Elena Morera, una Mujer con muchos Pantalones", *Animal Político*, February 8, 2011 (http://www.animalpolitico.com/2011/02/maria-elena-morera-una-mujer-con-muchos-pantalones/#axzz2OsNNi100, consulted on 03/28/2013), and the websites of the organizations abovementioned: http://www.mucd.org.mx/Nuestra-Historia-c85i0.html, http://www.altoalsecuestro.com.mx/Nosotros.htm, http://movimientoporlapaz.mx/es/historia/.

was the same: to remind the government that it was being negligent to the security problem, situation that should be remedied as soon as possible. Hence, a noticeable impact of the whole set was to insert "from the bottom" the topic of security in the discussions of the public agenda.

The first protest of 1997 marked tendencies that continued in 2004 and 2008. First, NGOs have always been present in them. Although in 1997 there were still no national organizations advocating against violence, right after it México Unido Contra la Delincuencia (MUCD, Mexico United Against Crime) began its constitution. In the next protests, the leaders of MUCD and other NGOs coordinated them and were their protagonists. Even more, the 2008 protest was named by the media Iluminemos México (Let's Illuminate Mexico), which was the name of the *ad hoc* organization that was formed to coordinate it.[29]

Second, next to the presence of NGOs, individual citizens were the core of the protests. Intellectuals, politicians, and other people with no particular stakes in the problem participated in these events. However, organizers and the media tried to emphasize the individual stories of the people who marched, which always included victims or their relatives, underlining the social and shared nature of the claims for the government to better attend the security problem, as opposed to that being the interest of any particular organization.[30]

Thirdly, the protests always maintained a political color, although in different tones.

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[29] Specifically for the 2008 protest see: Nayeli Gutiérrez, "Los 10 Momentos Destacados de *Iluminemos México"*, *El Universal*, September 1, 2008 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/534476.html, consulted on 03/29/2013), and Enrique Duarte, "México Marcha contra el Secuestro", *CNN Expansión*, August 31, 2008 (http://www.cnnexpansion.com/actualidad/2008/08/31/mexico-marcha-contra-el-secuestro, consulted on 03/29/2013).

[30] Carolina García, "Asisten Ciudadanos Emblemáticos a *Iluminemos México*", *El Universal*, August 31, 2008 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/534309.html, consulted on 03/29/2008),

In general, mottos and chants were directed against the government and the President. In the demonstration of 1997, with the PRI still in power, members of opposition political parties that participated in the demonstrations received media attention. A protest against a bad policy (or lack thereof) was a protest against the government and, in this case, against the authoritarianism of the party that had ruled for almost seventy years.[31] This reported a direct benefit to opposition political parties, as they tried to secure a place in the political system. In 2004 and 2008, once the PRI was out of office, politicians had a much smaller, if any, role in the protests. This space was taken by relatives of victims obtained. This, added to the fact that the authoritarian system was no longer in place, changed the context of these events: they were not against an anti-democratic rule and for the opening of spaces for government opposition, but for a larger voice of citizens on public policy affairs, which would further deepen democracy. In addition, in 2008 there were hints of demands of accountability, as many protestors chanted "if you [authorities in general] can't [deal with the problem of insecurity], quit!"[32] However, at least until 2008 the apparent goal of citizens was not so much to participate in public debates, but rather to pressure the government to change its focus on the security policy.

Fourth, in time protests widened their scope of participation, enlarging the visibility of the members of the security policy network. In 1997, next to the role of politicians of opposition parties, it was noticeable that many of the demonstrators were upper- and mid-income urban classes of Mexico City. In 2004, this socio-demographic feature persisted, but an additional group participated: the mothers of teenager and young adult women

[31] Daniel Pastrana and Raúl Campos, "Clamor en el País contra la Violencia", *La Jornada*, November 30, 1997 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1997/11/30/marchas.html, consulted on 03/29/2013).
[32] Arturo Cano, "Decenas de Miles Corean en el Zócalo el Reclamo: '¡Si No Pueden, Renuncien!', *La Jornada*, August 31, 2008 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/08/31/index.php?section=politica&article=005n1pol, consulted on 03/29/2013).

murdered in impoverished areas of the northern state of Chihuahua.[33] And in 2008, the array of participants was more diverse. There were more organizations and, more importantly, the protest took place simultaneously in Mexico City and in other major urban areas of the country, allowing local claims to find a space of expression closer to their own authorities.

