

Police Protection Rackets and Political Modernity in Mexico

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Alejandro Lerch

Graduate Institute of Geneva (IHEID)

Abstract

This article provides a long-term historical periodization of federal police agencies under Mexico's single-party regime (1930s–2000). Based on archival findings in Mexico and the United States, as well as interviews with former law-enforcement officials, the article documents and reflects, in particular, on the entanglements between federal policing agencies and organized crime (police protection rackets). Drawing from bandit studies and critical perspectives on policing, the article argues police protection rackets to be an integral but overlooked mechanism in Mexico's modern state-formation process. The article also hints at the important but largely overlooked role of police protection rackets in the making of capitalist modernity more generally.

Keywords

Mexico, state-making, protection rackets, organized crime, policing

Corresponding Author:

Alejandro Lerch, Centre on Conflict, Development & Peacebuilding, IHEID, Chem. Eugène-Rigot 2, 1202, Geneva, Switzerland.

Email: lerchh@gmail.com

In December 2019, the architect of the “War on Drugs” in Mexico, Genaro García Luna, was taken into custody by the FBI on charges of having extorted millions of dollars from drug cartels.¹ The arrest was puzzling not only because García Luna represented the most powerful security official in Mexico in recent decades but also because of the unparalleled support provided to him since 2000 by the US government. Had the Mexican government been unaware of his connections to drug traffickers? Was US intelligence oblivious to his involvement in crime? The arrest of García Luna, generating a political earthquake in Mexico, represented a new puzzle for a public perennially trying to make sense out of history where emerging evidence constantly refutes official government narratives. Commentators and scholars noted how the arrest of García Luna called for a reinterpretation of the drug war and the history of drug trafficking in Mexico.

In truth, the arrest of García Luna should not have been too surprising. As shown here, the involvement of the country’s security apparatus in organized crime goes back a very long time. What was lacking, rather, was a framework better suited to explain why these entanglements have been so prevalent, entrenched, and politically permissible in the first place. If the police is not the antagonist of the criminal but the result of criminal enablement, what then is policing all about? If the police is a central mechanism in the creation of social order, then criminal enablement has too often allowed for the creation of order in Mexico. This article documents the pervasiveness of protection rackets, operated by the police, in the history of federal policing in Mexico. It shows how policing in Mexico has been less invested in suppressing criminal markets than in instrumentalizing these markets to expand the security capabilities of the state. The article shows the weight of these entanglements at historical junctures that defined modern Mexico. Police rackets are argued to be an important but overlooked mechanism in the construction of Mexican modernity.

Six sections make up this article. The first unpacks two useful bodies of literature: critical perspectives on the police and bandit studies. Critical perspectives on policing “denaturalize” the police institution by studying its functionality in securing the social inequalities required by capitalist development. Bandit studies, on the other hand, reflect on the historical embeddedness of policing and organized crime during capitalist transitions and nation-state formation processes. Together, these two bodies of literature provide tools to analyze the input of criminality, via the police, in securing and making capitalism historically feasible. The next section shows the input of organized crime in the creation of Mexico’s first “national” police, *Los Rurales*. *Los Rurales* policed Mexico’s gargantuan nineteenth-century liberalization process: a trajectory of mass dispossession in the countryside brought to a halt, five decades later, by the Mexican revolution. The following section documents the protection rackets mobilizing policing under Mexico’s postrevolutionary, single-party state. From the 1940s to the 1980s, the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS) was the policing apparatus employed by the central government to push back on revolutionary inertias, social protest, and political opposition. The DFS was, in parallel, the country’s most prominent criminal organization. The next two sections show how drugs

and contraband economies assisted the deployment of counterinsurgency in the 1970s. Paradoxically, counterinsurgency campaigns began to make use at this hour of a new “securitization” narrative: the war on drugs. Finally, the last section documents the predatory ethos in the agency supplanting the DFS by the end of the 1980s, the *Policía Judicial Federal* (PJF). The PJF policed the last decade of the single-party state—a period framed by the implementation of another gargantuan liberalization program. Under neoliberalism, the object of policing shifted from containing “peasant insurgencies” to containing a nationwide “epidemic” of organized crime.

