



Citizen Security in Michoacán

“Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence” Briefing Paper Series

By Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk

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List of Acronyms

AFO	Arellano Felix Organization, an organized crime group from Tijuana
BLO	Beltran Leyva Organization, an organized crime group
CDG	Cartel del Golfo (Gulf Cartel), an organized crime group
CESO	Consejo Estatal de Seguridad Pública (State Public Security Council)
CFE	Comisión Federal de Electricidad (Federal Electricity Commission)
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, a Mexican center for teaching and research in the Social Sciences
CISEN	Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (Mexican Intelligence Agency)
CJNG	Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, an organized crime group
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (National Human Rights Commission)
Edomex	Estado de México, a state in central Mexico
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía, e Informática (National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information)
KTO	Knights Templar Organization, an organized crime group based in Michoacán
LFM	La Familia Michoacana, an organized crime group
MPF	Ministerio Público de la Federación (Federal Office of the Public Prosecutor)
OCG	Organized crime group
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), a Mexican political party
PF	Policía Federal (Federal Police)
PGJE	Procuraduría General de la Justicia del Estado (State Attorney General's Office)
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party), a Mexican political party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), a Mexican political party
SCJN	Suprema Corte de Justicia Nacional (National Supreme Court of Justice), Mexico's supreme court
SCT	Secretaría de Comunicación y Transporte (Secretary of Communications and Transportation)
SEDENA	Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (Mexican Secretary of Defense, Army and Air Force)
SEDESOL	Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (Secretary of Social Development)
SEGOB	Secretaría de Gobernación (Mexican Interior Ministry)
SEMAR	Secretaría de Marina (Mexican Secretary of the Navy)
SEMARNAT	Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Secretary of the Environment)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education)
SESNSP	Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (Executive Secretary of the National Public Security System)
SHP	Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (Secretary of Finance and Public Credit)
SNSP	Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (Mexican National Security System)
SSP	Secretaría de Seguridad Pública (Public Security Ministry)
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollars

Executive Summary

Arguably the most intractable security issue facing the administration of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto has been the dynamic and dangerous situation in the state of Michoacán, located on the Pacific in the southwestern portion of the country. During Peña Nieto's first two years in office, the state has seen a significant increase in violence and criminal activities; the emergence, evolution, and internal struggles of armed "self-defense" groups (*grupos de autodefensa*, commonly referred to as *autodefensas*); and concerted federal government efforts to gain control and restore order in certain parts of the state, particularly in the state's western Tierra Caliente region.

While certain crime indicators—notably homicide—have fallen significantly throughout much of Mexico since 2011, Michoacán is one of the states where problems of crime and violence have been most intractable. It is also one of the places where citizen mobilization has manifested most visibly through self-defense forces and vigilantism, with entire communities rising up to take the law into their own hands because of the real or perceived inability of authorities to address the problem of organized crime.

Over the course of 2014, the worsening situation in Michoacán led the Mexican government to intervene heavily and try to regain the trust of the citizenry. The federal government must be exceedingly careful and deliberate in its strategy for intervening in state and local security matters, its approach to dealing with armed citizens taking the law into their own hands, its efforts to empower state and local authorities to pick up the reins, and its efforts to rebuild civic engagement and social trust. The authors offer three guiding recommendations:

First, since achieving success will require that the Mexican government have clear targets focused on outcomes and performance for social development programs aimed at strengthening community resilience (e.g., the relationship between farm subsidies and poppy cultivation, the relationship between the number of student scholarships and gang membership, etc.), the authors recommend that *the Peña Nieto administration should conduct and present regular evaluation and assessment of the outcomes of its programs using precise, program-specific performance metrics.*

Second, a core challenge in Michoacán, as elsewhere in Mexico, is the lack of institutional integrity, which has contributed to often visible corruption of local officials and widespread support for vigilantism. Unfortunately, recent developments have delayed implementation of Michoacán's judicial reform, which was due for implementation in February 2014, pushing back urgently needed reforms to introduce greater transparency and accountability into the state's criminal justice system. *Given the state's complex security situation, it is critically important that operators of the criminal justice system—particularly prosecutors, public defenders, and court personnel—be adequately trained and prepared for the transition.*

Third, the Peña Nieto administration's intervention in Michoacán positions the federal government to help resolve these problems, but it also runs the risk of unwittingly stifling civic engagement. *The federal government's liaison should work intently to create spaces and regular opportunities for dialogue and collaboration among citizens and civic organizations, and should particularly empower the state and local citizen security counsels to provide consistent communication and constructive feedback on the progress of security measures.*

CITIZEN SECURITY IN MICHOACÁN

By Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk¹

Overview

Arguably the most intractable security issue facing the administration of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto has been the dynamic and dangerous situation in the state of Michoacán, located on the Pacific in the southwestern portion of the country. During Peña Nieto's first two years in office, the state has seen a significant increase in violence and criminal activities; the emergence, evolution, and internal struggles of armed "self-defense" groups (*grupos de autodefensa*, commonly referred to as *autodefensas*); and concerted federal government efforts to gain control and restore order in certain parts of the state, particularly in the state's western Tierra Caliente region. Developments continue to unfold as criminal organizations, self-defense groups, and government all vie for control of Michoacán, a state that has long served as an important production and transit zone for drug traffickers.

This report forms part of a series of studies on citizen security and responses to organized crime that has been sponsored by the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center and the Justice in Mexico project at the University of San Diego. While certain crime indicators—notably homicide—have fallen significantly throughout much of Mexico since 2011, Michoacán is one of the states where problems of crime and violence have been most intractable. It is also one of the places where citizen mobilization has manifested most visibly through vigilantism, with entire communities rising up to take the law into their own hands because of the real or perceived inability of authorities to address the problem of organized crime. Over the course of 2014, the worsening situation in Michoacán led the Mexican government to intervene heavily and try to regain the trust of the citizenry. This report therefore pays close attention to the efforts and challenges of the Mexican government and civil society to work together to establish order in Michoacán, offering important insights and recommendations for continued progress to that end.

Background: Crime, Violence, and Citizen Insecurity in Michoacán



Over the last several years, the state of Michoacán has been troubled by problems of crime, violence, and social unrest. To provide a general context for understanding the current citizen security challenges in Michoacán, below we address some of the major political and social dynamics in the state, the evolution of the state's security challenges in recent years, and the nature of federal government efforts to address these issues under Presidents Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), both from the National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional, PAN).

¹ This working paper compiles several months of monitoring and analysis of security and human rights issues in Mexico. The authors greatly appreciate the support of The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as well as the comments and suggestions of Lázaro Cárdenas Batel, David Gaddis Smith, Octavio Rodríguez Ferriera, and Duncan Wood.

The Political and Social Dynamics of Michoacán

Located in southwestern Mexico, the state of Michoacán touches on the Pacific Ocean and borders six other states: Colima, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Querétaro, and the State of México (See Figure 1: **Map of Michoacán**). Home to over 4.3 million inhabitants, Michoacán has a significant indigenous population, with approximately 3.5% of the population still speaking one of four main indigenous languages, predominantly Purépecha (over 85%), but also Náhuatl, Mazahua, and Otomí.² While there are a total of 113 municipalities in the state, nearly one in five people reside in the state's capital, Morelia, which lies geographically midway between the much larger cities of Mexico City and Guadalajara.³ Michoacán is a state that is rich in natural resources, and a leader in agricultural production, specializing in avocados, limes, mangos, blackberries, and other produce. The state is also frequented for cultural and historic centers such as Apatzingán, Morelia, Paztcuaro, as well as its Pacific beaches. However, other areas of the state, such as the Sierra Madre del Sur, are underdeveloped and access to amenities and communication is poor.

Figure 1: Map of Michoacán



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía, e Informática, INEGI.

Michoacán has a history as a bastion of defiance. Dating back to the pre-Colombian era, the region's Tarascan, or Purépecha, people were legendary for their resistance to Aztec domination.⁴ During Spanish colonial rule, the state's first bishop—Vasco de Quiroga—earned a revered place in history for his efforts to protect and care for the state's indigenous peoples, in direct confrontation with the

² “Información Estadística.” *Gobierno de Michoacán*. Last updated August 8, 2012. See also “Cuentame: Información por entidad.” INEGI. Last visited September 28, 2014.

³ Ibid. “Cuentame: Información por entidad.” INEGI.

⁴ Warren, Benedict J. “The Conquest of Michoacán: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530.” *Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press*. 1985.

wealthy land grantees (*encomendados*) that enjoyed the favor of the crown.⁵ In Mexico's early 19th century struggle for independence it was in Apatzingán, that two heroes of Mexico's independence movement, Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, promulgated the 1814 Constitution (*Decreto Constitucional para la Libertad de la América Mexicana*).⁶ Michoacán was also an important staging ground for resisting Spanish colonial authority, as the home of Agustín de Iturbide, who led insurrectionist forces to victory and became the country's first independent head of state.

After independence, Michoacán was one of the places of fiercest resistance to the French occupation of the 1860s, as residents of Zamora helped turn the tide to restore Mexican Republican forces. During the 1910 Revolution, José Inés García Chávez, one of Michoacán's most notorious revolutionaries, an effective military strategist who supported the forces of Francisco Villa, earned the nickname "The Attila of Michoacán" for his banditry and brutality, particularly in western localities that factor prominently in the state's current troubles, such as Apatzingán, Parácuaro, and Cotija.⁷

In the 1920s and 1930s, Michoacán was the incubator for some of the post-revolutionary government's most progressive social policies, as the state's governor, General Lázaro Cárdenas, organized labor and agricultural unions and redistributed the property of wealthy landowners. Cárdenas was elected president from 1934 to 1940, and incorporated many of these same policies at the national level, in addition to nationalizing foreign oil fields in 1938. His legacy helps explain why Michoacán became one of the bastions of opposition to the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), which many felt strayed from Cárdenas' principles and visions in subsequent decades. By the mid-1980s, former- Michoacán governor Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano—the son of Lázaro Cárdenas—grew so frustrated with the PRI that he bolted to run as the head of a leftist coalition that nearly defeated the ruling party's 1988 presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas. Salinas' victory over Cárdenas was tainted by widespread allegations of electoral fraud. Following the contentious election, Cárdenas refashioned his ad hoc leftist coalition into a new opposition party: the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD). In Michoacán, one of the PRD's most important bases of support, the ruling party appeared intent on repressing the new leftist opposition. In the state and local elections of 1989 and 1992, there were significant irregularities and conflicts in dozens of the state's municipalities.⁸

Despite political repression, the PRD scored significant victories in Michoacán during the 1990s. The PRD won roughly half of the state's municipal governments in local elections, and captured the largest share of congressional seats in the state. In 2002, PRD gubernatorial candidate Lázaro Cárdenas Batel, the third in the Cárdenas family's political dynasty, succeeded in wresting the state's

⁵ Chowning, Margaret. "Wealth and Power in Provincial Mexico: Michoacán from the Late Colony to the Revolution." *Stanford: Stanford University Press*. 1999.

⁶ Miguel Hidalgo was rector of the Colegio de San Nicolás, which is today the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, considered the ideological cradle of Mexico's independence movement.

⁷ Estrada (2010) notes that Chávez García headed a group of bandits that included Rafael "El Manco" Nares, Jesús "El Tejón" Zepeda, Luis "El Chivo Encantado" Gutiérrez, and Jesús Sintora. See: Estrada, Miguel. "La historia de José Inés Chávez García." *Agencia Mexicana de Noticias*. September 29, 2010. See also Purnell, Jennie. "Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico." *Duke University Press*. 1999.

⁸ Calderón Mólgora, Marco Antonio. "Elecciones municipales y conflictos en Michoacán y Guerrero," in Jorge Alonso y Jaime Tamayo (eds.), "Elecciones con alternativas: algunas experiencias en la República Mexicana. Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias." *UNAM; La Jornada*. 1994.

governorship away from the PRI for the first time. The increasing political competition in the state of Michoacán—particularly in the early and mid-2000s—was accompanied by growing competition and conflict among organized crime groups that resulted in severe problems of crime and violence. Given its growing political fortunes, the PRD’s elected officials—many of them political neophytes and others disaffected members of the PRI—found themselves immersed in a deteriorating security environment, and also under newfound scrutiny from federal officials during the administrations of Presidents Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), both from the National Action Party. Below we discuss the dynamics of organized crime and violence in the state of Michoacán, followed by a discussion of federal government efforts to combat these problems.

The Evolution of Organized Crime and Violence in Michoacán

For more than a century, Michoacán has been a base of operations for cannabis and opium production and trafficking. The state has a hospitable climate for agricultural production and excellent trade routes through Mexico’s largest deep-water facility, the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, named after the former President. Michoacán’s contemporary organized crime groups (OCGs) have their origins in the 1970s, when the state gained notoriety for the dark, slender-leaved variety of cannabis known as “Michoacán.” At that time, José Valencia, the patriarch of a family of avocado growers based in the municipality of Aguililla de Iturbide, in a mountainous area in the Southwest corner of the state, began cultivating cannabis and opium poppy.⁹

By the 1990s, under the leadership of Armando Cornelio Valencia, the family’s criminal operations flourished and became known as the “Milenio” Cartel. As Althaus and Dudley (2014) note in a briefing paper prepared for the Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute and InsightCrime, the growth of avocado production and exportation to the United States provided ample cover for the Milenio Cartel’s illegal operations during this period.¹⁰ Also important were Milenio’s ties to other larger drug trafficking organizations. At this time, there were four major cartels operating in different regional strongholds in Mexico: the Gulf Cartel (Cartel del Golfo, CDG), the Juárez Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Tijuana Cartel (also known as the Arellano Felix Organization, AFO). The Milenio Cartel developed close ties to the Juárez Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel, and their junior partners in the Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO), which had control over the port of Lázaro Cárdenas. Thanks to its alliances, the Milenio Cartel was able to diversify into cocaine trafficking and expanded its operations into southern Jalisco and the State of Mexico (Estado de México, or Edomex).