Within this last characteristic, the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity) deserves a separate commentary. This is not so much because it would have features substantially different to those of the previous protests or due to its effects. Being a movement instead of just a demonstration, however, gave it a continuity that the other events were not able to maintain for more than some days. Additionally, indeed it can be argued that in the aftermath of the creation of the Movement a set of round tables between the president and civil society to talk about security issues began. This was far from the outcome of other protests, which was limited to verbal support from and a closed-door meeting with high-level officials.[34] The relevance of the Movement is that it appeared in a new context: citizen concerns on security were not "only" due to kidnappings or robberies, but for the high (reaching thousands) and indiscriminate (including by-passers, complete families, or tenths of people at once) number of victims, which were part of the so-labeled "war against organized crime" wielded by the federal government.

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[33] "Rebasó a Organizadores el Reclamo de Miles contra la Inseguridad", *La Jornada*, June 29, 2004 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/06/28/003n2pol.php, consulted on 03/29/2013).

[34] It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess whether or not the protests had an impact on the security policy. After that of 1997, there was an almost threefold increase in the federal security budget, but it was not accompanied by administrative or legal changes in the strength or scope of the state for security tasks. At the same time, statistics on diverse crimes for 1999 continue with the tendencies they had for 1997-1998; however, it must be acknowledged that in the case there occurred a subtle change in the security policy, it would have been necessary more than one year for it to be evident in crime figures. *Estado y Seguridad Pública*, 26-43, and Alberto Cuenca, "Hace 11 Años, el Primer ¡Ya Basta!, y Nada Pasó", *El Universal*, August 29, 2008 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/161966.html, consulted on 03/29/2013).

The first action of the Movement was a march from Cuernavaca to Mexico City in 2011. When reaching its destination, speeches were pronounced, which urged all levels of government to pay more attention to the problem of security. So far, it was not so different to the previous protests. An initial novelty appeared weeks with a series of treks called the Caravans of Consolation, conducted by members of the Movement, Sicilia among them. Their objective was to collect first-hand testimonies and general information of the scope of the drug trafficking organizations-related violence, particularly in the most affected regions of the country, and to promote empathy among the victims of each community visited.[35]

All this contributed to the general message from NGOs to the government that the security problem should be attended in a different way. But by retrieving stories from all over the country the Movement also gave voice to those people who could not participate in any of the previous protests, which took place in large cities, far from where they lived. Hence, thus far the novelty of the Movement must be seen not in the substance of the message it promoted, but on its quality: more people are suffering more than what security demonstrations allow to see. Clearly, the scope and the expertise of the security policy network were very large, and the state was not demonstrating sufficient capacity in addressing the security problem. A window of opportunity opened to allow non-state actors to participate in the security policy discussions was open.

[35] Blog entries of the Caravan, in a daily journal style, can be read in the website of the Movement here: http://movimientoporlapaz.mx/tag/caravana-del-consuelo/. See also Oscar Guadarrama, "El Poeta Sicilia Lidera una Marcha Nacional por la Paz, Inédita en México", *CNN México*, May 5, 2011 (http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2011/05/05/javier-sicilia-encabeza-una-marcha-desde-cuernavaca-a-la-ciudad-de-mexico, consulted on 03/30/2013), and Elena Azaola, "El Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad", *Desacatos*, no. 40, September / December 2012, pp. 159-170 (http://www.ciesas.edu.mx/desacatos/40%20Indexado/testimonios.pdf, consulted on 03/30/2013).

