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Violence vs. Violence: Why the Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto
Administrations Exacerbated Violence in Michoacán

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Introduction

It is difficult to conceptualize the rise in violence throughout Mexico over the last decade without examining the direct and indirect roles that the Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) governments undertook in producing and perpetuating that violence. In this research paper, I will examine two critical questions: In what ways did Felipe Calderón's militarized war against drugs exacerbate violence in Michoacán? Furthermore, how did the policies and actions of the Enrique Peña Nieto administration aggravate the pre-existing violence crisis in Michoacán? I conclude that Michoacán between 2006 through 2018, underwent two waves of violence: The *Aggressive Wave Era* under Felipe Calderón and the *Vicious Cycle Era* under Enrique Peña Nieto. The first wave produced violence in Michoacán as a result of aggressive anti-cartel policies that intensified violence and encouraged criminals to retaliate violently and visibly against the aggressive actions of the state. Additionally, I refer to the second wave as the 'vicious cycle era' because although EPN's approach to the violence crisis aimed to shift the focus away from targeting cartels leaders towards rebuilding security, the EPN administration built on previously established militarized efforts introduced by the Calderón administration, and thus, engendered a vicious cycle of violence in Michoacán.

This paper is divided into five distinct sections. The first section will examine how my research contributes to the existing literature surrounding violence in Michoacán. The second section will discuss the case selection process and provide an explanation of the relevance and credibility of the data used in my research. The third section will be divided into two sub-sections: the first part will examine the first wave of violence in Michoacán, while the second part will focus on the second wave of violence. Furthermore, this section will introduce

and examine the emergence of *autodefensas* as a response to the violence crisis. Afterwards, I will provide two alternative explanations worth considering in light of my research question in an attempt to reinforcing my main argument. Lastly, I will conclude my research by examining the implications for Mexican migration into the United states as a result from the Calderón and EPN's failure to claim victory over the battle against violence and organized crime.

Literature Review

My analysis of the Calderón and Peña Nieto administrations will primarily draw on the literature of Angélica Durán-Martínez, in her brilliant book, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*, the author focuses on three distinct Mexican cities: Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and Culiacán. Although these case studies have successfully illustrated how interactions between states and drug cartels influence the visibility of violence, I will contextualize how Durán-Martínez's theory of a state security apparatus unfolds in the context of a state, as opposed to a city. Ultimately, I conclude that the state security apparatus remains fragmented throughout both the Felipe Calderón and the Enrique Peña administrations as a result of failed efforts to combat violence and enforce the rule of law.

Substantial research has been devoted to understanding spikes in violence as it pertains to competition over drug trafficking and territorial control in Mexico. However, I do not examine violence as a byproduct of competition between drug traffickers, but rather, as a consequence of interactions between the state, federal officials, and drug traffickers. In this way, I build upon the literature of Angelica Durán-Martínez by applying her theoretical framework of a state security apparatus to the context of Michoacán. Furthermore, I examine the various ways in which the fragmented state security apparatus remains the same throughout the first and second waves of

violence. Moreover, this research is an accumulation of primary and secondary articles conducted in both Mexico and the United States. This research relies heavily on peer reviewed sources, news articles, and government established sources, such as reports from the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the Department of Justice. I hope that my contribution to the study of violence in Michoacán can emphasize the importance of effective public security in order to establish sustainable relationships between civil society and the government, and in turn, promote law and order.

Methods

Although Michoacán is not considered Mexico's most violent state,¹ the extreme presence of criminal groups has gravely deteriorated public security and exacerbated violence throughout the region. Michoacán has been considered by some scholars a 'laboratory' where Calderón and EPN have tested various strategies for combatting drug trafficking.² After conducting further research, I came to the conclusion that the critiques of the Calderón and EPN administration's failure to combat violence hold validity in the context of Michoacán for three major reasons: First, Michoacán is a critical drug production and distribution route because its soil has facilitated the growth of marijuana and opium poppy, thus making the state more susceptible to violence at the hands of criminals.³ Second, ten days after assuming office, former president Calderón launched one of the largest militarized operations (Operation Michoacán) in his home state of Michoacán; I focus on this region in order to examine how a new military policing strategy unfolds in the context of two administrations. Lastly, this case study is worth

¹ Corcoran, Patrick "In Mexico, 3 Gangs Battle for Control of Pacific State" (InSight Crime, 2012).