The landscape of drug trafficking in Michoacán began to shift in the early 2000s, when a Milenio Cartel associate named Carlos “El Tísico” (“Tuberculosis”) Rosales Mendoza split with the Valencias to form his own criminal operation. Employing a quasi-religious doctrine of vigilantism, divine justice, and folk heroism, Rosales portrayed his organization as the protector of local communities against the threat posed by other drug trafficking organizations, particularly those dealing methamphetamine and committing crimes against locals.¹¹ Developing close ties to Osiel Cárdenas, Rosales benefited from the support of the Gulf Cartel and its enforcers, Los Zetas, in an alliance that became known generically as “La Compañía” (“The Company”). With the help of these

⁹ Redacción. “De siete al inicio del sexenio, los cárteles mexicanos se multiplicaron: Calderón dejará por los menos 25.” *Sin Embargo*. August 20, 2012.

¹⁰ Althaus, Dudley and Steven Dudley. “Mexico’s Security Dilemma: Michoacán’s Militias: The Rise of Vigilantism and Its Implications Going Forward.” *Mexico Institute and Insight Crime*. 2014. Accessed September 18, 2014.

¹¹ “La Familia Michoacana Fact Sheet.” *Drug Enforcement Agency*. Accessed September 28, 2014.

ties, Rosales' business operations soon expanded into cocaine and methamphetamine, despite his group's previous aversion to the latter.

Using the instruction and example of the Zetas—including the use of torture, dismemberment, and military combat tactics—Rosales waged a violent campaign against his former associates in the Milenio Cartel, by now backed primarily by the Sinaloa Cartel (following the demise of Juárez Cartel leader Amado Carrillo Fuentes in 1997). In 2003, the arrest of Armando Cornelio Valencia weakened the Milenio Cartel, and confirmed the dominance of Rosales's criminal organization in the state.¹² In 2004, however, federal authorities also arrested Rosales. Control of his operations passed to two of his partners—Nazario “El Chayo” Moreno González and José de Jesús “El Chango” Méndez Vargas, who now branded their organization as “La Familia Michoacana,” or “The Michoacán Family” (LFM), still adhering to Rosales' unusual brand of quasi-religious populism.

At this point, LFM became positioned to play a pivotal role in the battles raging among the larger, more established cartels. The Gulf Cartel had been weakened by the arrest of Osiel Cárdenas in 2003 and by the mid-2000s found itself under siege by its former enforcers, Los Zetas. Evidently sensing an opportunity to take advantage of Rosales' arrest, Los Zetas also made a gambit to take over criminal operations in the state of Michoacán. However, in September 2006, LFM sent a very public message using the Zetas' own techniques against them, rolling five decapitated heads of Zeta members onto a dance floor in Uruapan, about 70 miles from the state capital.¹³ Previously a lesser-known organization, La Familia Michoacána had now “arrived” on the national and international stage.

The next few years produced continued clashes throughout the state, during what would be the worst period of inter-cartel violence, from roughly 2008 through 2011. In this period, national homicide rates trebled from their historic low in 2007 according to *Milenio*, primarily because of the dramatic increase of violence in just a handful of states, including Michoacán.¹⁴ While the Michoacán's violence in the mid-2000s contributed significantly to the national body count, Mexico's overall increases in violence were more attributable to the Sinaloa Cartel's split with its former Juárez and BLO allies in 2008.¹⁵ In Michoacán, this split also had implications for the balance of power, since the weakness of the BLO created an opportunity for an LFM bid to control illicit operations in the state's major port facility.

Data on homicides and “organized-crime-style” homicides have some significant limitations. In 2013, a year in which most other highly violent states experienced a drop in homicide, data from the National Public Security System (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, SNSP) show that Michoacán was one of the few states that went against this trend, and in fact experienced the greatest increase in the number of homicides out of any state (See Figure 2).

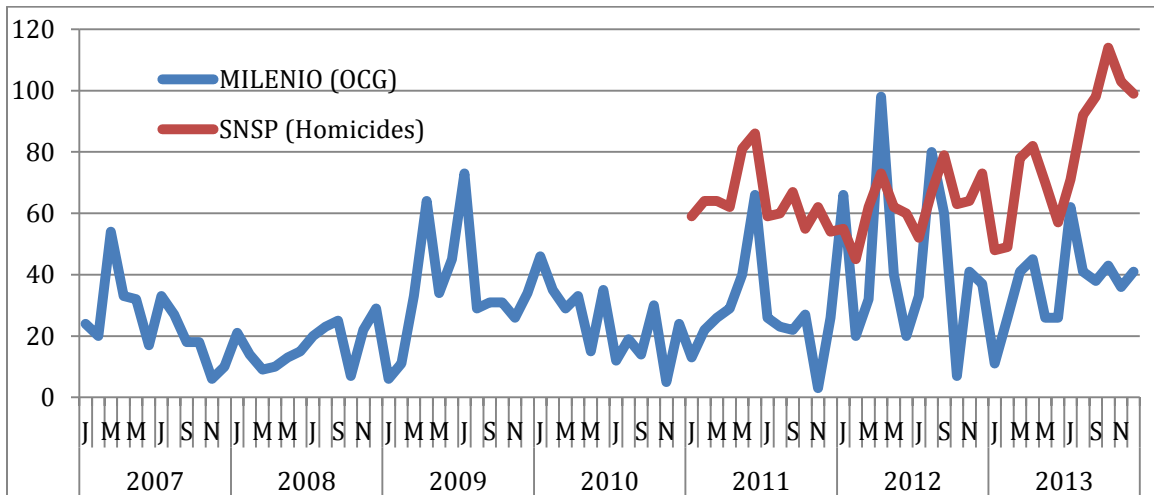
¹² Armando Cornelio Valencia's cousin Luis Valencia took over the leadership of the Milenio Cartel until his arrest.

¹³ Pérez Salazar, Juan Carlos. “Decapitados en México, un drama casi cotidiano.” *BBC*. November 1, 2013.

¹⁴ Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2013*, San Diego: Justice in Mexico, 2013.

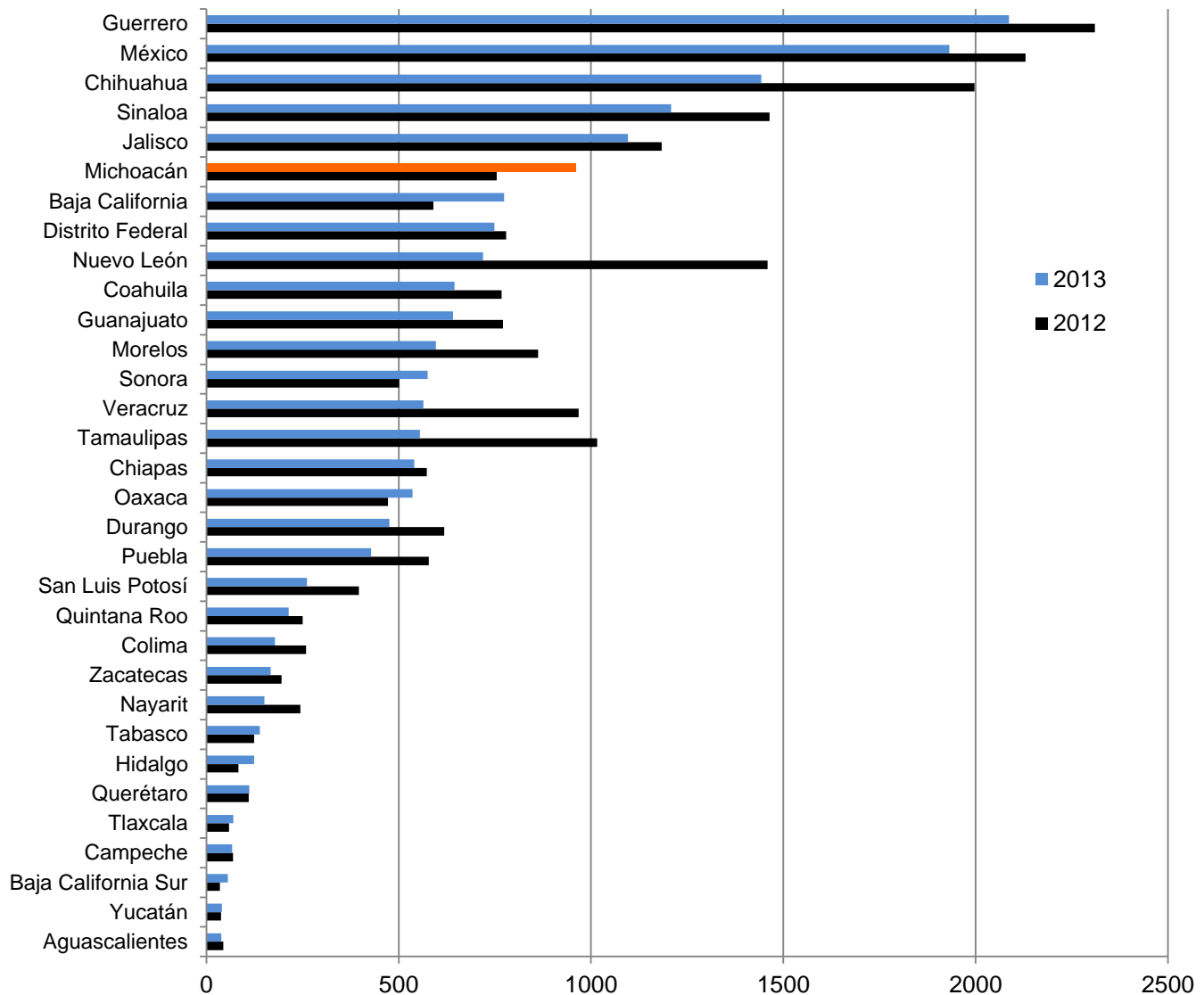
¹⁵ “Tres años de guerra.” *La Policiaca*. May 3, 2011.

Figure 2: Homicides Reported by SNSP and Organized-Crime-Style Homicides Documented by *Milenio* in Michoacán, 2007-2013



Source: Milenio; SNSP. This figure shows the number of organized crime-style homicides tracked by the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, and the number of homicides documented by law enforcement agencies per month in the state of Michoacán.

Figure 3: Total Homicides by State Reported by SNSP, 2012 and 2013



Source: SNSP.

As the conflict heated up in Michoacán, the number of intentional homicides increased significantly in the state and was particularly concentrated in the Tierra Caliente region in which criminal organizations were vying for control (See Figure 4). Thus, in 2013, while the greatest number of homicides in any municipality was found in Morelia, the state’s capital and largest city, the rate of homicides per capita was more concentrated in the southwestern portion of the state (See Map 1 and Map 2).

Figure 4: Homicides in Michoacán in 2013

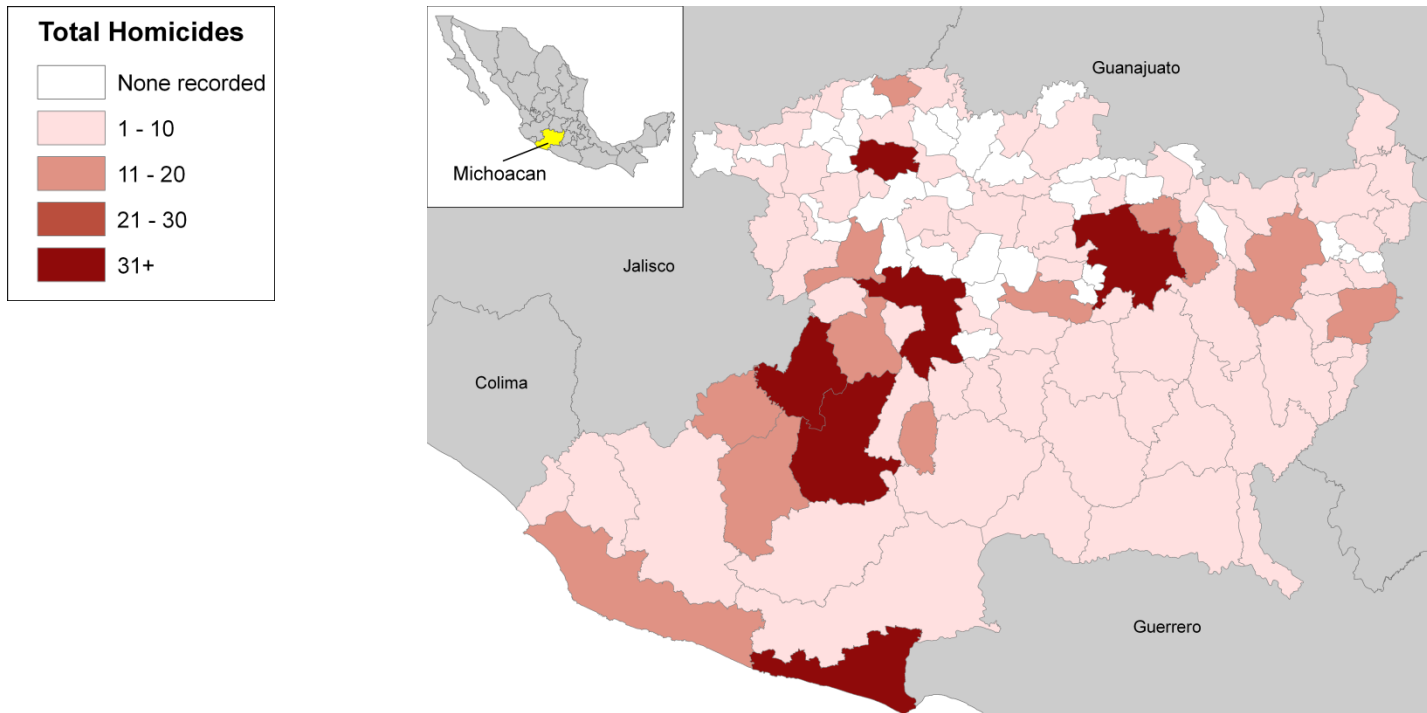
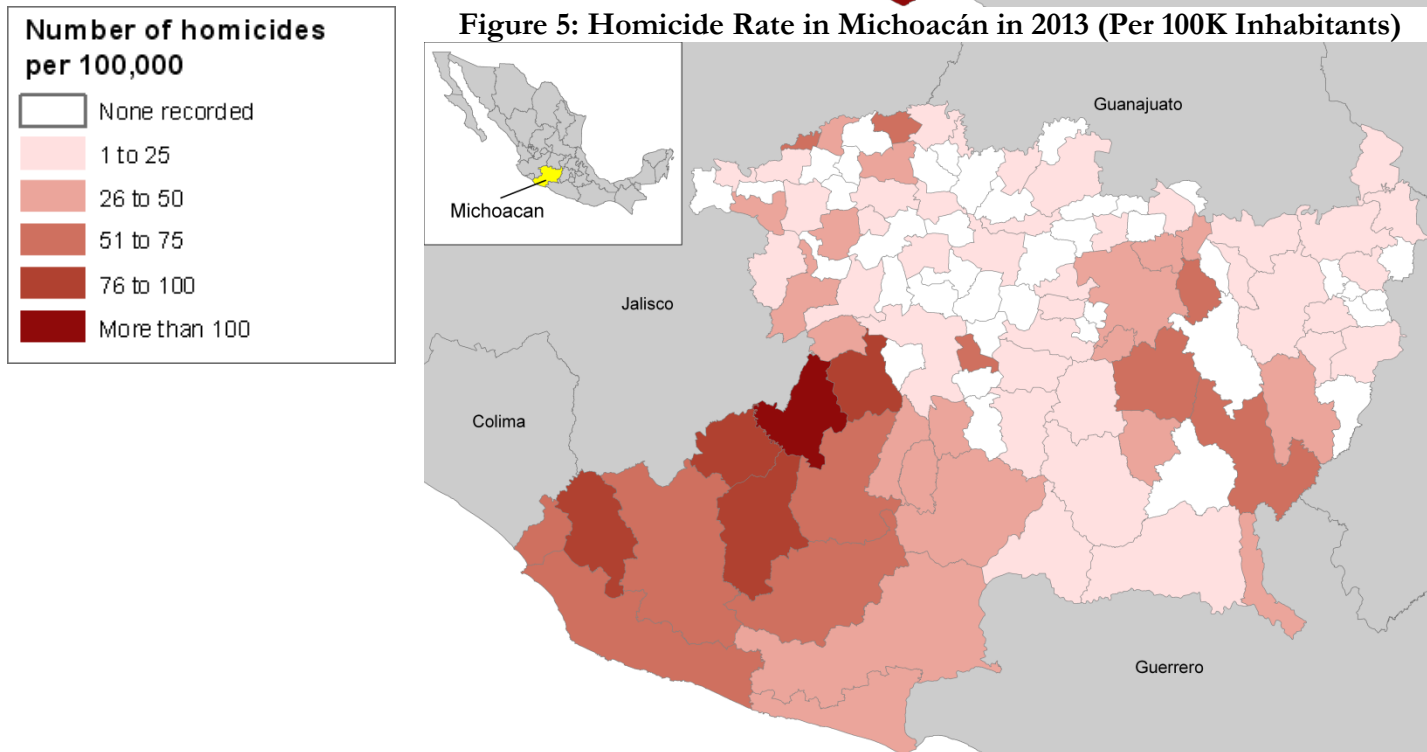