The Literature

Critical Views on Policing

Capitalism, for Rosa Luxemburg, is always at war against every historical form of natural economy that it encounters.² This is a system whose reproduction depends on bringing about new schemes to colonize the material and spiritual life of common people in order to make the accumulation of capital more rational and efficient. A capitalist landscape, constantly dislocated and transformed, is for obvious reasons intrinsically insecure. Capitalist classes require a security apparatus capable of cementing and enforcing capitalism amid the instability and discontent creating and recreating it. This apparatus, tasked with generating and upholding a capitalist order by virtue of securing capitalism’s inherent insecurities, is the police.³ Critical perspectives uproot the police from its normalized place in our modern imaginary and do so primarily by casting the police as a by-product, and key enabler, of capitalist modes of production.⁴

Critical perspectives often locate the origin of modern policing in the enclosures and early proletarianization processes driving capitalism’s “primitive” impulse. The police secures the insecurities springing from the alienations, evictions, dispossessions, spatial dislocations, proletarianizations, and mass migrations implicated by the capitalization of old economic orders. For Bayley, “policing emerged as new political and economic formations developed, producing social upheavals that could no longer be managed by existing private, communal, and informal processes.”⁵ The early origins of the police were, according to Vitale, “tied to three basic social arrangements of inequality in the eighteenth century: slavery, colonialism, and the control of a new industrial working class.”⁶ The police is the tool allowing for the unequal distribution of resources and skills required by the capitalist division of labor. Its main functions were “to protect property, quell riots, put down strikes . . . and produce a new economic order of industrial capitalism.”⁷ Mitrani finds the origin of police institutions to spring, most noticeably, from the need to contain social discontent—above all, labor strikes—generated by transitions to wage labor.⁸ For Schrader, the police provides the powerful with an instrument to avoid negotiating the social contract with the subaltern.⁹ Forms of “police” always existed. But it was under this new form of economic production alienating peasants and turning workers into wage earners when policing became increasingly indispensable to keep rising antagonisms in check. The police became responsible for *pacifying* two key social reflexes engendered by the capitalization of

economic relations: social revolt—generated by escalating discontent—and widespread criminality—transpiring from declining living standards, labor redundancies, and social dislocation. Landlords and industrialists were aware of the potential of crime to escalate to social rebellion. The police was the instrument to cut, at their root, incipient revolutionary processes.

Critical views on the “primitive” history of policing offer channels to rethink policing’s functionality in an era of advanced liberalism.¹⁰ Pushing back on the “sciences” driving global policing today (predictive policing, community policing, evidence-based policing, problem-oriented policing, etc.), critical perspectives underscore how policing and capitalist exploitation are two sides of a single, inseparable process. “Defund the Police,” “Abolish the Police,” “Black Lives Matter,” and other social movements build on these ideas to “abolish” the police less by virtue of closing police departments than by strengthening the sense of commonality destroyed by liberalism. Critical perspectives provide, in summary, powerful platforms to denaturalize policing in modern societies and fight back on structural injustice. Yet, in their historical dissection of policing power, critical voices overlook what I believe is the weakest vulnerability of policing vis-à-vis its own pretenses: its historical embeddedness with crime. This article seeks to contribute to critical reassessments of the police by showing the importance of criminal enablement in making policing historically possible.

Bandit Studies

Bandit studies, focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, look at thieves, looters, kidnappers, extorters, smugglers, traffickers, and other criminals in contexts of capitalist change, modern nation-state formation, and colonial-liberal globalism.¹¹ These perspectives find in the bandit a powerful window into, but also a key embodiment of, the capitalization processes driving the rise of liberal societies and the modern state. For Eric Hobsbawm, who largely pioneered this literature, waves of banditry reflect “the disruption of an entire society, the rise of new classes and social structures, the resistance of entire communities or peoples against the destruction of its way of life.”¹² Hobsbawm notes how two structural processes are particularly important for the socioeconomic constitution of banditry as a social, widespread historical phenomenon. The first is *time*: banditry becomes “epidemic” during the pauperization and economic crisis that mark the end of a relatively “long” cycle in economic history.¹³ Hence banditry is a likely by-product of capitalist transitions. The second is *location*: banditry is much more common in peripheral or “backward” regions where state rule is weak.¹⁴ Periphery regions are particularly weak when capitalist change washes away old political orders.