² Olmos, Gil Jose "Mexico-Michoacan: Failed Drug War Strategy of Calderon and Pena Nieto" (MexicoVoices, 2015).

³ Olmos, Gil Jose "Mexico-Michoacan: Failed Drug War Strategy of Calderon and Pena Nieto" (MexicoVoices, 2015).

examining because of the *autodefensas* (self-defense groups) that emerged in Michoacán as a response to the violence crisis and the inability of the state to provide public security;⁴ from one city in Michoacán, the self-defense movement quickly spread throughout the entire state, eventually becoming legitimized by the state.

The commonly acknowledged definition of violence is understood as “behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something.”⁵ Although this definition of violence can entail physical, sexual, emotional, or cultural abuses, for the purpose of my research, I examine violence in terms of homicide. I chose to focus on this specific aspect of violence because I believe that homicides, especially when carried out through in public forms, creates an immense distrust of the state’s ability to enforce the rule of law and provide the most basic public security. The statistical evidence provided in this research paper is largely obtained from the Mexican government’s data on homicide. When considering large datasets such as the one examined here, it is important to consider the limitations on datasets provided by governments, such as: missing data, errors in data accumulation, and data misinterpretations. I examine government data, as opposed to solely evidence used in news sources because official figures on homicide rates were found to be 15% - 25% higher than data provided in media reporting.⁶ Furthermore, this research has attempted to overcome such limitation by obtaining data from the most reliable source of information in Mexico- the autonomous government statistics agency (INEGI).⁷

⁴ Felbab-Brown, Vanda “The Rise of Militias in Mexico Citizens’ Security or Further Conflict Escalation?” (Brookings, 2015). pp: 175

⁵ Webster, Merriam. “Definition of violence (noun),” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence>

⁶ Beittel, June S. “Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Violence” Congressional Research Service (2013): pp. 23

⁷ Molzahn Cory, Rodriguez Ferreira Octavio, Shirk David A. “Drug Violence in Mexico Data and Analysis through 2012” Trans-Border Institute, University of San Diego (2013): pp. 8

Case Study: Michoacán

First Wave of Violence: The 'Aggressive Wave Era' Under Calderón (2006-2012)

Throughout Felipe Calderón's presidency, there were a total of 5,526 homicides in Michoacán from 2006 through 2012.⁸ However, the years 2006, 2009, and 2011 experienced the deadliest years with over 850 homicide.⁹ The first wave of violence examines these homicide rates as produced by the aggressive anti-cartel initiatives of Calderón and perpetrated by the indirect and direct interactions between the state and the traffickers. Furthermore, Durán-Martínez's theory of a state security apparatus is very applicable in the context of Michoacán because it illustrates how interactions between criminals and the state determines whether violence appears in "visible" or 'hidden' forms.¹⁰ I conclude that the interactions between the state and drug traffickers during the first wave produced two forms of violence: 'response violence' and 'retaliation violence.' The decision to respond or retaliate the actions of the state varied depending on whether the state security apparatus in place was fragmented or cohesive; a cohesive state security apparatus is likely to reduce the visibility of violence, while a fragmented security apparatus is likely to increase the visibility of violence as protection and enforcement becomes unreliable.¹¹ According to Durán-Martínez, a state security apparatus "...determines the government's ability to credibly enforce the law or, alternatively, to protect criminal actors"¹² Based on this theory, the gruesome violence displayed by *La Familia*

⁸ National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), "Homicide Rates in Michoacan" (2017): Pp. 3

⁹ National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), "Homicide Rates in Michoacan" (2017): Pp. 3

¹⁰ Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*(Oxford University Press, 2018): pp. 13

¹¹ Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*(Oxford University Press, 2018): pp. 12

¹² Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*(Oxford University Press, 2018): pp. 12.

Michoacán (LFM) during the first wave of violence is a direct result of a fragmented security apparatus that was created by the Calderón administration.