Figure 5: Homicide Rate in Michoacán in 2013 (Per 100K Inhabitants)



Maps prepared by Theresa Firestine.

LFM's fortunes appeared to diminish with the announcement of the death of Moreno González in a shoot out with federal authorities in Apatzingán in December 2010, and as José de Jesús Méndez Vargas, "El Chango," assumed operation of the cartel. Shortly thereafter, an LFM faction led by

Servando “La Tuta” Gómez Martínez, a former school teacher, split with Méndez Vargas and formed a splinter group known as the Knights Templar Organization (Caballeros Templarios, KTO, commonly referred to as *Templarios*), as proclaimed by “narcomessages” throughout the state in March 2011.¹⁶ Three months later, on June 21, 2011, Méndez Vargas was arrested in Aguascalientes and LFM appeared to be supplanted by KTO.

What was largely unknown then was that Gómez was not the top leader of the KTO at the time, since Moreno González had actually survived the federal assault in Apatzingán and was now running the new organization by proxy. This seemed all the more improbable because of the extent to which the KTO became involved in preying on the local population of Michoacán, which seemed to run counter to the teachings of Nazario Moreno González, or “El Más Loco.” KTO became a major producer of methamphetamine, using precursor chemicals imported from China, and also employed tactics of extortion and kidnapping for ransom that targeted owners of large lime and avocado growing operations, as well as small and medium sized business. Most important, KTO raised questions about the federal government’s ability to stamp out organized crime in Michoacán.

Federal Government Efforts in Michoacán Under President Calderón (2006-2012)

During the six-year presidential term of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), the effort to combat drug trafficking organizations became a top priority. Calderón, who hails from Michoacán and once ran (unsuccessfully) for the state’s governorship, launched what would become a counter-drug crusade in his own home state. Within days of taking office in December 2006, the president sent a reported 6,700 federal police and military personnel to Michoacán in the first of multiple federal deployments intended to quell the violence caused by the clash between the Gulf, Zeta, and LFM organizations.¹⁷ In January 2007, one month after taking office, Calderón himself visited the state, famously donning a military uniform and offering praise to the troops and federal police sent to protect his native state.¹⁸ Over the course of his term, Calderón continued this strategy around the country, reportedly increasing standing troop deployments throughout Mexico from 45,000 in 2007 to 96,000 in 2011 before a nearly 50% reduction to 49,000 in 2012, his last year in office.¹⁹

Michoacán thus served as the testing ground for the Calderón doctrine of massive military deployments to “recapture public spaces,” as well as targeted arrests to disrupt the leadership structures and networks of organized crime groups. Yet, federal government efforts in Michoacán were not limited to targeting key LFM leaders like Moreno González and Méndez Vargas, but extended to many of the state’s elected and appointed officials. On May 26, 2009, Mexican federal authorities unveiled an unprecedented operation that ultimately netted a total of 38 state and local officials—including ten mayors—from all three of the country’s major political parties (PRI, PAN,

¹⁶ Solano, Margarita. “La historia de ‘Los Callaberos Templarios’, un oscuro y sangriento cartel mexicano.” *El País*. August 27, 2013. See also Guardiola, Andrés. “Dejan narcomantas previo a visita papal, en Guanajuato.” *Excélsior*. March 18, 2012.

¹⁷ Aranda, Jesús and Gustavo Castillo. “Aumentó mil por ciento el número de ejecuciones en Chihuahua durante 2008.” *La Jornada*. January 21, 2009.

¹⁸ “I come as the supreme commander to recognize your work, to urge you to go boldly forward, and to tell you that we are with you,” Calderón declared. Authors’ translation from: “Vengo hoy como comandante supremo a reconocer su trabajo, a exhortarlos a seguir adelante con firmeza, entrega y a decirles que estamos con ustedes.” Herrera, Claudia and Ernesto Martínez. “Vestido de militar, Calderón rinde ‘tributo’ a las fuerzas armadas.” *La Jornada*. January 4, 2007.

¹⁹ Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional. “Informe de Rendición de Cuentas 2006-2012.” *Gobierno Federal de México*. 2012.

and PRD) in 12 of Michoacán's 113 municipalities.²⁰ The officials taken into custody in the massive crackdown, which became known as the "Michoacanazo," were alleged to have LFM ties. The strong show of force in Michoacán was intended to demonstrate the federal government's commitment to cracking down on organized crime and corruption.

However, the experience in Michoacán also revealed the limits and problems of the federal government's overall counter-drug strategy. First, as noted above, efforts to break up organized crime activities can have negative consequences. The series of splits and violent clashes among criminal organizations in Michoacán was triggered by government efforts to disrupt the leadership structures of these groups. Indeed, upon the arrest of LFM operative Méndez Vargas in 2011, drug trafficking analyst and College of William & Mary professor George Grayson noted that "rival groups like Los Zetas are 'rejoicing' at the possibility of making greater inroads into the state [of Michoacán], which usually means more fighting as various groups vie for control²¹." As Michoacán's organized crime groups splintered, this led to shifting alliances, more violent tactics, and the diversification of their activities into new profit-making areas like kidnapping and extortion, which have low barriers to entry.

Second, federal intervention in Michoacán also illustrated the weaknesses of the Mexican judicial system. Within the first three days after the operation, three of the mayors detained—Audel Méndez Chávez (Coahuayana), José Cortes Ramos (Aquila), and Osvaldo Esquivel Lucatero (Buenavista Tomatlán)—were cleared of any charges. The remainder was held under a special legal procedure known as "arraigo," which allowed federal investigators to hold the suspects without formal charges. Over the next two years, each of the remaining detainees was eventually released due to a lack of sufficient evidence of illicit activities.²² The last detainee, Mújica mayor Armando Medina, walked free only 19 months after the initial arrests.²³ Whether these 38 men were innocent or guilty—as Mexican federal government officials maintained even after their release—the Michoacanazo became widely viewed as either a political maneuver intended to embarrass the mostly PRI officials, or a blatant failure of federal prosecutors to build an adequate case for the operation. In either case, the ineffectiveness and lack of due process of the criminal justice system undermined the fight against organized crime in Michoacán.

A third problem revealed by the government's approach was the effect on human rights caused by the massive federal crackdown in Michoacán. During the Calderón administration, following Chihuahua, Michoacán had the second highest number of cases of military human rights abuses investigated by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH), the country's human rights ombudsman. From 2007 to 2012, there were 13 human rights cases in the state of Michoacán that resulted in formal documentation and recommendations by CNDH, including two recommendations in 2007, four in 2008, three in 2009, three in 2010, and one in 2011 (none were made in 2012).²⁴ Some of these abuses were recorded in

²⁰ Rivera, Rafael. "Federales detienen a otro alcalde Michoacano." *El Universal*. May 27, 2009. See also Notimex. "Citan a 36 personas más por caso Michoacán." *El Universal*. May 28, 2009.

²¹ Miller Lana, Sara. "La Familia drug cartel defeated, says Mexico." *Christian Science Monitor*. June 22, 2011.

²² Redacción. "De 38 detenidos por Michoacanazo, 37 libres." *El Universal*. September 28, 2010. See also Mosso, Rubén and Francisco García Davish. "El michoacanazo, ridículo de la PGR." *Milenio*. September 29, 2010.

²³ "El 'michoacanazo' aún no ha concluido: Tena Fernández." *El Financiero*. April 13, 2011. See also Vásquez, Cecilia. "Armando Medina Torres, el último implicado del 'michoacanazo' llega a Múgica." *Cambio de Michoacán*. April 17, 2011.

²⁴ Daly, Catherine et. al. "Armed with Impunity: Curbing Human Rights Abuses." *Justice in Mexico Special Report and Trans-Border Institute*. 2012.

major cities like Morelia and Uruapán, but most were reported in smaller, rural municipalities in the “Tierra Caliente” region affected by LFM and TKO activities.²⁵ These cases included cases of forced entry, unlawful detention, torture and physical abuse, and even loss of life.²⁶ It should be noted that detention without charge, as in the *arraigo* cases described in the “Michoacanazo” is widely considered in the international community to be a violation of human rights, but permitted by Mexican law and therefore not documented by CNDH.

Finally, all of the above had divisive and negative effects on civil society and state-society relations in Michoacán. As a result of the federal government crackdown, in some parts of the state, organized crime groups were revered more than the authorities themselves. The antipathy of some local populations toward the federal government’s intervention was perhaps a natural response to the kind of human rights abuses documented by CNDH. Yet society’s seeming support for the organized crime groups that prey upon ordinary people seems somewhat harder to reconcile. Following the reported death of Moreno González in 2010, for example, shrines to the fallen LFM leader proliferated throughout towns and villages of the Tierra Caliente region. Scholars such as Aguirre and Herrera (2012) point to the complex social factors—including institutional weakness, a lack of societal trust in authorities, kinship ties with organized crime figures—that created a fertile environment for organized crime groups to flourish in Michoacán. As Aguirre and Herrera note, given the “institutional vacuum” or absence of state power in the state, Michoacán society became accepting and even supportive of criminal activity in large part because of the role played by the LFM and later the KTO in asserting and enforcing a set of cultural “values, codes of conduct, behaviors, and symbol[s].”²⁷ In this context, communities felt that they had no support from state, and were forced to accept the presence and power of organized crime groups, or take the law into their own hands.

The Rise of Self Defense Forces in Michoacán

Enrique Peña Nieto assumed office as president of Mexico in December 2012. Within two months the new president faced a growing crisis in Michoacán, as a result of new clashes between the Knights Templar Organization (KTO) and groups claiming to be grassroots self-defense organizations (*autodefensas*), particularly in the Tierra Caliente region in the southwestern part of the state. Claiming to be primarily from the agriculture and livestock sectors of the local economies, but also including professionals and local politicians, members of the *autodefensas* said that they were responding to an elevated presence of organized crime groups in their communities—particularly

²⁵ CNDH investigated and reported on abuses in Apatzingán, Ario de Rosales, Buenavista Tomatlán, Carácuaro, La Huacana, Huetamo, Nocupétaro, Parácuaro, Los Reyes, Tanhuato, and Zinapécuaro.

²⁶ For example, on March 26, 2008, in Zinapécuaro, Michoacán, members of the Mexican Army detained three individuals at a bar, interrogated and beat them for information related to a kidnapping, and held them incommunicado (along with a fourth individual) at military base in Morelia, Michoacán before handing them over to the proper state authorities. Also, according to documentation by Human Rights Watch, Jesus Picazo Gómez was detained, held incommunicado, severely beaten, and tortured on a military base in Uruapán. In another case, a soldier opened fire on a vehicle without warning, killing 17-year-old Víctor Alfonso de la Paz Ortega. “Uniform Impunity: Mexico’s Misuse of Military Justice to Prosecute Abuses in Counternarcotics and Public Security Operations.” *Human Rights Watch*. April 29, 2009.