Dialogues and Consultation

Concurrent with the protests, from July to October 2010 President Felipe Calderón hosted a series of meetings called "Dialogues for Security". He mentioned that the objective of the meetings was "to consolidate a real state policy by means of a frank, inclusive and constructive dialogue that takes us, above any difference, to a shared position in front of this common enemy [*i.e.*, criminal organizations]".[36] Arguably, this means he expected to create consensus around the way in which the state was facing organized crime. Notably, the first of them was with NGOs representatives (all NGOs invited to the meeting had participated in the protests, but not all NGOs that had participated in the protests were invited to the meeting). In further occasions, he discussed with the academia, political parties, the media, religious organizations, the judicial power, the legislative power, state governors, and municipal governors diverse aspects of the security policy, mainly those that were the most problematic for the interlocutor. As well, there were special meetings in the cities most affected by the violence, where specific programs were talked through.[37] What do these encounters say about the inclusion of non-state actors in general, and NGOs in particular, in the security policy process?

On the one hand, it could be assured that never before a public policy had been the object of such amount of discussion. Practically all relevant political groups, state and non-state, had a voice in the meetings. In fact, they used them as a forum to present their diagnosis of the implementation of the security policy. NGOs representatives, for instance, urged the President to fully implement the penal reform (to ensure effective and just trials

[36] "Felipe Calderón Invita a Líderes Partidistas a Dialogar por la Seguridad", *CNN México*, August 09, 2010 (http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/08/09/felipe-calderon-invita-a-lideres-partidistas-a-dialogar-por-la-seguridad, consulted on 01/04/2013).

[37] "El Presidente de México, Felipe Calderón, ha convocado y participado en 14 Diálogos por la Seguridad", Mexican Presidency Press Release, no date (http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/documentos/Dialogos_por_la_Seguridad.pdf, consulted on 01/04/2013).

to criminals) and to work with Congress to pass a new anti-kidnapping law.[38] Party leaders, governors, and legislators identified other problems: sound efforts against criminal financial assets were missing, budget allocations could be changed, and more coordination across state boundaries was necessary.[39] As well, media coverage and, hence, the exposure of the meetings was substantial, largely because they were public (in contrast with the first encounter with NGOs representatives, which was behind closed doors and newspapers reproduced the information given in the official press release) and were broadcasted live in internet and the radio.

In spite of these benefits, it is doubtable whether the dialogues produced any relevant outcomes. For instance, no concrete long-term agreement or document was agreed. State governors came to a pact to ameliorate the joint management of anti-crime operations; but a journalist noticed that 18 out of 31 of them would not be in office in one year due to elections, seriously compromising the continuity of this accord.[40] Furthermore, both the President and the Secretary of Governance insisted in the maintenance of the existing anti-narcotics strategy (what they contrasted to returning to the pervasive corruption and arguable passiveness of previous administrations), leaving an uncertain space for the relevance of the participation of non-state actors in discussions around the security policy.[41]

In spite of this, the dialogues were celebrated again on diverse occasions during

[38] For unclear reasons, in the meeting just three NGOs were represented. "Reunión de FCH con Presidentes y Representantes de Organizaciones Sociales", Mexican Presidency Press Release, June 21, 2010 (http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/07/reunion-de-fch-con-presidentes-y-representantes-de-organizaciones-sociales/, consulted on 01/04/2013).
[39] Alma Muñoz y Fabiola Martínez, "Frenar Operaciones y Poderío Económico del Crimen Organizado, Demanda Ebrard", *La Jornada*, August 13, 2010 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/08/13/politica/007n1pol, consulted on 04/01/2013).
[40] José Gerardo Mejía and Jorge Ramos Pérez, "Culminan Diálogos por la Seguridad", *El Universal*, August 12, 2010 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/701409.html, consulted on 04/01/2010).
[41] Hanako Taniguchi, "Calderón Admite Fallas en Estrategia de Seguridad e Inicia Nueva Etapa", *CNN México*, August 4, 2010 (http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/08/04/calderon-admite-fallas-en-estrategia-de-seguridad-e-inicia-nueva-etapa, consulted on 04/01/2010).