On July 2, 2006 Felipe Calderón won the Mexican presidential elections, defeating Andrés Manuel López (AMLO) by 0.58 percent, leading AMLO to challenge the results through massive protests and marches. Regardless of these efforts, by September 5, 2006 the Elections Tribunal concluded PAN candidate Felipe Calderón president.¹³ Uncoincidentally, one day after the Elections Tribunal declared Calderón president-elect, on September 6, *La Familia Michoacán* (LFM) -a Mexican drug cartel that operates in the Mexican state of Michoacán- dumped five human heads onto a dance floor in Uruapan city alongside a message stating that the act was “divine justice” carried out by “the family.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the note left behind continued to assert that “The family does not kill for money. It does not kill women or innocent people. Those who die are those who must die. Everyone should know that this is divine justice.”

¹⁵ There were 420 homicides and seventeen heads discovered in 2006 alongside of notes such as the one previously described.¹⁶ The visible violence perpetrated by LFM should not be viewed as circumstantial, but rather, a strategic display of violence in *response* to the political climate created by the new administration in an attempt to undermine the government under Calderón, the state, and the Mexican people.

On December 11, 2006 the Secretary of the Interior, Francisco Javier Ramírez Acuña, addressed the initiation of Operation Michoacán.¹⁷ In agreement with the governor of Michoacán, Lázaro Cárdenas Batel, *Operation Michoacán* would allow the Calderón

¹³ CRS “Mexico’s 2006 Elections”(Congressional Research Service, 2009): pp. 2

¹⁴ Associated Press, “Human Heads dumped in Mexico bar” BBC News (2006).

¹⁵ Associated Press, “Human Heads dumped in Mexico bar” BBC News (2006)

¹⁶ Weissert, Will “Mexican Gangs Displaying Severed Heads” FOX News (2006).

¹⁷ Speech “Announcement on the Joint Operation Michoacan” (Presidency of the Republic, 2006)

administration to deploy thousands of troops, eradicate illicit drug plantations, establish checkpoints, execute searches and arrest warrants, and dismantle drug outlets as a means to eliminate violence and rebuild security in Michoacán.¹⁸ Under Operation Michoacán, Calderón successfully launched a militarized war against the drug cartels by sending 6,500 troops and federal police armed with automatic rifles to the city of Apatzingan. Calderón ordered the state troops to gather traffickers and set fire to the marijuana and opium fields as a means to restore order in a territory where traffickers had resisted and failed to obey authorities.¹⁹ Although dozens of federal police officials searched passengers and vehicles for drugs, weapons, and cartel leaders, these efforts temporarily constrained violence; as a citizen of Michoacán stated, “When the soldiers leave, the problems will continue.”²⁰ Evidently, the military serves as a temporary solution, the citizens need the most protection when the state is not present. Regardless of the aggressive militarized efforts, the drug cartels retaliated against the states efforts by resisting to comply with federal law while proving their legitimacy through visible forms of violence.

One of the most notorious attacks against LFM occurred on July 11, 2009 when Mexican law enforcement successfully arrested the cartel’s leader Arnoldo Rueda-Medina in Michoacán. Although this arrest may reflect a cohesive state apparatus due to enforcement efficiency,²¹ the security apparatus under the first wave of violence remained nonetheless fragmented. Following the arrest, members of LFM attempted to free Rueda-Medina and in response to these failed attempts, law enforcement deployed military personnel throughout Michoacán.²² Two days later,

¹⁸ Speech “Announcement on the Joint Operation Michoacan” (Presidency of the Republic, 2006)

¹⁹ Associated Press, “Mexico Sends 6,500 Troops to Drug-Riddled State to Stop Violence” FOX News (2006)

²⁰ Associated Press, “Mexico Sends 6,500 Troops to Drug-Riddled State to Stop Violence” FOX News (2006)

²¹ Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico* (Oxford University Press, 2018): pp. 12.

²² Department of Justice “La Familia Michoacán Drug Cartel Leader Sentenced to 43 Years in Federal Prison” (The United States Attorney’s Office, 2018).