²⁷ Aguirre Ochoa, Jerjes Izcoatl and Hugo Amador Herrera Torres. “Societal Attitudes and Organized Crime in Mexico: The Case of Michoacán, Mexico.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science: Special Issue*. Vol. 2, No. 16, August 2012.

that of the Templarios.²⁸ The primary complaints were of extortion and threats for failure to cooperate with the group's demands. According to data from the Executive Secretary of the National Public Security System (Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, SESNSP), there were 342 investigations opened into complaints of extortion in 2012, as compared with 184 in 2011, and 162 a decade prior.²⁹

Origins of the *Autodefensas*

The first reported emergence of *autodefensas* occurred in the municipalities of Buenavista and Tepalcatepec in the Tierra Caliente region in January 2013, and spread quickly, first to nearby municipalities, and then beyond.³⁰ By the end of the year, there were an estimated 20,000 members of the *autodefensas* operating in eight municipalities: Buenavista, Tepalcatepec, Coalcomán, Aguililla, Tancitaro, La Huacana, Churumuco, Parácuaro.³¹ In early 2014, even as federal negotiators attempted to contain the *autodefensas* phenomenon, their presence multiplied rapidly, reportedly expanding to 29 municipalities across Michoacán by March 2014.³² As with similar groups that formed in at least 12 other states, what most of Michoacán's *autodefensas* have in common is that they are found in relatively poor, rural areas where state and federal authorities have little or no presence, and where municipal police forces are weak and/or susceptible to influence from organized crime.

The *autodefensas*' initial strategic methods consisted primarily of occupying municipal police stations, placing officials they claimed to be corrupt under detention, and setting up armed checkpoints at access points entering and leaving affected towns. They also employed an increasingly visible and widespread public relations campaign involving social media, as their success in any given municipality depends upon community support there. Some communities were relatively quick to offer support to the groups, particularly given reports that in addition to extortions, threats, and acts of physical violence, members of the Knights Templar would cut off the supply of fuel and food in some towns, and forbid residents from accessing it elsewhere.³³ Nevertheless, some municipalities saw protests over the emergence of *autodefensas* in their communities, such as that of Parácuaro, where blockades were set up on the Apatzingán-Cuatro Caminos highway in early January 2014, a little over a month after three Federal Police (Policía Federal, PF) officers were killed and 13 others were wounded in an ambush nearby.³⁴ In some cases, buses were taken and used in the blockades, prompting bus service cancellations in the area. Citizens carrying out the blockades demanded the removal of the *autodefensa* that had taken over the municipality's police station.³⁵ Likely leading to the

²⁸ Díaz Sánchez, Salvador. "Autodefensas en Michoacán: ¿Guerra civil o insurrección de la burguesía?" *La Jornada de Oriente*. January 15, 2014. See also Monroy, Jorge. "Agricultores, empresarios y políticos entre los civiles armados." *El Economista*. January 26, 2014.

²⁹ Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública. "Informe de víctimas de homicidio, secuestro y extorsión 2014." *Secretaría de Gobernación*. Last accessed September 2014.

³⁰ "Castilias Mendoza, Sayra. "Autodefensas en 23 municipios de Michoacán." *Cambio de Michoacán*." February 22, 2014.

³¹ AFP. "Inicia proceso para desmovilizar a las Autodefensas." *El Economista*. April 28, 2014. See also García Tinoco, Miguel. "Se extienden *autodefensas*; grupo armado toma municipio de Parácuaro." *Excelsiór*. January 5, 2014.

³² Macías, Verónica. "Autodefensas toman un nuevo municipio." *El Economista*. March 25, 2014.

³³ Wilkinson, Tracy. "Mexico launches military push to restore order in Michoacán state." *Los Angeles Times*. May 21, 2013.

³⁴ Martínez, Dalia and Marcos Muedano. "Suman tres los federales caídos en Michoacán." *El Universal*. November 29, 2014.

³⁵ Martínez, Ernesto. "Siguen bloqueos en Parácuaro; piden retiro de autodefensas." *La Jornada*. January 7, 2014.

protests was the fact that the majority of those involved in the push to occupy Parácuaro were from outside the community, according to a statement at the time from Governor Vallejo.³⁶

While they began in early 2013 as relatively unstructured groups, within a year the *autodefensas* had attained an organization that has been compared with armed forces, as well as organized criminal groups. According to statements from *autodefensas* members cited in *El Universal*, each group has an accountant charged with purchasing supplies and, in some cases, paying members.³⁷ Moreover, *autodefensas* groups were commanded by what could be equated to lieutenants, each of whom oversees ten groups or cells comprising “soldiers,” who carry out the security functions for the group. Additionally, there was a group of *autodefensas*, known as H3 that was placed in charge of advancing on towns and occupying municipal police buildings.

Several individuals that had distinguished themselves as leaders within the movement—either recognized by the federal government as spokespeople for the *autodefensas*, or within their organizations for the leadership they have provided—were present for the signing of the disarmament treaty in April 2014.³⁸ Estanislao Beltrán Torres, of the Buenavista Tomatlán *autodefensa*, became recognized by the government as the coordinator general of Michoacán’s self-defense groups.³⁹ Popularly referred to as “Papá Pitufo” (Papa Smurf) because of his bushy white beard, Beltrán Torres was a lime grower who felt compelled to join the *autodefensas* movement in response to KTO interference with his industry. Hipólito Mora, also a lime producer, was reportedly the first to take up arms against the Templarios in his community of La Ruana in the Buenavista Tomatlán municipality, motivated by KTO’s entry into lime packing operations in the area. He was the leader of the *autodefensa* in La Ruana, and became a de-facto leader of the self-defense groups in the Tierra Caliente region. Meanwhile, José Manuel Mireles Valverde, a doctor who worked for the Red Cross for a time in California, was the most visible leader of the Michoacán *autodefensas* before he was in an aviation accident in early January 2014, and subsequently left Michoacán. A man known by the moniker “Comandante Cinco,” another lime producer, became recognized as the leader of the *autodefensa* in Parácuaro. Luis Antonio Torres González, known commonly as “El Americano” because he was born in the United States, became the leader of the Buenavista Tomatlán self-defense group. He joined the *autodefensa* movement after he was kidnapped in 2012 when he was vacationing with his family in Michoacán, which led his family to sell property to pay the \$150,000 (USD) ransom.

The *autodefensas* can be categorized into two classifications in terms of their composition and goals, as has been indicated by José Jesús Reyna García, the former secretary general of the Michoacán government. While some of these groups emerged as true, grass-roots entities within communities impacted by organized crime, others, such as the group originating in Buenavista, attempted to expand toward the municipality of Apatzingán, the largest in the Tierra Caliente region and also the center of the Templarios’ influence there. Edgardo Buscaglia of Columbia University argues that groups belonging to this second classification do not meet the parameters for true, community self-defense groups, as they have not been legitimately chosen by the people they claim to defend. He

³⁶ Martínez, Ernesto. “Siguen bloqueos en Parácuaro; piden retiro de autodefensas.” *La Jornada*. January 7, 2014.

³⁷ Muédano, Marcos. “Autodefensas se organizan al ‘estilo militar.’” *El Universal*. February 3, 2014.

³⁸ An agreement was reached between self-defense group leaders and the federal government to disarm the groups by May 10, 2014, and integrate them into what would become a Rural Defense Corps under the auspices of the Mexican Army.

³⁹ García, Dennis A. “Autodefensas, con signos de fractura; desconocen a Papá Pitufo como vocero.” *La Crónica de Hoy*. February 22, 2014.

maintains that the groups that emerged in February 2013 more closely resemble paramilitary groups, some receiving funding from business interests, some allegedly from organized crime groups, and others surreptitiously from the government. An *autodefensa*, he said is “socially legitimate” when the community requests it, and not when it takes on an “offensive character,” attempting to clean up entire regions, as is the case with most of the groups in Tierra Caliente, with some of the groups joining efforts with the Federal Police as early as May 2013 to take over police functions in communities in the area. Buscaglia holds up the self-defense group in the community of Cherán as an example of a true *autodefensa*, appointed by the residents, without logistical support to businesses or the government. He maintained that these groups were in the minority in Michoacán.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the groups’ funding has largely been an area of speculation, with some fearing that the *autodefensas* were receiving support from organized crime groups in the area. While that is still just speculation, it does appear that the groups have received funding from important regional economic sectors. Self-defense groups’ spokesmen Estanislao Beltrán announced in February 2014 that the groups were indeed receiving financial support from the state’s mining sector, which has reported that for years it has been extorted by the Knights Templar. Interviewed by *AFP*, the head of a foreign mining company operating in Michoacán, who asked to remain anonymous, said that since the *autodefensas* took control of the town where the company operates extortions have largely ceased.⁴¹ In exchange, he said, the company has agreed to pay \$3-\$4 per ton of iron it extracts. Michoacán is the largest producer of iron in Mexico, representing 27.2% of national production. According to the same source, the Knights Templar reportedly began illegally extracting iron in 2010 and exporting it to China, primarily via the port in Lázaro Cárdenas, which the Mexican Army has maintained control of since more than 9,000 soldiers were sent there in January 2014.

Major Accomplishments of *Autodefensas*

Perhaps most the important accomplishment for the self-defense groups in their more than 18 months in existence was their recapturing of Apatzingán—a municipality that has long-been at the center of the fight for control—from the organized crime groups. The self-defense groups had identified the city as their top strategic priority, and had worked for months to surround the Templarios stronghold, taking over security functions in several surrounding communities. On February 8, 2014 the groups, who were supposedly unarmed, entered the city of more than 90,000, along with members of the Federal Police and the Mexican Army. They then sent out a Twitter message reading, “Today the world will be witness to your liberation, Apatzingán.”⁴²

Another significant accomplishment of the self-defense groups was the recovery of the state’s lucrative fruit industry, which had been heavily infiltrated by the Templarios. Michoacán is considered the principle exporter of limes and mangos worldwide, providing a revenue flow that the Templarios quickly learned to exploit. According to Sergio Ramírez Castañeda from the National Mexican Lime Product System Commission (Comité Nacional del Sistema Producto Limón Mexicano), Michoacán as of April 2014 was producing 1.3 metric tons of limes per day, and

⁴⁰ Macías, Verónica. “En Michoacán operan tres tipos diferentes de paramilitares.” *El Economista*. January 19, 2014.

⁴¹ AFP. “Mineras financian a autodefensas.” *El Economista*. February 19, 2014.

⁴² Fausset, Richard. “Mexico vigilantes backed by troops march into key city in Michoacan.” *Los Angeles Times*. February 8, 2014.

averaged 1.8 in 2013.⁴³ Aside from extorting the agriculture industry, the Templarios also came to control product distribution, infiltrating lime and mango packing operations and deciding what to buy, how much, and the price to be paid. They would also slow production to manipulate market prices. In June 2013, Hipólito Mora, a lime grower and prominent *autodefensas* leader in the La Ruana municipality, estimated that between 70% and 80% of profits would be lost for the year given the OCG's involvement and meddling in the business.⁴⁴ Aside from the economic costs to the fruit industry, there has been substantial human cost as well, which data from the National Public Security System (SNSP) most certainly underestimate. This was most visible on April 10, 2013 when dozens of lime pickers who had marched into Apatzingán, the bastion of the Templarios, protested the violence and extortions. The group, escorted by Federal Police, was attacked by heavily armed Templarios who came upon them in pickup trucks, leaving an official death toll of 14, though those present maintain that there were 16 deaths, and 20 more disappeared.⁴⁵

Autodefensas, in some cases organized by people in the fruit industry themselves, formed in Michoacán's lime growing region around February 2013 as a response to the violence and extortions, as well as to the government's failure to respond, and by most accounts succeeded in regaining control of the industry. The price of limes spiked in 2014, in part due to a lower production throughout Mexico caused by weather extremes, but also due to the *autodefensas* in turn manipulating the market price of limes in order to recuperate lost profits. The *autodefensas* ordered the fixing of prices among Apatzingán lime producers, resulting in a spike from \$15 pesos per pound in February to as much as \$30 pesos per pound in April. The groups also removed the board of directors of the Apatzingán lime association to ensure that organized crime would not influence industry decisions.⁴⁶

Federal Government Intervention Under President Peña Nieto

After an increasing wave of violence and insecurity, Peña Nieto announced a new security strategy in mid-May 2013 to combat organized crime in the state, which became the first major operation launched since he assumed the presidency in December 2012. At the center of the strategy was to establish close collaboration with local governments to confront the situation of lawlessness in some regions of the state. The first action was the nomination of Mexican Army General Alberto Reyes Vaca as Michoacán's public security secretary, after his predecessor had resigned in February.⁴⁷ The operation included the deployment of the Army and the Navy to different regions within the state, and with the appointment of an Army General as the new public security chief. While exact numbers of soldiers deployed were not released in initial media reports, Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong indicated that this operation would deploy troops from the Ministry of Defense (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, SEDENA) and the Ministry of Navy (Secretaría de Marina, SEMAR), who would be supported by state and municipal governments. There were additional deployments in November 2013 and January 2014.⁴⁸ Michoacán's interim governor at the

⁴³ Jiménez, Benito. "Exprimen limón las autodefensas." *El Norte*. March 7, 2014.

⁴⁴ Castellanos, Laura. "Las extorsiones 'Templarios' en Tierra Caliente." *El Universal*. June 10, 2013.

⁴⁵ Castellanos, Laura. "Las extorsiones 'Templarios' en Tierra Caliente." *El Universal*. June 10, 2013.

⁴⁶ García Tinoco, Miguel. "Recuperan el control de tianguis limonero en Michoacán." *Excélsior*. February 12, 2014.

⁴⁷ Rubí, Mauricio and Jorge Monroy. "Michoacán con nueva estrategia a tres niveles." *El Economista*. May 21, 2013.

⁴⁸ Notimex and Francisco García Davish. "Mil militares más 'blindan' Apatzingán." *Milenio*. November 30, 2013. See also AFP. "México: 9.300 policías y militares desplegados en violento estado de Michoacán." *Univisión*. January 21, 2014.

time, José Jesús Reyna García—who replaced Fausto Vallejo Figueroa for health reasons—added that the operation would at first focus on the Tierra Caliente region, and would gradually progress to others.⁴⁹

On November 4, 2013, the Mexican Navy occupied Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacán, the country's second-largest port by way of freight transferred in Mexico's leading iron producing state, in order to combat the Templarios' infiltration into the exportation of iron ore to China. Drug trafficking organizations, which had made inroads into Mexico's iron ore mining industry, had thus integrated themselves even deeper into the national economy. Federal officials had reportedly been aware of the problem since 2010, when that group's predecessor, La Familia Michoacana, carried out the same practice. According to comments by people within the mining industry to the Mexican daily newspaper *La Jornada*, the Templarios demand payment from local coal transportation cooperatives for safe passage to the port.⁵⁰ They also have helped iron ore mining operations to gain control of mineral claims, and have pressured customs officials to allow the free passage of ore. An official speaking anonymously with *La Jornada* in January estimated that roughly half of the area's mining product was processed without the proper permits.⁵¹ Building on economic relations with China has been one of President Peña Nieto's top priorities in the early stages of his presidency, and with plans for expanding the port of Lázaro Cárdenas to compete with the likes of the port of Los Angeles, the Templarios will continue to be a liability to economic growth through the port as long as they maintain their operational capacities, as will any splinter or other criminal organization that may replace them.