For Hobsbawm, the bandit is a depositary of revolutionary potential: an inclination to resist the dispossession of its class. This is, however, a limited or “primitive” form of potential because, while driven by dispossession, the class-consciousness of the bandit is limited.¹⁵ Criminals, wrote Engels, “protest against the existing order of society as one individual.”¹⁶ Lacking class-consciousness, the bandit fails to organize against and identify its true enemy. Rather than portraying bandits as protorevolutionaries or “Robin Hoods,” Hobsbawm noted how the socioeconomic drivers stirring historical waves of banditry were not that different from the drivers of social revolt.

Moreover, banditry was in many cases the currency making revolution materially possible: preying, extorting, looting, etc. nurtured revolution on the ground.¹⁷ Akin to Pancho Villa extorting his way to Mexico City, the line separating the bandit from the revolutionary is thin.¹⁸ Landlords and industrialists knew how crime can turn into looting, looting into rioting, rioting into revolt.

Building on Hobsbawm's contributions, Anton Blok took bandit studies in a different direction.¹⁹ Rather than underlying the nexus between banditry and revolution, Blok became interested in highlighting the relationship between banditry and *counter-revolution*: the ways in which bandits end up embodying a form of protopolice of the capitalist process. Blok's landmark contributions on the history of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sicilian mafia challenged the idea of bandits as social rebels by noting their vicinity to political power. In concrete, Blok studied the proximity of Cosa Nostra to emerging capitalist interests in a context where an old baronial order gave way to a landscape of capitalist estates (*latifondo*), commercial ventures, and liberal politics.²⁰ Blok and others showed how Cosa Nostra helped secure alienated capitalist assets in a context of political implosion and growing social insecurity. Similarly, Acemoglu, De Feo, and De Luca showed the rise of Cosa Nostra to be tied to politicians and landowners pushing back on the first socialist movement in Italy, the Fasci dei Lavoratori.²¹ Regions where land conflict was intense were spaces where mafiosi power became ancillary to the construction of social order. Importantly, the relationship between Cosa Nostra and liberal elites did not end after national statehood took root in Italy: the state continued to "license" the predatory impulses of the mafia to repress communist and socialist movements, control the region's electoral system, distribute patronage, and police Sicilian society throughout the twentieth century.²² The vicinity of banditry to capital, in other words, transcended "primitive accumulation" to become a permanent feature of capitalist security in an evolving political and geopolitical landscape. By noting the proximity of Cosa Nostra to capitalist interests, Blok provided us with a more comprehensive understanding of "policing" no longer restricted to the police institution itself.

Building on Blok's contributions, a group of bandit scholars began to compute the input of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century banditry into the making of national statehood in places like Argentina (Slatta), Brazil (Singleman, Jaynes, Lewin), China (Antony), Corsica (Wilson), Egypt (Nathan), India (Wagner), Mexico (Vanderwood), Turkey (Barkey, Gingeras), and others.²³ These studies underlined the strong connection between the commercialization of agriculture driving primitive accumulation and liberal state-making in periphery regions (Southern Europe, India, Latin America, and Asia) and the emergence of bandit gangs driven by economic dislocation. Gallant notes how "in peripheral areas, capital accumulation occurred in the form of large landed estates that were usually created through the extirpation of small, subsistence-oriented peasant forms of agriculture and their replacement by more commercialized agrarian regimes."²⁴ Wherever this transformation occurred, "be it in southern Europe, India, Latin America or Asia, banditry developed."²⁵ It was among these "disgruntled and displaced young men" where landowners recruited or co-opted gangs to discipline alienated labor and secure property. These new guards continued to selectively rob, kidnap, and extort despite their gradual incorporation as "policing" bodies. Notwithstanding the

gradual institutionalization of the police, the entanglements between crime and policing persisted. They adopted the form of police protection rackets. Illegality, enabled by the police, nurtured capital's ability to produce a society in its image and likeness.