LFM retaliated violently to the arrest by brutally kidnapping, torturing, and murdering twelve federal agents leaving a note behind stating, “Vengan por otro, los estamos esperando” which translates to “Come for another, we are waiting for you.”²³ The arrest of Rueda-Medina serves as a means for the state to convey to the traffickers that they will not tolerate, negotiate, or protect any individual associated with organized crime. Furthermore, the retaliation on behalf of LFM serves to threaten the state and question the ability of the state to control violence and protect its citizens. If the government failed to protect its federal officials, what security can be expected for the rest of society?

It is important to note that I refer to the first wave of violence as the ‘aggressive wave era’ because the insecurity and violence created and perpetuated by Calderón administration indirectly influenced the retaliation of criminals and the community organization of affected communities. After the alleged death of Nazario Moreno Gonzalez, the LFM’s spiritual leader, the cartel was announced dismantled. By 2011, an equally powerful cartel, Knights Templar, announced their dominance in formerly controlled LFM territory by physically hanging banners throughout Michoacán asserting that they would carry out the “altruistic activities that were previously performed by the Familia Michoacán.”²⁴ One year after the Knights Templar declared their arrival, the Calderón administration deployed 4,000 troops into Morelia, Michoacán where rival gangs were engaged in a battle over control.²⁵ For years, the militarized approaches in Michoacán have proved unsuccessful leaving civil society with no viable alternative than to defend themselves.

²³Department of Justice “La Familia Michoacán Drug Cartel Leader Sentenced to 43 Years in Federal Prison” (The United States Attorney’s Office, 2018).

²⁴ InSight Crime “Knights Templar” (InSight Crime, 2017).

²⁵ Pachico, Elyssa “Security Surge in Michoacan to Confront Familia-Knights Templar Battle” (InSight Crime, 2012).

Indigenous organizing in Cheran, a town in Michoacán, illustrates the government's failure to promote security and order in the presence of organized crime. The indigenous community of Cheran has managed to preserve a sense of tranquility despite of the violence plaguing Michoacán through the establishment of 'homegrown' patrols that protect the three main entrances of the town.²⁶ A community leader in Cheran stated, "To defend ourselves, we had to change the whole system — out with the political parties, out with City Hall, out with the police and everything... We had to organize our own way of living to survive."²⁷ This leader is asserting that his community no longer depends on the government, but rather, on communal governance; in other words, the government holds no legitimacy in Cheran. One of the earliest instances of indigenous organizing in this town is the Cheran rebellion that initiated on April 15, 2011; in this year, Michoacán was undergoing one of its most dangerous epochs with a total of 853 homicides.²⁸ The rebellion sought to revolt against politicians, mayors, and the policies and demand a system of self-government which became realized by 2014.²⁹ This example illustrates the depth of the violence and security crisis in Michoacán. The disconnect between civil society and the state is evident in Cheran as society begins to demand a position outside of government intervention. As the Calderón administration comes to an end in 2012, the legacy of violence, insecurity, and community organizing created by the 'aggressive wave era' transforms under the second wave of violence.

²⁶ McDonnell, Patrick J. "One Mexican town revolts against violence and corruption. Six years in, its experiment is working" (Los Angeles Times, 2017).

²⁷ McDonnell, Patrick J. "One Mexican town revolts against violence and corruption. Six years in, its experiment is working" (Los Angeles Times, 2017).

²⁸ McDonnell, Patrick J. "One Mexican town revolts against violence and corruption. Six years in, its experiment is working" (Los Angeles Times, 2017).

²⁹ McDonnell, Patrick J. "One Mexican town revolts against violence and corruption. Six years in, its experiment is working" (Los Angeles Times, 2017).

Second Wave of Violence: The Vicious Cycle Era (2012- 2018) Under EPN

Throughout Enrique Peña Nieto's presidency, there were a total of 5,877 homicides in Michoacán from 2013 through 2017.³⁰ The years 2016 and 2017 experienced the greatest rates of violence with over 1,400 homicide each year.³¹ Due to this astonishing data, I conclude that the second wave of violence arose more viciously than the previous shortly after Enrique Peña Nieto assumed office on December 1, 2012. On this day, EPN made a promise to the Mexican people—a promise to protect citizens from high level crimes such as homicide, extortion, and kidnappings by restoring peace in Mexico. Although EPN's approach to the violence crisis shifted the focus away from targeting cartel leaders, towards the rebuilding of security, the EPN administration made the unfortunate mistake of continuing the previously established militarized efforts initiated by his predecessor. Furthermore, I argue the the second wave of violence consists of two stages: the protection stage and the confrontation stage.