Several months after the operation at the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, public security functions were effectively taken over by the federal government on January 15, 2014 with Peña Nieto's appointment of Alfredo Castillo Cervantes as public security commissioner for the state, relieving the ailing Governor Fausto Vallejo of that component of his governing responsibilities.⁵² Castillo was trained as an attorney and worked in the federal Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) before Peña Nieto, then governor of the State of Mexico, appointed him to serve as attorney general of that state. He rejoined the PGR after Peña's election to the presidency. Upon assuming his new role as Michoacán security commissioner, Castillo was given free reign over the state's public security strategy, charged with coordinating the efforts of all federal agencies involved in restoring public security in the state; developing and implementing a strategy for not only preventing crime, but also restoring the social fabric; and working with local authorities to coordinate efforts to restore public security and promote community wellbeing. Castillo also assumed the complicated task of engaging in sit-down meetings with leaders of the *autodefensas*, in the hopes of organizing a disarmament agreement. The new commissioner stressed that his appointment did not impugn the integrity of existing state-level officials, nor that his presence was intended to replace them in their functions, but rather to align the efforts of all agencies involved to most effectively confront the public security crisis in the state. He also criticized the operation ordered by former President Calderón in December 2006 for failing to rebuild local institutions, allowing organized crime groups to quickly regain control once the federal presence receded.⁵³

⁴⁹ Redacción. "De arranque, operativo de seguridad en Michoacán prioriza siete municipios." *Cambio de Michoacán*. May 22, 2013.

⁵⁰ "Controlan Caballeros templarios exportación de mineral de hierro." *La Jornada*. January 3, 2014.

⁵¹ "Controlan Caballeros templarios exportación de mineral de hierro." *La Jornada*. January 3, 2014.

⁵² Redacción. "Vallejo anuncia relevos en gabinete de seguridad." *El Universal*. January 18, 2014.

⁵³ Redacción. "Castillo alista cambios en las dependencias de seguridad de Michoacán." *CNN México*. January 16, 2014.

Despite Castillo's statements, January 2014 brought major shakeups to the Michoacán government. While Governor Fausto Vallejo remained despite numerous calls for him to step down, many of those responsible for public security in the state were replaced. José Martín Godoy Castro became Michoacán's attorney general, while Carlos Hugo Castellano was appointed public security secretary. Accompanying him was Adolfo Eloy Peralto, who assumed the position of assistant public security secretary. For his part, Jesús Isaac Aceves was appointed to head up the state's prison system. Each of the six regional attorneys general (subprocuradurías regionales) was also slated for replacement.⁵⁴ The effort led by Castillo moved to wrest control of the municipalities taken by the *autodefensas*, as well as others still under influence from organized crime, and by the end of the month, Monte Alejandro Rubido Garceia, executive secretary of the SNSP, reported that the Federal Police had taken control of security duties in all 27 municipalities the federal operation had targeted in Michoacán.⁵⁵

As a long-term strategy for countering the Knights Templar organization, in February 2014 Castillo then lobbied Michoacán deputies from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the state congress to introduce asset forfeiture (*extinción de dominio*) legislation in order to "asphyxiate" the group financially. The legislators present at the meeting expressed a willingness to examine such a proposal, and by early May an asset forfeiture bill had been fast tracked through the state congress.⁵⁶ The law (Ley de Extinción de Dominio) allows for the confiscation of goods belonging to organized crime, and mandates the creation of a special unit for identifying organized crime groups' financial structures. The law was slated to go into effect by September 2014, but in June it was suspended while the Mexican Supreme Court (Suprema Corte de Justicia Nacional, SCJN) examined it for possible constitutional violations.

Plan Michoacán

On February 4, 2014, President Peña Nieto announced that the federal government would invest \$3.4 billion (USD) in infrastructure and social programs in Michoacán in order to address some of the state's root causes of the unrest. The proposal was vastly greater than the one set forth by Peña Nieto's social development secretary, Rosario Robles, who pledged around \$225 million (USD);⁵⁷ yet the plan was similar to that implemented in Ciudad Juárez by his predecessor, Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), amidst the security crisis in that city. That program, "Todos Somos Juárez," is generally considered to have been a success. Homicides in the city decreased by 70% by some counts following the program's implementation, though it is debatable how much of this decrease resulted from Todos Somos Juárez, as opposed to the likelihood that organized crime-related homicides significantly decreased due to the Sinaloa Cartel effectively winning its turf war with the Juárez Cartel there.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Plan Michoacán, which Peña Nieto said is meant "to recover security, establish conditions of social order, and spur economic development" in the state, appears to have been

⁵⁴ Redacción. "Vallejo anuncia relevos en gabinete de seguridad." *El Universal*. January 18, 2014.

⁵⁵ "El operativo en Michoacán completa el relevo de policías municipales." *CNN México*. January 18, 2014.

⁵⁶ Redacción. "Alfredo Castillo pide aplicar la 'Ley de extinción de dominio' en Michoacán." *Aristegui Noticias*. February 7, 2014.

⁵⁷ Fausset, Richard and Cecilia Sanchez. "Mexico to invest \$3.4 billion in troubled Michoacán state." *Los Angeles Times*. February 4, 2014.

⁵⁸ Notimex. "Poiré destaca logros de 'Todos Somos Juárez.'" *El Economista*. July 31, 2012.

modeled at least in part after Todos Somos Juárez, with its emphasis on rebuilding society and encouraging public engagement.⁵⁹ It focuses on five central areas:

- 1) **Economic development**, including bank credits for starting small businesses, and projects for improving farming infrastructure;
- 2) **Education**, including \$1.6 billion pesos (\$120 million USD) for 350,000 scholarships for all levels of schooling, construction of new school buildings, and use of public spaces for art;
- 3) **Infrastructure and housing**, including the construction of a second terminal at the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, and \$3.5 billion pesos (\$260 million USD) in housing credits for an estimated 24,000 families;
- 4) **Public health**, including a regional hospital in Apatzingán and a new children's hospital in the state capital of Morelia, and renovations of hospitals in Zitácuaro and Ciudad Hidalgo; and
- 5) **Social development and sustainability**, including expanding elder care services to include 115,000 beneficiaries, the addition of 30 municipalities to the National Crusade Against Hunger (Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre) including the construction of 400 new community food banks, a new women's center in Apatzingán, the construction of four new family medicine centers, park restoration, and the establishment of the National Center of Geothermal Energy Center (Centro Nacional de Investigación en Energía Geotérmica) in Morelia.⁶⁰

In the same vein, Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong announced the 24 representatives from the federal government who will act as liaisons in Michoacán to as many government agencies, including the ministries of the Treasury (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, SHCP), Social Development (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, SEDESOL), Environment (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, SEMARNAT), and Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP), among many others.⁶¹ Their roles are critical to the strategy's success, given that the Plan details 117 "Works," and 133 "Actions" involving 21 separate government agencies. There is a clear emphasis on restoring infrastructure as well as social institutions, reflected in the number of action items assigned to the Public Education Ministry with 37, and the Communications and Transportation Ministry (Secretaría de Comunicación y Transporte, SCT) with 83. As of September 2014, the federal government reports 191 of the 250 action items as "in process," and three as "finalized."⁶²

Disarming and Regulating the Self-Defense Groups

Beginning in January 2014, the Mexican federal government and the *autodefensas* entered into nuanced discussions over the groups' eventual disarmament by May 2014. Two months earlier, the government insisted that the groups halt their expansion toward Apatzingán, one of the Tierra Caliente region's principle cities, and widely accepted to be the Templarios' foremost stronghold

⁵⁹ Fausset, Richard and Cecilia Sanchez. "Mexico to invest \$3.4 billion in troubled Michoacán state." *Los Angeles Times*. February 4, 2014.

⁶⁰ "Los 45,500 mdp de inversión federal en Michoacán, punto por punto." *CNN México*. February 4, 2014. See also Notimex. "Detallan en portal avances del Plan Michoacán." *El Universal*. March 25, 2014.

⁶¹ Castellanos J., Francisco. "Presenta Osorio a los 24 enlaces de la Federación en Michoacán." *Proceso*. February 18, 2014.

⁶² Website. "Plan Michoacán." *México: Gobierno de la República*. Last accessed September 30, 2014.

there. On January 4, 2014, self-defense groups entered Parácuaro, another municipality near Apatzingán, taking control of the municipal building and blockading the access points to the city. Roughly a week later, the Federal Police negotiated entry into Parácuaro with the self-defense groups and citizens alike. It was agreed that the groups would not be required to disarm, but would hide their weapons, allowing the Federal Police to be in charge of patrolling the streets.

On January 27, though, Interior Minister Osorio Chong announced that the federal government and self-defense groups in Michoacán had agreed on a pact by which the groups would be absorbed into the state security apparatus, to form what are being termed “Rural Defense Corps,” operating under the authority of the Mexican Army.⁶³ On January 29, Castillo announced that the process of regulating the self-defense groups in Michoacán had begun, with recruiting, distributing uniforms, and collecting records for members of the new Rural Defense Corps.⁶⁴ The document was signed by Castillo Cervantes, Governor Vallejo, and self-defense group leaders Estanislao Beltrán, Hipólito Mora, Jesús Bucio, and Adalberto Rodríguez. The eight-point document specified that the corps would be temporary, and required the groups’ leaders to provide the government with a registry of all of their members, and also to register their weapons.

Governor Vallejo and Commissioner Castillo expressed their hope and expectation that regularizing the self-defense groups and submitting them to vetting exams would lessen the risk of organized crime infiltration.⁶⁵ A month after the decision to regulate the self-defense groups, Michoacán Governor Fausto Vallejo reported that nearly 700 members had registered themselves and their firearms with the Mexican Army by February 2014.⁶⁶ He added that not all of those who had presented themselves had passed the required examinations for admittance into the Rural Defense Corps. Vallejo did not elaborate on the percentage of applicants that did not gain admittance, nor did he mention the specific reasons for which they were turned away.⁶⁷ Moreover, despite the pact, the self-defense groups’ expansion and activities continued, at times with the implicit support of the government, such as the *autodefensas*’ takeover of Apatzingán on February 8 with members of the Federal Police and Mexican Army. Also, notably absent from the signing was Dr. José Manuel Mireles, leader of the Buenavista self-defense groups, suggesting a lack of complete agreement with the new accord.⁶⁸

The tenuous goodwill established between the government and *autodefensas* in the early months of the process of disarming and institutionalization came into serious question following the arrest in March 2014 of Hipólito Mora Chávez, the leader of the self-defense groups in La Ruana, Michoacán, for his alleged involvement in the murder the previous week of Rafael “El Pollo” Sánchez Moreno (52) and José “El Nino” Torres Castañeda (49).⁶⁹ Although it is believed that at

⁶³ “Autodefensas se incorporarán a Cuerpos de Defensa Rurales.” *El Informador*. January 28, 2014. See also “Comienza proceso de regularización de autodefensas en oeste de México.” *EFE*. January 29, 2014.

⁶⁴ “Comienza proceso de regularización de autodefensas en oeste de México.” *EFE*. January 29, 2014.

⁶⁵ “Autodefensas se incorporarán a Cuerpos de Defensa Rurales.” *El Informador*. January 28, 2014.

⁶⁶ Notimex. “Casi 700 autodefensas se han registrado: Vallejo.” *El Universal*. February 20, 2014.

⁶⁷ Notimex. “Casi 700 autodefensas se han registrado: Vallejo.” *El Universal*. February 20, 2014.

⁶⁸ In April, Mireles agreed that his group would abide by the agreement. However, soon after that he was arrested along with dozens of his *autodefensa* for violating the pact. Laura Castellanos, “Acuerdan disolución de las autodefensas en Michoacán.” *El Universal*. April 14, 2014. See also Díaz, Daniel. “Aplauda PRD Michoacán desarme de autodefensas.” *La Jornada Michoacán*. April 15, 2014.

⁶⁹ The power vacuum created by Mora’s arrest was immediately filled by Luis Antonio Torres, known as “El Americano,” the leader of another self-defense group in Buenavista Tomatlán that lies in dispute with Mora’s group. El Americano quickly moved his self-defense group into La Ruana and demanded those whom are loyal to Mora to

least two other members in Mora's self-defense group actually killed Sánchez and Torres, the State Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado, PGJE) brought Mora in on 35 counts of robbery, threats, deprivation of freedom of liberty, and overseeing the homicides. Mora's arrest created a power vacuum in La Ruana that the leader of a rival group in nearby Buenavista Tomatlán attempted to fill, prompting intervention from federal forces to diffuse the situation. On January 3, 2015, Hipólito Mora was indicted along with 26 others in connection with the deaths of 11 in a December 16, 2014 firefight, in which his son was killed. Mora claims that his group came under attack from the self-defense group led by Luis Antonio Torres ("El Americano").

Despite these tensions, on April 4, Security Commissioner Castillo, alongside Interior Minister Osorio Chong, announced that self-defense groups had agreed that members would either disarm or join the Rural Defense Corps by May 10, 2014.⁷⁰ Authorities were instructed to arrest civilians found in possession of a firearm beginning on May 11. As of May 10, authorities reported having registered more than 6,000 weapons, and more than 120 group members had been provided with uniforms, 9mm pistols, .223 caliber rifles, and perhaps most importantly, legitimacy by the government.⁷¹

Along with the initial stated plan to incorporate former self-defense members into a Rural Defense Corps under the control of the Mexican Army, a new police force was also created: the Rural State Police (Policía Rural Estatal). While members of the Corps were to operate under SEDENA, assisting in intelligence to combat organized crime but on a voluntary basis, community members joining the Rural State Police are under the command of the state government and receive a wage. The State Rural Police has replaced the traditional municipal police forces and operates primarily in and around the municipalities where they live and are assigned, though they can be called on to respond to larger threats in other municipalities. As such, the new model closely resembles the unified police model (*mando único*) strongly advocated by former President Calderón and then Public Security Secretary Genaro García Luna, under which state police forces across the nation would assume a tighter control over the historically corrupt municipal police forces.