2011 with similar format and reach. Two of those meetings were with representatives of the movement organized by Javier Sicilia after the Caravans of Consolation had concluded. As previously with members of NGOs, attendants to this encounter confronted the President about the security policy and its death toll. However, in contrast with previous sessions, attendants were no public figures, but victims' relatives from the most affected areas of the country (grassroots stakeholders of the security policy network, so to speak), whose stories were known with the Caravans. Furthermore, they made a specific request that could benefit them as victims' relatives: they asked to include in the anti-crime strategy provisions to give the victims and their families legal, health, and psychological assistance, as well as some kind of protection from any eventual retaliation of criminals, in contrast to just strengthening military operations against drug cartels. Calderón insisted that it were the criminals, not the government's actions, that had caused the deaths, for which the policy would not change.[42]

In spite of this, the President and representatives of the Movement for Peace agreed to produce a novel law for victims; the Movement would help to draft it and the President would sign and apply it. The Senate received it in November 2011. The core of the proposal, prepared in collaboration with the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), followed the demands of the participants in the latest editions of the security dialogues: state-guaranteed protection, reparation, and attention to violence

[42] For the first meeting, in June 2011, see for example: Claudia Herrera and Alfonso Urrutia, "'No somos Daños Colaterales; Tenemos Nombre y Familia', Reclaman Deudos de las Víctimas", *La Jornada*, June 24, 2011 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/06/24/politica/003n1pol, consulted on 04/01/2013), and Jorge Ramos, "Avanza el Diálogo", *El Universal*, June 24, 2011 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/37143.html, consulted on 04/01/2013). For the second meeting see: Claudia Herrera and Alfonso Urrutia, "La Tentación Fascista Amenaza la Civilidad, Alerta Sicilia a Calderón", *La Jornada*, October 15, 2011 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/10/15/politica/005n1pol, consulted on 04/01/2011), and Jorge Ramos, "FCH: El Gobierno No Reprime Ni Asesina", *El Universal*, October 15, 2011 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/37936.html, consulted on 04/01/2013).

victims. For instance, it suggested the creation of a national victim registry, of a special office of the Attorney General for violence victims, and of a "damage-repair" fund.[43] In the course of the next months, and with a close scrutiny from the Movement for Peace and the media, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies discussed and finally approved the law. Of its 189 articles, just nine were modified from the original proposal and another was added; in no case the spirit of the document was affected.[44]

The law, however, was not published. When sent to President Calderón for signature, he returned it to the Congress, arguing that it had details that could contradict other regulations, reason for which he feared its possible beneficiaries could meet burdensome bureaucratic procedures instead of a timely attention. As well, he presented some doubts on the financial sustainability of the "damage-reparation" fund.[45] This triggered a series of reactions from all political actors that had a stake on the law. In the end, the discussion between the legislative and executive powers reached the Supreme

[43] Andrea Becerril, "UNAM: Debe el Estado Brindar Protección y Reparación del Daño a las Víctimas del Delito", *La Jornada*, December 19, 2011 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/12/19/politica/015n2pol, consulted on 04/01/2013). Further detail on the most relevant aspects of this law in Paris Martínez, "Ley para Víctimas de la Violencia: 8 Novedades a Debate", *Animal Político*, April 18, 2012 (http://www.animalpolitico.com/2012/04/ley-para-victimas-de-la-violencia-ocho-novedades-a-debate/#axzz2PGDoAOfb, consulted on 04/01/2013).

[44] Arguably, the closing of the legislature by the end of April 2012, and presidential and legislative elections that summer were two factors that could have speeded the chambers in the approval of the law (this, of course, next to their interest in meeting the promise made in the dialogues). See Andrea Becerril and Víctor Ballinas, "Aprueba el Senado en Comisiones Ley General de Víctimas del Crimen", *La Jornada*, April 25, 2012 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/04/25/politica/005n1pol, consulted on 04/05/2013), Andrea Becerril and Víctor Ballinas, "El Estado Ya es Corresponsable de la Seguridad de las Víctimas", *La Jornada*, April 26, 2012 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/04/26/politica/007n1pol, consulted on 04/05/2012) and Roberto Garduño and Enrique Méndez, "La Cámara de Diputados Aprueba sin Cambios la Ley General de Víctimas", *La Jornada*, May 1, 2012 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/05/01/politica/015n1pol, consulted on 04/05/2013).