The transition into the protection stage is evident after on May 20, 2013 when EPN presented his National Development Plan (PND) that was set to guide his administration for the duration of his presidency. Although the PND included five critical goals, the first goal aimed to “...achieve peace in Mexico that will advance democracy and security.”³² In regards to the security crisis, the plan called for “...bolstering police forces and more spending on education...” Nieto announced a \$9 billion effort focused on that social spending in the specific communities identified as breeding grounds for criminals.³³ However, these optimistic efforts proved unsuccessful as civil society took it upon themselves to provide security for themselves.

³⁰ National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), “Homicide Rates in Michoacan”

³¹ National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), “Homicide Rates in Michoacan”

³² MexicoNow “Mexico's National Development Plan 2013-2018” (MexicoNow, 2013).

³³ Althaus, Dudley “Mexico drug war, rebooted” (Global Post, 2013).

The protection stage begins to further unfold when the citizens of Michoacán decided to arm themselves as a means to provide security to their community against criminals- a security that the state failed to provide; by the end of the administration, different communities facing similar concerns rise up to provide their own protection. In La Rauna, the Knights Templar cartel threatened the security of the community by limiting their access to food and other basic resources; in response, the community of La Rauna formed self-defense groups in order to protect themselves from the Knights Templar.³⁴ Similarly, on May 2013 president EPN sent 6,000 troops into the town in order to combat the Knights Templar.³⁵ In distress, the citizens of La Rauna greeted the troops as they entered their town and, in this way, the early vigilantes and self-defense groups worked alongside the government to combat violence and extortion at the hands of organized crime. Furthermore, throughout 2013, the municipality of Tepalcatepec and members of the regions Tierra Caliente and Sierra-Costa also began to self-organized as a means to combat similar abuses at the hands of the Knights Templar.³⁶ By March 2013, the self-defense movement had grown from 250 to 600 members to some claiming a force of 6,000;³⁷ the continuous growth of this movement illustrates that the security apparatus further fragmented under EPN as the drug cartels and civil society challenge the state's ability to maintain order.

Although violence and organized crime in Michoacán contributed to the rise of self-defense groups, these groups reflect the state's inability to protect its citizens from violence thus leaving communities with no viable alternative but to self-organize and provide their own protection. Conscious of the threat presented by these groups, on January 27, 2014 the EPN

³⁴ Rueda, Manuel "Residents Cheer as Mexican Army Rolls Into Drug War Town" (ABC News, 2013).

³⁵ Rueda, Manuel "Residents Cheer as Mexican Army Rolls Into Drug War Town" (ABC News, 2013).

³⁶ Baroz Valle, Valentina "Two Years of the Autodefensas Movement in Michoacán, Mexico: Persecution and Politics" (Upside Down World, 2015).

³⁷ Sanchez, Jose "Autodefensas: Mexico's Self-Defense Forces" (StMU History Media, 2018).

government collaborated with the leaders of numerous self-defense groups by coming to an agreement, which asserts:

“... the agreement focuses primarily on establishing a formal relationship between the government and selected groups. Its current eight point structure renames the autodefensas as “Rural Defense Corps,” obliges their leadership to submit lists of members to the government, and commits the groups to registering any weapons that members already possess. It also dictates that members of the autodefensas can form part of the Municipal Police...”³⁸

This agreement can be seen as the states effort to place the self-defense groups under the reach of the state. Although negotiating with the self-defense groups can be seen as a successful attempt to combat current and future violence perpetrated by these vigilantes, the broad agreement makes society more prone to a vicious cycle of violence because the structure of the agreement makes it difficult to maintain accountability and respect for the rule of law because the framework does not articulate mechanisms of accountability, nor outlines the relationship that self-defense groups will have with government authorities.³⁹ The agreement articulated by the EPN government is problematic because it provides self-defense groups a form of legitimacy and thus creates opportunities for violations against other citizens; furthermore, the agreement can blur the lines between federal policing and community policing.