These reforms came about quickly, and initial reports indicated that infrastructure and training needs could prove to be hindrances, at least early on. Upon visiting the municipality of Tepalcatepec in May 2014, *El Universal* reported that the new police force there lacked the facilities, operative and logistical structures, and training and equipment to properly safeguard its local population. They also lacked a salary structure, as well as other benefits for performing their duties.⁷²

However, reports later in the year indicated that the capacities of the Rural Force had improved. Along with the high-caliber weapons they had acquired as *autodefensas*, these forces were also equipped with night-vision goggles and modern vehicles, many with off-road capacity. They were also granted a monthly salary of between \$8,000 and \$12,000 pesos (\$595-\$893 USD), as well as benefits including social security, and housing and education stipends, according to statements in June from Commissioner Castillo, the federal Michoacán security commissioner.⁷³ The Citizens'

evacuate from the territory within 48 hours, threatening violent consequences if they failed to leave or obey the rules of newly formed cartel in La Ruana. The growing tension ultimately led to the federal authorities stepping in to help diffuse the situation.

⁷⁰ Martínez, Dalia. "Próximo, desarme de autodefensas: Castillo." *El Universal*. April 4, 2014.

⁷¹ "May 2014 News Monitor." *Justice in Mexico*. May 31, 2014.

⁷² Muédano Enviado, Marcos. "Rurales operan en improvisado cuartel." *El Universal*. May 12, 2014.

⁷³ Dalia Martínez, "Salarios para policía Rural, entre 8 y 21 mil pesos." *El Universal*. June 10, 2014. Ernesto Martínez, "Fuerte operativo en Michoacán en busca de 'La Tuta.'" *La Jornada*. September 24, 2014.

Force, which coordinates with the PGJE, and includes intelligence and investigatory functions, has a starting wage of \$15,000 pesos, as compared with the Rural Force's \$8,000 pesos. Members of the latter can aspire to join the ranks of the former, given that they meet certain requirements. Bernardo Trelles Duarte, head of the State Public Security Council (Consejo Estatal de Seguridad Pública, CESO), said that recruitment has spread to the public and private universities in the state dedicated to studying the security situation in Michoacán.

Ongoing Tensions Between the Government and Self Defense Groups

After the deadline for self-defense groups to disarm and join the Rural Defense Corp in May, it was clear that a comprehensive disarmament was far from complete, and that internal rifts continued to divide the self-defense groups. Largely at the center of such resistance and concern over the government's strategy has been Dr. José Manuel Mireles, the former leader of the Tepalcatepec group and widely known as the face of the movement. Leading up to the May 10 deadline, Mireles expressed his concern with dismantling the groups, arguing that their presence has made Michoacán's municipalities safer, while the areas still under government control continue to suffer and experience high levels of daily violence, "between three and five murders...and hundreds of cases of extortion."⁷⁴ In an interview with *Noticias MVS*, Mireles clarified that the May 2014 disarmament deadline only meant the groups' "outfits are going to change, though [their] fight will remain the same." As *Proceso* reported, Mireles viewed autonomous self-defense groups as playing a fundamental role in achieving a safer Michoacán and thus vowed that the fight would continue until Michoacán has been secured.⁷⁵

Tension within the groups grew further with the removal of Mireles as the movement's official spokesman and from his seat on the General Council of the Self-Defense Groups (Consejo General de las Autodefensas), the reasoning for which was two-fold. First, in the days leading up to the May 10 deadline, the former leader released an unauthorized 20-minute video speaking to President Peña Nieto, expressing his concerns and his hopes for Mexico, and asking the president to engage in direct dialogue and conversation with the groups. Mireles then proceeded to explain his desire and the desire of the people of Michoacán to be able to live free from the fear of violence.⁷⁶

Second, authorities announced they had launched an investigation into Mireles' alleged connection with the murder of five younger *autodefensa* members in an incident that occurred in Caleta de Campos, Michoacán on April 27. Mireles has denied the claim.⁷⁷ The allegations surfaced from group leader Estanislao Beltrán, among others, who has portrayed Mireles as an out of control vigilante who refuses to cooperate with the Mexican government. In response, Mireles publicly claimed that Beltrán has extensive ties to a gang known as "Los Viagras," a small group that had formed part of La Familia Michoacána and later continued to operate within the Knights Templar Organization until late 2013.⁷⁸ A video released in August 2014, showed Beltrán with Nicolás Sierra,

⁷⁴ Redacción. "Preocupa a Mireles la conversión de comunitarios en paramilitares." *Proceso*. May 5, 2014.

⁷⁵ Redacción. "Preocupa a Mireles la conversión de comunitarios en paramilitares." *Proceso*. May 5, 2014.

⁷⁶ "Mensaje de José Manuel Mireles a Enrique Peña Nieto." *Río Doce*. May 7, 2014.

⁷⁷ Arce, Alberto. "Mexico to Transform Anti-Cartel Vigilante Forces." *Associated Press*. May 10, 2014.

⁷⁸ Named after Carlos "El Viagra" Sierra Santana, this group originates from the town of Pinzándaro in the municipality of Huetamo, on the border of Guerrero. "Los Viagra" reportedly consists of Sierra and his brothers: Rodolfo, Nicolás, Valentín, Severino, Beatriz, Bernabé, and Mariano. The group reportedly had been more closely affiliated with the Méndez faction of LFM, but sided with Servando Gómez and the KTO when it emerged in 2011. Los Viagra reportedly

one of the alleged leaders of “Los Viagra.” However, Mireles has claimed that the allegations against him are a fabricated attempt to remove him from power, as he has been a nuisance to both the government and KTO operations. Furthermore, Mireles claims that he remains the last line of defense between the people of Michoacán and KTO control. A similar rift had also formed between self-defense leaders Hipólito Mora and Luis Antonio Torres González (known as “El Americano” because he was born in the United States and lived much of his life in El Paso, Texas), each accusing the other of having ties to the KTO. On May 21, Commissioner Castillo announced on his Twitter account that the two leaders had reconciled, emphasizing that the mending of ties between *autodefensa* leaders was fundamental to restoring order to the state.⁷⁹

Since the creation of the self-defense groups in February 2013, a lack of centralized power and coordination was a point of concern for the groups themselves and for the Peña Nieto administration. As reported by *Proceso* in May 2014, Mireles admitted to a “Colombianization” effect in which each regional self-defense group had operated independently from both the Mexican state and other organizations. Mireles expressed concern that such disaggregation could lead the groups to become more like the unchecked paramilitary forces in Colombia than the self-defense community groups Michoacán citizens have sought to create.⁸⁰ As if in reaction to these concerns, on May 28 self-defense groups convened in Mexico City for the National Meeting of Citizen Self-defense Groups (Encuentro Nacional de Autodefensas Ciudadanas), where Mireles and Hipólito Mora were featured speakers. In that meeting, held at the Siqueiros Cultural Convention Center (Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros), self-defense leaders, alongside social leaders, priests, and former legislators, proposed the formation of a “National Self-defense Front” (Frente Nacional de Autodefensas). During his speech, Mireles stressed that this was not a call to insurrection or to take up arms, but to “awaken the nation and demand justice and public security.” He also clarified that he would not be the leader of such a movement were it to come to fruition. During his speech, he emphasized that the battle the *autodefensas* were waging was not against the government, but rather criminal groups; nevertheless, he did not shy from openly criticizing officials central to the federal government’s efforts in Michoacán to quell the violence between the Knights Templar and the self-defense groups. He particularly criticized Interior Minister Osorio Chong, for his aggressive stance toward disarming the *autodefensas*; and Commissioner Castillo, who he accused of negotiating with criminals.⁸¹

Just a month after the self-defense groups meeting, Mireles was arrested for carrying military-grade weapons on June 27. A joint operation by the Federal Police, Navy, Army, and State Attorney General’s Office was conducted that led to Mireles’ arrest along with over 80 other group members, an operation during which no shots were fired. According to the PGJE, Mireles and the detained

split from the KTO in late 2013, and Los Viagra may have associations with the *Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación*. “La banda de la Tuta se escindió con Los Viagra.” *Criterio Hidalgo*. Accessed on September 22, 2014.

⁷⁹ “May 2014 News Monitor.” *Justice in Mexico*. May 31, 2014. The accusations against Torres seemed an unlikely charge at the time, given his history. Torres was kidnapped in 2012 when he was vacationing with his family in Michoacán. His family sold property to pay the \$150,000 (USD) ransom, which he says compelled him to join the *autodefensa* movement. Yet, Torres was removed from his duties as commander in Buenavista Tomatlán in late August 2014 at the request of Michoacán’s Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado, PGJE), as it opened an investigation into his suspected ties with organized crime.

⁸⁰ Redacción. “Preocupa a Mireles la conversión de comunitarios en paramilitares.” *Proceso*. May 5, 2014.

⁸¹ Gil Olmos, José. “Proponen la creación del Frente Nacional de Autodefensas.” *Proceso*. May 28, 2014.

group members were all in violation of Mexico's Federal Law of Firearms and Explosives (*Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos*).⁸²

Accomplishments of Federal Intervention

President Peña Nieto's security operation in Michoacán, as well as the emergence of the *autodefensas*, was met by a number of violent attacks from suspected members of criminal organizations in July 2013. On July 22, a group of gunmen opened fire during a protest by 300 masked-members of a self-defense vigilante group against the Knights Templar. The group was at the gates of the city hall in the town of Los Reyes threatening to take over police functions because of the insecurity caused by uncontrolled criminal groups in the area when three gunmen allegedly opened fire on the crowd, killing five people, including one police officer and one civilian who was not involved with the protest. Over the span of the next week, attacks claimed the lives of six agents of Mexico's Federal Police and two members of the Mexican Navy. The next day on July 23, several convoys of Federal Police were ambushed in at least six attacks throughout the Tierra Caliente region where alleged members of the Knights Templar blocked roads and attacked patrols as they passed through. According to official information, police officers were able to repel the attacks, killing at least 20 of the gunmen and wounding 15 others, though two Federal Police agents were also killed. The following day, a group of assailants ambushed a convoy of patrols near the town of Pichilinguillo in Tierra Caliente, close to the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, killing two more Federal Police officers. On July 27, two members of the Mexican Navy, including a Vice Admiral, were then killed by gunmen while they were driving through the northwestern region of the state.⁸³

In an apparent response to the augmented presence of the Federal Police and Mexican armed forces, further aggressions occurred in October 2013 when substations controlled by Mexico's Federal Electricity Commission (*Comisión Federal de Electricidad*, or CFE) came under attack by individuals wielding homemade explosives and long arms. The attacks left over 400,000 residents without electricity, primarily in the Tierra Caliente region, including Apatzingán. The attacks were quickly attributed to the Knights Templar, a claim supported by the head of the Michoacán Congressional Justice Commission, Deputy Selene Vázquez Alatorre, and Hipólito Mora, by then leader of the Tierra Caliente self-defense groups.⁸⁴ The KTO, in turn, alleged that these actions were attributable to the splinter group "Los Viagras." Ultimately, federal authorities arrested Leopoldo Jaimes Valladares, the president of the lime growers association of the Valley of Apatzingán, who was alleged to have been appointed to this position by Nazario Moreno González himself.⁸⁵

While their primary stated purpose for taking over local policing functions was the intolerable presence of criminal groups in their municipalities, the *autodefensas* also pointed to the absence or corruption of local law enforcement as necessitating their presence in troubled areas. The arrival of Mexican armed forces and Federal Police, as such, was met with mixed reactions from the groups. While interactions between the self-defense groups and the Federal Police were reported to be

⁸² "Detienen a Mireles in Lázaro Cárdenas." *Milenio*. June 27, 2014. See also Redacción. "Detienen al Dr José Manuel Mireles y 82 autodefensas en Michoacán." *Aristegui*. June 27, 2014.

⁸³ "April – July 2013 News Monitor." *Justice in Mexico*. August 4, 2014.

⁸⁴ Redacción. "Atribuyen a Los Templarios ataques en Michoacán; refuerzan instalaciones de CFE y Pemex." *Proceso*. October 28, 2013.

⁸⁵ Martínez, Ernesto et. al. "Cae el presunto responsable de ataques a instalaciones de la CFE en Michoacán." *La Jornada*. November 7, 2013.

relatively conflict-free, with some groups beginning to cede control to the Federal Police as early as mid-May 2013, there were reports of violent confrontations between the groups and the Mexican Army. On January 14, 2014, for example, reports emerged that soldiers had confronted members of a self-defense group in Antúnez, in the Parácuaro municipality, with unofficial reports of between seven and 12 civilians killed.⁸⁶

Despite these conflicts, the first three months following Commissioner Castillo's appointment rendered three of the four Knights Templar leaders that the *autodefensas* had demanded be captured or killed. On January 27, security forces captured Dionisio Loya Plancarte, "El Tío," identified as the Templars' third in command, behind leader and founder Servando Gómez, "La Tuta," and Enrique "Kike" Plancarte. In March, a coordinated operation with Mexico's Center for Investigation and National Security (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional, CISEN), the Army, and the Navy resulted in the killing of Nazario Moreno González, "El Chayo," who the Mexican Government in 2010 claimed had been killed in a shootout with federal forces. Many, including Michoacán's *autodefensas*, had maintained that he was still alive. Three weeks later, on April 1, members of the Mexican Navy killed Enrique "Kike" Plancarte during a joint operation lasting over 24 hours and involving nearly 200 agents. As of this report's publication, the Knights Templar's leader, Servando Gómez Martínez, "La Tuta," remains at large. The federal government currently has a \$10 million peso (\$754,000 USD) reward out for La Tuta's capture, and he is actively being pursued by the Rural Police Corps and elements of the national Gendarmerie, and authorities say that his operational capacities have been substantially weakened.