[45] Ángeles Cruz, "Veta Calderón la Ley de Víctimas; Pide al Congreso Aclarar el Tema de los Subsidios", *La Jornada*, July 5, 2012 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/07/05/politica/016n1pol, consulted on 04/05/2013), and "Calderón Regresa Ley General de Víctimas al Congreso", *Animal Político*, July 4, 2012 (http://www.animalpolitico.com/2012/07/ejecutivo-regresa-ley-general-de-victimas-al-congreso/#axzz2PdGxfi3M, consulted on 04/05/2013).

Court in the shape of a constitutional controversy over law-passing procedures.[46] Noticeably, Javier Sicilia and members of the Movement for Peace call the situation a veto of the President, agruing he was acting contrary to the word he gave during the dialogues without consulting any expert or stakeholder. A spin-off movement, "Yes to the Victims Law", was created in support of the proposition.[47] Other organizations which had participated in previous anti-violence demonstrations, however, supported the arguments of Calderón, suggesting that indeed the law presented a number of practical problems that could turn into serious implementation problems (such as inter-agency coordination, the distribution of tasks between federal and state governments, or the precise definition of the role to be played, if any, by NGOs in the attention of victims) if left without changes.[48]

The polemic surrounding the law did not finish until Calderón left office in December 2012 and his successor, Enrique Peña, removed from the Supreme Court the file of constitutional controversy within days of the beginning of his administration. Weeks later, he signed the law and it was promulgated.[49] This did not solve any of the concerns previously stated by some organizations; consequently, almost immediately after its publication there were claims to reform it. NGOs that participated in demonstrations, the

[46] Fernando Camacho, Andrea Becerril, and Ciro Pérez, "La Corte Admite Controversia del Ejecutivo Contra Ley de Víctimas", *La Jornada*, July 25, 2012 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/07/25/politica/005n1pol, consulted on 04/05/2013).

[47] "El Gobierno Intenta 'Vetar' la Ley de Víctimas, Dice Movimiento Por la Paz", *CNN México*, July 5, 2013 (http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2012/07/05/el-gobierno-intenta-vetar-la-ley-de-victimas-dice-movimiento-por-la-paz, consulted on 04/05/2013), and Jorge Ramos, "Diálogo, Hasta que Publiquen la Ley de Víctimas: Sicilia", *El Universal*, July 17, 2012 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/859495.html, consulted on 04/01/2013).

[48] See, for instance, "Ley General de Víctimas, los Argumentos de Los Pinos", *México SOS*, July 16, 2012 (http://mexicosos.org/noticias/ley-general-de-victimas-los-argumentos-de-los-pinos, consulted on 04/02/2013).

[49] Omar Granados, "Retira Presidencia Controversia por Ley de Víctimas", *Animal Político*, December 6, 2012 (http://www.animalpolitico.com/2012/12/pena-nieto-reactivara-ley-de-atencion-de-victimas/#axzz2PGDoAOfb, consulted on 04/01/2013), and Paris Martínez, "Publican Ley General de Víctimas", *Animal Político*, January 9, 2013 (http://www.animalpolitico.com/2013/01/pena-nieto-anuncia-hoy-entrada-en-vigor-de-la-ley-general-de-victimas/#axzz2PGDoAOfb, consulted on 04/01/2013).

dialogues and other activities to influence security policy participated in writing the draft of the reforms, and constantly mentioned that the law should not be understood as a product of their work, but as the acknowledgement of a state obligation to the victims of violence.[50]

Conclusion – Violence and Opportunities for Democracy

In this paper I have tried to sketch the ways in which non-governmental organizations have tried to influence the discussions of the security policy. The overall context of this discussion was that of a country emerging from a democratization process. I offered two theoretical answers, non-mutually exclusive, on why new non-state actors could be allowed to participate in policy discussions: the state acknowledges that it lacks some kind of resource which the non-state actor has, or non-state actors have a particular stake or expertise in participating in policy discussions, reason for which they will fight to make their voice heard or which will prompt government officials to include them in the policy process.