Referring back to Durán-Martínez’s theoretical framework, she argues that drug traffickers ‘outsource violence’ when “... they systematically draw on youth gangs to attack their rivals or the state.”⁴⁰ Rather than examining ‘outsourcing violence’ in terms of drug traffickers preying on outside sources to carry out their work, I conclude that EPN’s decision to incorporate

³⁸ Horton, Gillian “Conflict in Michoacán: Vigilante Groups Present Challenges and Opportunities for the Mexican Government” (Wilson Center, 2014): pp. 6

³⁹ Horton, Gillian “Conflict in Michoacán: Vigilante Groups Present Challenges and Opportunities for the Mexican Government” (Wilson Center, 2014): pp. 6

⁴⁰ Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*(Oxford University Press, 2018): pp. 14

self-defense groups into a “Rural Defense Corps” can be perceived as the state ‘outsourcing security’ by using a group formed by civil society to combat the drug cartels. In this way, the EPN administration recognizes that it has not been able to combat the cartels alone, and thus, sought assistance from an outside source formed by civil society. The success of the self-defense groups to combat violence and the inability of the state to achieve the same end further illustrates the fragmented security apparatus of Michoacán for two main reasons: the government is either undergoing a threat on behalf of self-defense groups or the government recognizes that the military and federal police cannot (alone) combat the Knights Templar.

By 2014, the self-defense groups took an unexpected turn in their agenda from fighting against violence to perpetuating violence. According to Mexico’s interior minister, “The presence of armed civilian self-defense groups across Mexico will only cause “anarchy.”⁴¹ The EPN administration’s decision to arm a civilian population perpetuates a different kind of violence than the one seen under Calderón. The violence in the second wave is a combination between cartel violence and vigilante violence. I examine the events that took place after 2014 as the confrontation stage because Mexico is now facing a new set of criminal actors; a threat that the EPN administration perpetuated through its legalization of the self-defense groups.⁴² The lack of public policy and the inability of the EPN administration to successfully enforce laws has contributed to the problems arising from the self-defense groups. For example, José Manuel Mireles, the ‘face of the self-defense movement’ in Michoacán was arrested, along with 80 other members, for violating Mexico’s Federal Law of Firearms and Explosives Act.⁴³ Although Mirales was arrested and later incarcerated, this incident illustrates the fragmented security

⁴¹ Bonello, Deborah “Mexico Authorities Schizophrenic on Self-Defense Groups” (InSight Crime, 2017).

⁴² Lohmuller, Michael “No Solution in Sight for Mexico’s Vigilante Problem” (InSight Crime, 2015).

⁴³ Justice in Mexico “Self-defense group leader José Manuel Mireles arrested” (Justice in Mexico, 2014)

apparatus that existed throughout the EPN administration due to its failure to control the possession of weapons at the hands of civilians collaborating with the state. As of 2017, “Mexico’s Congress hastily approved the Law of Internal Security, which gives the military broad new powers and solidifies its central role in the country’s drug war.”⁴⁴ This new law reflects the fragmented security apparatus of the EPN administration for two reasons: 1) the government is desperately resorting to militarized strategies that have failed to work in the past (under Calderón and EPN), and 2) law enforcement efficiency has gravely deteriorated in Michoacán, leaving the EPN administration with no alternative than to enforce the law through aggressive means.

The second wave of violence has illustrated that there needs to be a clear distinction between the state and civil society; because the EPN administration failed to fulfill this end, the years 2012-2018 experienced great levels of violence as a result from drug cartels and the new ‘criminals’ that emerged from the self-defense groups. In the first stage (protection stage), we see civil society provide their own protection through the rise of self-defense groups; this, in turn, delegitimizes the state because of its failure to provide its citizens with reliable protection regardless of militarized efforts. Additionally, the second stage (confrontation stage), illustrates that blurring the lines between civil society and the state can perpetuate violence when there is a lack of respect for the rule of law.