While the government has maintained that the operation in Michoacán has improved the security situation there, several Mexican news outlets seized on data released by SNSP that show an increase in most crimes during the first half of 2014. *Proceso*, which has been particularly critical of President Peña Nieto's public security strategy, issued a critical report in August 2014, citing SNSP data highlighting that violent crime rates in the state have increased significantly since Castillo was appointed in January.⁸⁷ *Proceso* referenced a statement by Castillo during a visit by President Peña Nieto to Michoacán to address hunger that the public security strategy in the state had succeeded in eradicating extortion, including extracting payments from businesses for what is commonly known as "right to grounds" (*derecho de piso*). Nonetheless, SNSP data show that there were 234 reports of extortion in 2014 from January through June, before an anomalous nine incidents reported in July. This compares with 104 investigations opened into complaints of extortion in the second half of 2013, according to SNSP data.⁸⁸ In its analysis, *Proceso* found that 2011 had the highest rates of intentional homicides, kidnappings, extortions, and vehicle theft during former President Calderón's six-year term (the first half of 2011 outpaced the second half in intentional homicides by about 17%). Compared with the first six months of that year, *Proceso* also found that in January through June of this year there was a 33% increase in intentional homicides, a 40% increase in kidnappings, a 57% increase in violent auto thefts, and triple the number of extortions. The analysis also faults Castillo for arranging for the release from prison of a number of self-proclaimed members of the self-defense groups with known connections to the Templarios and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG).⁸⁹ Days after the report was published in *Proceso*,

⁸⁶ Gil Olmos, José. "Se enfrentan Ejército y autodefensas en Michoacán; se habla de entre 7 y 12 muertos." *Proceso*. January 14, 2014.

⁸⁷ Hernández, Anabel. "Con todo y 'virrey', el crimen se dispara en Michoacán." *Proceso*. August 3, 2014.

⁸⁸ Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública. "Informe de víctimas de homicidio, secuestro y extorsión 2014." *Secretaría de Gobernación*. Last accessed September 2014.

⁸⁹ Hernández, Anabel. "Con todo y 'virrey', el crimen se dispara en Michoacán." *Proceso*. August 3, 2014.

Castillo stated that it was “foolish” to compare criminal data between the first six months of 2013 and the corresponding period of 2014. Castillo attributed the rise in reported violent crimes during the first half of the year to an increase in public trust in authorities in the state. Without citing specific data, Castillo, at a meeting of municipal administrators, maintained that violent crime in the state was, in fact, in decline. At the same event, he vowed to go after public employees maintaining ties to organized crime.⁹⁰

Ongoing Issues and Challenges in Michoacán

The past year has proven to be a dynamic period for Michoacán with the ever-changing security situation and the three-front battle for control of the state’s Tierra Caliente region. Despite the noted efforts and the appeared cooperation and collaboration between the government and self-defense groups, the environment of uncertainty continues. While still too early to analyze the long-term effects of the federal government’s institutionalization and formal recognition of the groups, it is clear it is not a catchall solution (nor perhaps there is one). Given both the threat of spreading violence, for which Michoacán’s neighboring states have heightened security, and the self-defense group’s internal struggles, it is clear there is a challenging road ahead.⁹¹

The Problem of Social Movement Consolidation

In any organization there are numerous challenges involved in developing the capacity for sustained collective action. Social movements—like the *autodefensas*—are often much easier to mobilize than they are to consolidate. The challenges associated with social movement consolidation often have to do with the difficulty of establishing legitimate and capable leaders, a functional organizational structure, a stable source of revenue and other resources, and a viable vision and plan for continued cooperation. While these issues present challenges for any new organization, traditionally social movements have often faced special challenges. For example, social movements tend to emerge spontaneously with little prior planning or preparation, they lack the experience and/or capacity to operate at full scale, they represent the interests of people of limited means, and they may have multiple or even conflicting agendas that complicate longer term cooperation. Thus, groups that initially emerge in reaction to some specific event or set of grievances frequently live or die based on how they weather such challenges, going through a series of stages in which they either dissolve or achieve some degree of lasting cohesion.⁹²

In Michoacán, there have been numerous challenges in the face of a series of arrests and internal ruptures that have disrupted the leadership and organizational cohesion of the *autodefensas*, perhaps most notably between the La Ruana group leader, Hipólito Mora Chávez, and Luis Antonio Torres, “El Americano,” who filled the power vacuum created after Mora’s arrest in March 2014 for a double homicide. In addition, reports emerged the month before of ruptures within the movement

⁹⁰ Redacción. “‘Insensato’ comparar cifras de delincuencia de 2014 con las de 2013: Castillo.” *Proceso*. August 6, 2014.

⁹¹ As defined in a 2012 Woodrow Wilson Center report, “Closely linked to the ‘balloon effect,’ the ‘cockroach effect’ refers specifically to the displacement of criminal networks from one city/state/region to another within a given country or from one country to another in search of safer havens and more pliable state authorities.” See Bagley, Bruce. “Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas: Major Trends in the Twenty-First Century.” *Woodrow Wilson Center*. August 2012.

⁹² Smelser, Neil. “Theory of collective behavior.” *Routledge and The Free Press of Glencoe*. 1962.

that could complicate relations with government authorities. In February 2014, self-defense groups in La Ruana announced that they had cut ties with movement spokesman Estanislao Beltrán, saying that he maintains connections with former Knights Templar members.⁹³ In statements made via social media, the group announced its alliance with seven other groups including that of Apatzingán, and identified Father Gregorio López Gerónimo of Apatzingán as their leader. Father Gregorio had previously suffered an attempt on his life by presumed Templarios. Furthermore, the groups announced their separation from the Counsel of United *Autodefensas* of Michoacán (Consejo de Autodefensas Unidas de Michoacán), and that each group leader would then represent his or her own community.⁹⁴ For his part, Beltrán denied that there are divisions within the movement and that his position as spokesman is in question. Regardless, whether any of these groups will have staying power depends critically on how well they are able to manage the numerous “start up” challenges that confront social movements.

The Problem of Criminal Infiltration

The self-defense groups must also deal with the threat of criminal elements infiltrating their forces, which has been an issue of great concern and speculation since the initial emergence of the *autodefensas*. On the one hand, these groups clearly reflect the legitimate frustrations of communities affected by crime and violence, and enjoy widespread participation and support from locals fed up with official corruption and ineptitude. On the other hand, it is not clear who financed and armed these groups with high powered assault-type firearms, high caliber ammunition, bullet proof vests, and other weaponry that are not typically available to the lime and avocado growers that inhabit this important agricultural zone in Michoacán. It has been widely speculated that the Sinaloa Cartel—believed to be Mexico's most powerful organized crime group—and its allies in the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) may have a hand in supporting the self-defense organizations as a means of undermining the KTO.⁹⁵ The Templarios themselves claimed early on that the *autodefensas*, particularly those formed in the Buenavista Tomatlán, Tepeque, and La Ruana municipalities, were funded and armed by the CJNG.⁹⁶

Adding to the concerns of infiltration, several *autodefensas* leaders and members have also been accused of having current or former ties to criminal organizations. For example, at one point it was rumored that the now deceased *autodefensa* leader Rafael “El Pollo” Sánchez Moreno had previous ties to the KTO.⁹⁷ Likewise, a member of the Tepalcatepec self-defense group, Juan José “El Abuelo” Farías, was alleged to be a leader in the Valencia drug cartel, and even met with Alfredo Castillo, the federal government’s commissioner for managing the security situation in Michoacán, who claimed that he was uninformed about Farías’ alleged criminal ties.⁹⁸ Also, there have been a number of arrests of alleged organized crime members posing as a self-defense group. In March 2013, the Mexican Army detained 30 presumed members of the Jalisco Nueva Generación

⁹³ García, Dennis A. “Autodefensas, con signos de fractura; desconocen a Papá Pitufo como vocero.” *La Crónica de Hoy*. February 22, 2014.

⁹⁴ García, Dennis A. “Autodefensas, con signos de fractura; desconocen a Papá Pitufo como vocero.” *La Crónica de Hoy*. February 22, 2014.

⁹⁵ Otero, Silvia. “PGR indaga financiamiento a autodefensas.” *El Universal*. January 15, 2014.

⁹⁶ Robles, Paloma. “Frontera caliente.” *Reporte Indigo*. No. 442, February 2, 2014.

⁹⁷ García, Dennis A. “Autodefensas, con signos de fractura; desconocen a Papá Pitufo como vocero.” *La Crónica de Hoy*. February 22, 2014.

⁹⁸ “La PGR solicita una nueva orden de detención contra ‘el Abuelo’ Farías.” *CNN México*. February 21, 2014.

organization authorities said had infiltrated the self-defense group in Buenavista. A year later, in April 2014, state and federal police arrested 44 individuals for the same reason in Huetamo, a municipality that had seen strong protests against the entry of self-defense groups there. As of May 2014, the Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) reported that at least 155 people had been arrested in Michoacán for posing as members of the *autodefensas*.⁹⁹ Whether such allegations are true, the federal government's formal pact and required registration of individual group members is, among other objectives, intended to address this threat of infiltration.

The Problem of Legitimacy

Vigilante justice is a dangerous and unacceptable proxy for the rule of law, as it is the government's responsibility to ensure basic order. Jorge Chabat, a national security expert at the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, CIDE), observed in 2013 that the government and state security forces are at fault when it comes to self-defense groups. On one hand, the state failed to protect citizens, thus prompting the formation of community forces; on the other, Chabat felt that the government did not have "the capacity to prohibit these groups, as it would have a political cost," resulting in what he characterized as a "de facto tolerance" of the groups.¹⁰⁰ Complicating the situation were conflicting statements regarding self-defense groups coming from the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB) as to the groups' legality and tenability. On August 16, 2013, Interior Minister Osorio Chong was quoted saying that the groups lacked a legal framework within which to operate.¹⁰¹ The same week, however, SEGOB's delegate in Puebla, Juan Molina Arévalo, said that self-defense groups in that state did operate legally, collaborating with local authorities in their activities.¹⁰²

Samuel Antonio González Ruiz, a law professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM), attempted to add clarity to the question of a legal framework for auto-defense groups back in February 2013 arguing that the Mexican Constitution does allow for their existence given certain conditions.¹⁰³ He stated that Article 21 allows for community police forces to act to prevent crimes and to investigate them once they have been committed. González Ruiz went on to say, however, that it is when these groups perform the duties of public prosecutors in arresting and detaining suspects that they could be operating outside the bounds of the Constitution. He clarified that community justice provisions allow for a local judge to impose minor sanctions, for example a 36-hour arrest, but anyone detained for more serious crimes must be promptly turned over to the corresponding public prosecutor's office. González Ruiz concluded that, in order to avoid paramilitary groups like those seen in Colombia in

⁹⁹ Caballero, Eliseo. "Fuerza Rural de Michoacán detiene a 155 falsos Autodefensas." *Noticieros Televisa*. May 12, 2014. See also "155 'falso' autodefensas detenidos en Lázaro Cárdenas." *CNN México*. May 10, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Soberanes, Manuel. "Autodefensas en México: fracaso de la seguridad nacional." *El Tiempo*. February 12, 2013.

¹⁰¹ Hernández Alcántara, Martín. "Los grupos de autodefensa en Puebla son legales y ayudan a autoridades: Segob." *La Jornada de Oriente*. August 16, 2013.

¹⁰² Hernández Alcántara, Martín. "Los grupos de autodefensa en Puebla son legales y ayudan a autoridades: Segob." *La Jornada de Oriente*. August 16, 2013.

¹⁰³ Camacho Servín, Fernando. "Los grupos de autodefensa no están fuera de la ley: académico de la UNAM." *La Jornada*. February 10, 2013.

the 1980s and 1990s resulting in the deaths of 200,000 people over two decades, “we must regulate [community justice forces], and understand that it is not a black and white phenomenon.”¹⁰⁴

In January 2014, Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) weighed in on the legitimacy debate in a report it sent to the Mexican Congress in which it argued that “The use of force on the part of society members violates Article 17 of the constitution, and runs the risk that the cycle of violence escalates . . . and impedes the restoration of public security.”¹⁰⁵ While it was the citizenry that was directly in violation of the Mexican Constitution, the organization placed the blame squarely on the government for abandoning the affected areas, forcing society to take up arms. The CNDH urged the coordination between the citizenry and authorities to continue, but emphasized that state authorities not abdicate responsibility for security functions that exclusively belong to them.¹⁰⁶ The concern added to the CNDH’s previous statements expressing its opposition to the existence of self-defense groups, as the organization sees “very tenuous line between these organizations and paramilitary groups,” the existence of the latter being a clear threat to the physical and patrimonial well-being of Mexican citizens, which the government has a responsibility to protect.¹⁰⁷

Many politicians in Mexico advocated early on for creating a clear, national framework for these groups to operate, including Michoacán Governor Fausto Vallejo.¹⁰⁸ For its part, members of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in the Mexican Congress presented an initiative that would reform the Mexican Constitution, which would include self-defense groups in the National Public Security System (SNSP), giving them access to public security funds allocated by the federal government currently allotted for states and municipalities.¹⁰⁹ Similar to the CNDH’s expressed concerns, others, however, viewed this as a dangerous step. Rossana Reguillo, a social sciences professor at the University of Guadalajara, said that validating and regulating community police forces would be recognizing the Mexican state’s inability to maintain public security in the areas that these groups have proliferated.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, in January 2014, to resolve such concerns about the legitimacy of self-defense forces, the federal government announced the formation of the “Rural Defense Corps,” which would incorporate ordinary citizens who had taken up arms to fight against organized crime.

The Problem of State and Local Corruption

As the security situation in Michoacán has calmed in recent months relative to late 2013 and early 2014, allegations of corruption between state and local level officials have arisen, underscoring what analysts have pointed to as being at the core of Michoacán’s security woes—visible corruption among state and local-level officials leading to a loss of citizens’ trust in public institutions.

¹⁰⁴ Camacho Servín, Fernando. “Los grupos de autodefensa no están fuera de la ley: académico de la UNAM.” *La Jornada*. February 10, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Cervantes, Jesusa. “Autodefensas violan la Constitución, advierte la CNDH.” *Proceso*. January 8, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Cervantes, Jesusa. “Autodefensas violan la Constitución, advierte la CNDH.” *Proceso*. January 8, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Solano, Margarita. “Grupos de autodefensas, un virus que se extiende en México.” *El País*. September 28, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Solano, Margarita. “Grupos de autodefensas, un virus que se extiende en México.” *El País*. September 28, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Solano, Margarita. “Grupos de autodefensas, un virus que se extiende en México.” *El País*. September 28, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Solano, Margarita. “Grupos de autodefensas, un virus que se extiende en México.” *El País*. September 28, 2013.