Elements of both the "public administration and governance" and the "issue network" answers were found in the process by which NGOs in Mexico tried to participate in security policy discussions. Beginning with the first protest in 1997, until the presentation of the victims' law draft in 2011, NGOs always made clear that they possessed the necessary expertise to participate in policy discussions. Leaders of many NGOs had been victims of violence, or their relatives had. In addition, they collected stories and demands of victims from all over the country. In this sense, they demonstrated they

[50] Andrea Becerril and Víctor Ballinas, "Senadores Llevan al Pleno Iniciativa para Reformar Ley de Víctimas", *La Jornada*, February 20, 2013 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/02/20/politica/009n3pol, consulted on 04/05/2013), "Senado Aprueba Reformas a la Ley de Víctimas en Comisiones", *Animal Político*, March 21, 2013 (http://www.animalpolitico.com/2013/03/senado-aprueba-reformas-a-ley-de-victimas-en-comisiones/#axzz2PdGxfi3M, consulted on 04/05/2013).

belonged to the security policy network. Next to this, the dialogues could be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of the government for some kind of feedback in the implementation of the security policy. The agreement to produce the victims' law was a request to NGOs to help with a task that public authorities could not do by themselves, knowing the precise needs of victims. The "public administration and governance" answer also appears in the story. In contrast to the authoritarian system, it is clear that going from the first attempts of NGOs in trying to define the policy agenda to actually drafting a new law makes a case that, with the participation of non-state actors in the policy process, democratization has been deepened in Mexico.

The above provides insight on why and how NGOs were included in the discussions of the security policy. However, there are some questions that remained unanswered. First of all, it is uncertain the extent to which the interaction between the government and NGOs will be sustainable in time or could be repeated in any other policy area. Otherwise said, it appears there are no institutional channels to include NGOs in any policy discussion. A detailed review of the victims' law could illustrate if collaboration between the government and NGOs was formalized specifically for the security issue. Maybe it was. But other policy issues, perhaps with less visibility or in the interest of a small number of citizens, could not enjoy this collaboration channels between the government and other stakeholders. This indicates that non-state actors would still have to fight to find a place to make their voices heard in relation to a policy issue that is of their concern.

The second open question is related to the previous one. The story told in this article illustrates how NGOs fought to open a window of opportunity to participate in the security policy discussions. But it does not say why that window of opportunity was open. Why, after more than a decade after the first protest of 1997, did President Calderón agreed to

produce a victim's law? Did he fear loss of popularity and bad electoral results for his party in the general elections of 2012 if nothing concrete came out of the dialogues for security? Were the grassroots stories of violence collected and presented by Sicilia the specific difference that finally made him think that something different or new should be done? Were the meetings with Sicilia the first time in which he thought a concrete request was being made, as opposed to vaguely "attending the security problem", as demanded in the protests? Was it not then Calderón and the previous Presidents who were being stubborn, but the NGOs, that were lacking a sufficiently and concrete petition to the government?

The identification of the reason that explains why the window of opportunity for the participation of NGOs in the discussion of the security policy was open until 2011 can point out what NGOs advocating for other topics need to have a larger role in their own policy concern. This point is crucial. The story discussed here suggests that few things could have happened had the President not decided to dialogue with NGOs, have a new law drafted, not to sign it, and later to sign it. The apparent relevance of the President in a system largely thought of as being democratic poses the question of the impact that democratization has had on the political behavior in Mexico.

Finally, it should be reminded that this paper has dealt with a policy issue at a national level. Without question, the manner in which NGOs can influence a particular policy issue will be enriched by looking at state and municipal level processes. The focus here was national because it was the federal government that called for a change in the security policy. However, for many citizens the first face of the authority is not the federal, but the state and municipal governments. A review of those cases even offers the opportunity to go beyond the study-case and conduct a comparative research. This should be the subject of further research.

Annex 1 – Highlights of Mexico's Transition to Democracy

1960's-1970's – Protests of social actors (students, doctors, workers) who wanted to fit into the political system, open only for groups supporting the PRI.

1977 – Electoral reform. Introduction of PR for the Chamber of Deputies.

1982 – Nationalization of the banking system to prevent asset fugue. Businessmen become wary of the scope of the power of the PRI. Major foreign debt crisis, devaluation, and high inflation in the following years.

1983 – Reform to the municipality regime. Now, they can handle independently their own financial assets. Thus, it becomes attractive for parties to compete in municipal elections. Municipalities become an experiment in local democracy.