Civil Society

Although the early instances of individuals in La Rauna uniting to combat the Knights Templar reflects the states failure to protect this community, the courage of these citizens to

⁴⁴ Linthicum, Kate “A decade into Mexico's deadly drug war, lawmakers give the military more power” (Los Angeles Times, 2017)

achieve what the past two administrations could not, reflects the power and influence of civil society. Furthermore, community organization is a clear indicator that the Mexican government relies heavily on short-term policies while overlooking the root causes of violence. The self-defense groups brought to light the realities of Mexican citizens. Realities of insecurity, poverty, and hopelessness in the Mexican government. Furthermore, the self-defense movement has exposed the true root of the violence crisis; violence does not solely lie in the hands of organized crime, but rather, is a result of insecurity, militarized state efforts, and state absence. In essence, the self-defense groups have provided an alternative to combating violence; an effort to combat the true roots of violence lies in effective community policing. Furthermore, the self-defense movement has provided a hopeful example of what collaboration between the state and civil society could represent if carried out correctly with the proper restrictions and accountability mechanisms.

Alternative Explanations

Numerous scholars have dedicated substantial research to understanding the interactions and connections between violence, the state, and criminal groups. However, for the purpose of my research, I found two alternative explanations worth considering when determining why both administrations failed to combat violence in Michoacán. The socio-economic approach suggests that poverty and a ‘lack of opportunity’ fueled Mexico’s drug trafficking organizations and marginalized youth sought membership in these organizations; this approach is illustrated through Mexico’s “peace movement” which ultimately concludes that poverty and unemployment influence crime and violence.⁴⁵ Although Michoacán is considered to have one of

⁴⁵ Ramsey, Geoffrey “Poverty a Recruitment Tool for Mexico’s Criminal Gangs” (InSight Crime, 2011)

the highest numbers of jobless youth with an unemployment rate of over 25 percent,⁴⁶ this explanation fails to address why criminal groups act violently against the actions and policies of the state. Furthermore, this explanation generalizes the impoverished communities by assuming that those who compose these criminal organizations are likely poor and unemployed. Additionally, according to Durán-Martínez, there are two main economic approaches for explaining variations in violence. The first contends that “... certain aspects of the drug trade (e.g., distribution), certain goods (e.g., cocaine), and higher volumes of trade generate more revenue and, in turn, more violence.”⁴⁷ While the second approach argues that “... lower profits spur conflict because in order to maintain high revenues, criminals need to eliminate rivals.”⁴⁸ Although both explanations hold validity in their conclusion that more revenue generates violence and that criminals must eliminate rivals in order to maintain high revenues, these approaches solely focus on the actions of criminals- as opposed to the state. In other words, the economic approaches do not demonstrate how the state, as an institution and social actor embedded in society, creates and perpetuates violence. Therefore, these approaches are not suitable arguments for the purpose of my research: to illustrate how aggressive state policies and actions influence the increasing homicide rates in Michoacán.

Conclusion

The violence that plagued Michoacán throughout both waves was a byproduct of state policies and actions. The implications of the ongoing violence crisis is best understood through an analysis of the correlation between security, violence, and immigration. According to

⁴⁶ Ramsey, Geoffrey “Poverty a Recruitment Tool for Mexico’s Criminal Gangs” (InSight Crime, 2011)

⁴⁷ Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*(Oxford University Press, 2018): pp. 8

⁴⁸ Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*(Oxford University Press, 2018): pp.8

migration statistics provided by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), Mexicans are the largest foreign born group in the United States, accounting for 25% of the 44.5 million immigrants in 2017.⁴⁹ Additionally, the MPI concludes that the year 2010 experienced the great Mexican migration flow into the United States, which is not surprising considering that Mexico underwent the greatest violence in the year 2010 under the Calderón government. Furthermore, in 2010 a municipal poverty measurement released by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) revealed that 60.6 percent of the population in Michoacán was living under poverty as well as 95 percent of the population was experiencing at least one social deprivation (i.e., educational gap, access to healthcare, access to social security, housing access, access to food).⁵⁰ These socioeconomic factors as well as high violence rates, are all critical factors that have left numerous Mexican citizens with no other alternative than to seek refuge in foreign nation.

⁴⁹ Batalova Jeanne, Zong Jie “Mexican Immigrants in the United States” Migration Policy Institute (2018).

⁵⁰ CONEVAL “Municipal Poverty Measurement 2010” (The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, 2010).

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