José Jesús Reyna García—the Secretary General of the Mexican state of Michoacán, or second in command under the governor—was removed from his position and detained under an order of *arraigo* on April 6, 2014. Reyna García, who served as the state’s interim governor in 2013 filling in for then-Governor Fausto Vallejo who temporarily stepped down for health reasons, is accused of having close ties with drug cartels, specifically with the Knights Templar Organization (KTO). Senator Luisa María Calderón and self-defense group leader José Manuel Mireles accused Secretary Reyna García of having close links with the KTO, which they claim allowed him and Governor Vallejo a guaranteed win in the 2011 elections.¹¹¹ Reyna García has since been indicted on formal organized crime-related charges.

In April 2014, two mayors from municipalities heavily impacted by organized crime were arrested for suspected connections with organized crime and/or ties to embezzlement. A judge in the state capital of Morelia indicted the mayor of Apatzingán, Uriel Chávez Mendoza, a member of the Institutional Revolutionary (PRI) and nephew of Nazario “El Chayo” Moreno. Chávez will face charges on 50 counts for crimes of kidnapping having ties to organized crime, as well as extortion, specifically of Apatzingán city councilmen to support the Knights Templar. Two weeks later, Michoacán’s Attorney General’s Office (PGJE) detained Mayor Arquímedes Oseguera Solorio of Lázaro Cárdenas in western Michoacán on April 28 for his alleged participation in kidnapping, extortion, and ties to organized crime activities, particularly with the Knights Templar Organization. Police also arrested Lázaro Cárdenas Treasurer Omar Soto Gil for serving as an accomplice to Mayor Oseguera.

In August 2014, Rodrigo Vallejo Mora, son of former Michoacán Governor Fausto Vallejo, was detained by Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office (PGR) for holding while he is being investigated for alleged ties to the KTO. Vallejo can be seen in a widely disseminated video meeting with Servando Gómez Martínez, “La Tuta.” He is currently in the Santiaguito Center for Prevention and Social Re-adaptation in the State of Mexico, where he is awaiting charges stemming from covering up his meeting with Gómez, since he did not make the Federal Office of the Public Prosecutor (Ministerio Público de la Federación, MPF) aware of the event.

Then in mid-August, Salma Karrum Cervantes, mayor of Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, was placed under *arraigo* after appearing in a video filmed in March of last year alongside “El Tony,” the leader of the Templarios in her municipality. Around the same time, the mayor of the municipality of Huetamo, Michoacán, Dalia Santana Pineda, was formally indicted on August 21 on charges of homicide and extortion. Authorities allege that Santana, also of the PRI, ordered the assassination of Antonio Granados Gómez, identified as Santana’s godfather, and with whom she had personal conflicts, according to Michoacán Attorney General Godoy.¹¹² Granados was killed on April 9 in a local restaurant by a member of an unnamed criminal group operating in Michoacán, according to state authorities. This allegation further implicates Santana as maintaining ties with organized crime. The charges of extortion against Santana originate from allegations that she took 20% of Huetamo municipal employees to make payments to La Tuta.¹¹³ There are also allegations that she used the same practice against street vendors in the city.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ “Existen todas las pruebas en contra de Jesús Reyna: Mireles. Con Óscar M Beteta.” *Radio Fórmula*. April 7, 2014.

¹¹² García Tinoco, Miguel. “Alcaldesa de Huetamo, Michoacán es detenida y acusada de homicidio.” *Excélsior*. August 15, 2014.

¹¹³ “Un juzgado dicta auto de formal prisión contra tres alcaldes de Michoacán.” *CNN México*. September 8, 2014.

¹¹⁴ García Tinoco, Miguel. “Alcaldesa de Huetamo, Michoacán es detenida y acusada de homicidio.” *Excélsior*. August 15, 2014.

The arrest of Santana is the latest in a string of mayors detained for alleged ties to organized crime, including those of Lázaro Cárdenas, Parácuaro, Aguililla, Apatzingán, and Tacámbaro. These arrests, along with that of Rodrigo Vallejo and former interim governor and secretary of government José Jesús Reyna García, has drawn comparisons to the previously mentioned 2009 arrests of dozens of Michoacán officials known as the *Michoacanazo*, an operation that has since been qualified as a failure and a blemish on the Calderón presidency.

Writing for *Milenio*, Ricardo Monreal argues that the current hunt for corrupt public officials in Michoacán could have similar results to the 2009 operation, which he says created a state of instability that set the groundwork for the emergence of the self-defense groups that he characterizes as a significant threat to public security in the state, even if the Templarios are successfully disbanded.¹¹⁵ As Monreal points out, La Familia Michoacana first emerged as a vigilante group to counter the influence of the Zetas criminal organization in the state.¹¹⁶ Perhaps most notable about the *Michoacanazo* was the evident disconnect between federal law enforcement officials and the judiciary regarding the veracity of evidence, which in those cases was often based on statements from protected witnesses, whose reliability has been widely questioned.

The Problem of Moral Hazard

The recent federal intervention in Michoacán follows and expands on the example set by the 2010 federal intervention in Ciudad Juárez, when President Felipe Calderón designated a special representative to help coordinate a broad-based community rebuilding effort known as "Todos Somos Juárez" (We Are All Juárez). However, as it appears at this point, Castillo's role in coordinating security matters in Michoacán will be more substantial, which raises some important questions. First, at a January 2014 Mexico Institute forum on Mexico's security situation, Alejandro Hope expressed concerns that the federal government has created a moral hazard by allowing state and local authorities to abdicate their constitutionally mandated responsibilities.¹¹⁷ Bailing out state authorities that are unable to uphold the rule of law sets a dangerous precedent that may lead state and local officials to believe that they need not confront difficult security issues since the federal government will intervene if things get too bad.

Second, there is also the aforementioned question of legitimacy. Despite the federal government touting its pact with the self-defense groups as a significant step forward in resolving the security crisis in Michoacán, some security experts expressed their concern that institutionalizing such groups that had illegally armed themselves was fundamentally incompatible with a viable rule of law. Erubiel Tirado, a security expert at the Ibero-American University, characterized the move as effectively legitimizing paramilitary groups. Moreover, he criticized the government's failure to investigate whether the groups engaged in human rights abuses through their operations. "The origin of the *autodefensas* is illegal; there is a problem of legitimacy – it's necessary that we investigate. Nobody has told us whether there are innocent victims on the part of the *autodefensas*," he said.

¹¹⁵ Monreal Ávila, Ricardo. "¿'Michoacanazo' dos?" *Milenio*. August 4, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Monreal Ávila, Ricardo. "¿'Michoacanazo' dos?" *Milenio*. August 4, 2014.

¹¹⁷ Remarks by Alejandro Hope at forum entitled "The State of Citizen Security in Mexico: The Peña Nieto Administration's First Year in Review," hosted by the Mexico Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center. January 16, 2014.

Tirado also criticized the appointment of Michoacán Security Commissioner Castillo, saying that the naming of a security commissioner “does not have legal grounding, does not have any constitutional foundation.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, a high ranking state official interviewed anonymously by the authors in August 2014 characterized the current situation in Michoacán as a kind of “Vichy” state, in which state and local institutions have been subverted by an outside power.¹¹⁹ This raises questions about the long-term plan and viability for the federal government’s effort to keep the piece in Michoacán, since it is not clear what authority state and local officials have independent of the federal government or when they will assume full control of their duties.

Policy Options and Recommendations

As noted in this report, the Mexican government has developed a strategy for addressing the security situation in Michoacán, and is working to implement its plans. Below we discuss the key challenges facing Michoacán and some of the policy options and recommendations for enhancing the government’s strategy.

Addressing the Roots of Organized Crime

Substantial work has illustrated the socio-economic roots of organized crime. Matt Ingram’s (2014) study of the effects of low levels of education and employment in Mexico strongly suggest that there is a need to make greater investments in these areas in Michoacán and other states affected by rampant crime and violence.¹²⁰ The Peña Nieto administration’s five point Plan Michoacán promises to make targeted investments in these areas.¹²¹ If implemented well, these programs will help to improve the quality of life in disenfranchised communities throughout the state, and provide a social and economic foundation for restoring the rule of law. However, the key challenge will be to ensure that federal outlays to address these problems are well spent, and there do not appear to be clear processes and mechanisms to ensure that the funds promised will achieve the desired results. Government reporting on policy accomplishments often tends to focus on activities (what programs were implemented) and outputs (what deliverables were generated), but too often fails to focus on outcomes (what measurable changes occurred as a result of these activities and outcomes). Since achieving success will require that the government have clear targets focused on outcomes and performance (e.g., the relationship between farm subsidies and poppy cultivation, the relationship between the number of student scholarships and gang membership, etc.), *the Peña Nieto administration should conduct and present regular evaluation and assessment of the outcomes of its programs using precise, program-specific performance metrics.*

¹¹⁸ Vivas, María Luisa. “Advierten que Peña legitimó un modelo paramilitar al firmar acuerdo con autodefensas.” *Proceso*. January 29, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Interview with high-level Michoacán state government official on July 21, 2014.

¹²⁰ Ingram, Matt. “Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico’s Municipalities,” in Eric Olson, David Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, (San Diego; Washington, D.C.: Justice in Mexico; Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014).

¹²¹ Website. “Plan Michoacán.” *México: Gobierno de la República*. Last accessed September 30, 2014.

Also, while the overall scope of the federal government’s strategy is quite comprehensive, it appears to place little emphasis on the problem of local drug consumption in Michoacán. This is an issue of some importance, since preventing local drug dealing was partly what motivated the initial rise of the La Familia Michoacana, and generated significant levels of community support for the criminal organization. Local drug dealing has also evidently been an important source of revenue for rival organizations, like the Zetas and the CJNG, that have tried to encroach on LFM and KTO territory. *Mexican federal government efforts and international aid should focus greater resources and effort on preventing and treating drug consumption in Michoacán as part of their initiatives to stamp out the roots of organized crime.*

Strengthening State and Local Institutions

As noted above, the rise of vigilantism in Michoacán is an effort by citizens to fill the gap in the absence of strong and effective state and local institutions, particularly in the poorer, rural southwestern portions of the state. The situation of institutional weakness throughout much of rural Michoacán is not a recent phenomenon, and has allowed criminal organizations in their various iterations to operate more or less freely for years. The lack of institutional integrity has also contributed to often visible corruption of local officials, which has also fueled public support for the *autodefensas*. In this context, there is a clear need to strengthen state and local institutions, particularly in the criminal justice system.

Unfortunately, recent developments may actually further delay one of the measures that many believe will help to improve efficiency, transparency, and checks and balances in the state’s criminal justice system. Implementation of Michoacán’s judicial reform, which was due for implementation in February 2014, was pushed back out last year due to concerns that prosecutors were not yet ready to operate under the oral, adversarial criminal procedures that will be introduced under the new system. Thus, one important recommendation for improving the situation on the ground in Michoacán is to bolster efforts for the launch of the new criminal justice system.

Federal law requires that the state transition to the new system along with the rest of the country in 2016. *Given the state’s complex security situation, it is critically important that operators of the criminal justice system—particularly prosecutors, public defenders, and court personnel—be adequately trained and prepared for the transition.* Otherwise, innocent people could fall victim to the lack of an adequate legal defense, while criminal actors would take advantage of prosecutorial incompetence. This would further undermine the public’s confidence in reform efforts in the state, and help to undo a decade-long effort to improve the administration of justice in Mexico.

Empowering and Regaining Trust in Civil Society

As noted throughout this report, there has been a long-standing sense of abandonment in Michoacán. The state has been unable to fulfill its duties to its citizens, who are subject to the fear of pervasive violence, rampant corruption, and often-unspeakable crimes. Civil society has been severely intimidated by the threat of organized crime, which is so pervasive that even civic groups and business associations are infiltrated by or forced to collaborate with criminal organizations. These are problems that have been faced in other countries affected by rampant organized crime and violence from Palermo, Italy to Medellín, Colombia. Indeed, within Mexico, other regions wrought by rampant crime and violence—Chihuahua, Monterrey, and Tijuana, for example—have

only begun the process of reweaving the social fabric, thanks in part to targeted interventions and programs by the Mexican federal government (e.g., Todos Somos Juárez) and international agencies (e.g., U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID).

Social programs can be developed to address the deleterious effects of crime and violence. For example, Roy Godson and others have focused on the importance of fostering a “culture of lawfulness,” which implies a degree of accountability both for citizens and the state.¹²² What must also be developed in the context of violent threats from organized crime is a culture of civic engagement by empowering and rebuilding trust in society. That is, there is a critical need to restore the faith of citizens in their government and their engagement in civil society, both of which hinge on fostering a sense of trust. Self-defense groups and vigilantism channel citizens’ natural desire and willingness to do something about a shared problem, but these phenomena result precisely from a lack of effective mechanisms for constrictive civic engagement and a lack of social trust. Ultimately, the persistence of self-defense groups and vigilantism undermine both the rule of law and the social fabric. The Peña Nieto administration’s intervention in Michoacán positions the federal government to help resolve these problems, but it also runs the risk of unwittingly stifling civic engagement. *The federal government’s liaison should work intently to create spaces and regular opportunities for dialogue and collaboration among citizens and civic organizations, and should particularly empower the state and local citizen security counsels to provide consistent communication and constructive feedback on the progress of security measures.*

Concluding Observations

Ultimately, the situation in Michoacán has raised attention to the continued prevalence of violence in Mexico, and the challenges facing authorities in the effort to protect citizen security. As in other parts of the country where vigilante groups have formed, Michoacán's self-defense groups set a dangerous precedent and pose a serious problem for the Mexican government. The situation in Michoacán could have enormous implications, insofar as it could serve as either a forecast or an omen of things to come elsewhere in Mexico. The federal government must be exceedingly careful and deliberate in its strategy for intervening in state and local security matters, its approach to dealing with armed citizens taking the law into their own hands, its efforts to empower state and local authorities to pick up the reins, and its efforts to rebuild civic engagement and social trust.

¹²² Godson, Roy. “Guide to developing a culture of lawfulness.” *Inter-American Drug Abuse Council Commission, Organization of American States*. November 15, 2004.

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