1989 – The oldest opposition party, PAN (right), wins for the first time a state governorship.
Creation of the opposition party PRD (left).
Electoral reform: increase in the number of PR seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

1990 – Creation of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). Although an agency on its own, it is still controlled by the Secretariat of Governance.

Early 1990s – Privatization of most state-owned enterprises (including banks) as part of IMF's rescue plan.

1994 – Zapatista revolt.
Assassination of the PRI presidential candidate.
The presidential election receives wide international coverage and is acknowledged as "clean". The PRI remains in office.
Assassination of the president of the PRI.

1996 – Full autonomy granted to the IFE.

1997 – First local elections in the DF (Mexico City). PRD and PAN win every office under contest.
In the intermediate national legislative election, for the first time the PRI loses the absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

2000 – For the first time, the PRI loses the presidency to the PAN.

2006 – After a controversial campaign and accusations of fraud against it, the PAN retains the presidency. IFE's credibility diminished.

2012 – The PRI returns to power. Accusations of fraud persist around elections.

Annex 2 – Highlights of Mexico's Security Policy

1985 – Working in Mexico, DEA undercover agent Enrique Camarena is kidnapped and murdered by the drug lords he was investigating.

1993 – Imprisonment of the powerful drug trafficker Joaquín Guzmán, "El Chapo".

Late 1990´s – Kidnappings for ransom, auto theft, and assaults increase in large cities.

1997 – General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo is sentenced to 31 years in prison for collaborating with drug trafficking organizations.
First demonstration to demand the government a change in the security policy.

1999 – Defection of elite military commanders from the Mexican Army to form the quasi-paramilitary group Los Zetas. It later evolved into a drug trafficking organization on its own, characterized by its power and violence.

2000 – Creation of the federal Secretariat of Public Safety.

2001 – Escape of "El Chapo" within weeks of the first alternation of the party in power.

2001 – 2006 – First efforts at professionalizing the federal police. Establishment of the polygraph test and intense background checking for new recruits.

2004 – Second demonstration to demand the government a change in the security policy.

Late 2000's – The kidnapping and murder of close relatives of many wealthy people prompt the creation of NGOs advocating for a change in the security policy.

2006 – President Calderón promises to change the security policy and begin a "frontal combat" (as opposed to the until then prevalent "prohibitionist" policy) against drug trafficking organizations. The Army would have a major role in it.

2006 – 2012 – Rearrangement of the geographical location of drug cartels, in part due to the effects of the government's actions. Increasing and violent fights among them to secure the best routes to transport drug. The Army achieves the detention or killing of many drug cartel leaders, but apparently this only sprouts more violence. Fatal victims include members of drug trafficking organizations, law enforcement agents, and by-passers. Most of those murders remain un-investigated. In time, it is found out that drug trafficking organizations have the power to bribe officers in many agencies of the federal government. In parallel, denounces against the Army for human rights abuses increase.

2007 – U.S. and Mexico agree on the Merida Initiative, which would transfer equipment and capacities to Mexico to combat organized crime.

2008 – Third demonstration to demand the government a change in the security policy. A grenade is thrown to a large group of people celebrating Independence Day in the city of Morelia, leaving 8 dead. The attack was attributed to a criminal organization. It is the first open demonstration of power from these groups.

2010 – As the yearly death toll in drug-related violence reaches tens of thousands, President Calderón hosts the "Dialogues for Security" with NGO leaders, religious leaders, legislators, state governors, and other political actors. Calderón insists that, in spite of critiques, he will not change the security policy.

2011 – "Caravan for Peace." Activist Javier Sicilia walks through the zones most affected by drug-related violence (northern border states, the Pacific coast and the Gulf of Mexico coast) to retrieve testimonies of victims. Some of those persons participate in a dialogue with President Calderón, demanding a change in the security policy and protection for victims of violence.

2012 – The General Law of Victims is approved by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. It is intended to grant legal, health, and economic protection to victims of violence. The President stops its promulgation arguing legal vacuums in the Constitution that could prevent its full implementation.

2013 – Within weeks of taking office, President Enrique Peña Nieto promulgates the Law of Victims. Soon, reform proposals are presented.

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