Policing, Banditry, and Early Capitalism in Mexico

Early capitalism in Mexico was set into motion by the enclosure of the commons and the disincorporation of vast church holdings under the liberal presidencies of Benito Juárez and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (1860s). Antagonisms generated by this program soon began to transpire, and for the first time since the conquest of the Aztecs, land tenure became the driving cause of social revolt.²⁶ Capitalization in agriculture, however, reached epidemic proportions under the subsequent dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1877–1911). The levels of alienation endured by the Mexican peasantry under *Porfiriato* surpassed anything experienced under Spanish rule.²⁷ By 1910, 97 percent of rural households had no land,²⁸ and 90 percent of indigenous communities had been dispossessed of their communal lots.²⁹ Beneficiaries were mostly liberal elites in a position to purchase the disincorporated lands at bargain prices.³⁰ Soon enough, land concentration in Mexico reached the highest level in Latin America.³¹ The implementation of this particularly extreme liberalization program overlapped with, and was driven to a considerable extent by, an overwhelming incursion of American capital. In the following four decades, US businesses would come to control 80 percent of the country's mines, 80 percent of the rolling stock, 90 percent of the country's eighty largest capitalized businesses, most of the country's oil, and the largest share of productive agriculture.³² The Mexican countryside, along with Cuba's, became the first foreign region exploited systematically by US investors.³³

Land liberalization and labor proletarianization under the early liberal state and the subsequent Díaz dictatorship implanted conditions in the Mexican social landscape that, as noted by Hobsbawm, turn banditry into an *epidemic*. From the early stages of this process, owners of commercial agriculture and transnational capital turned to bandits to suppress other bandits, secure commercial estates, protect railroad infrastructure, and police cities.³⁴ The federal government encouraged the provinces to create police units, but lack of resources drove local governments to fill the void with vigilante groups noted by their interest in stealing.³⁵ Having employed bandit gangs in the 1850s to liquidate the armies of the Spanish/Criollo factions, the liberal government amnestied these gangs and incorporated them in 1861 into a new federal policing body, Los Rurales.³⁶ Los Rurales became Mexico's first national policing apparatus. In contrast to the regional rootedness of the army, Los Rurales embodied a centralized policing force expressing the will of the dictatorship and the economic interests in support of it.

The cost of policing primitive accumulation, coupled with fiscal insolvency, state weakness, and a criminal ethos in the police ranks guaranteed that extortion practices would play a key part in financing "pacification" operations in Mexico. Pacification, Vanderwood noted, "required the assimilation of organized crime into a police force."³⁷ Legendary bandits in Mexico became prominent Rurales. Working both sides of the law to their advantage, these "bandits-policemen extracted their toll as part of the price to be paid

for domestic peace and perhaps only the looted thought the price was too high.”³⁸ Newspapers reported on a regular basis on their involvement in robbing and abuse. Mobilized by rent-seeking, Los Rurales suppressed other bandits, policed the making and security of haciendas, hammered down peasant revolts, and broke labor strikes. A “license” to prey and extort—known colloquially in Mexico as *la charola* or “the badge”—allowed for the crystallization of a new social order. Amid an alienated social landscape, the police was never a neutral social actor but a force invested in reordering Mexico according to the needs of capital. The importance of unruly means in the construction of a capitalist “rule of law” is often missing in the liberal’s account of how political modernity came to be.

For Hart, Mexico’s “vulnerable and dependent position in the world economy caused a foreign-controlled, excessively narrow, imbalanced pattern of economic growth . . . protected by armed Rurales juxtaposed to and often combined with increasing native deprivation.”³⁹ Knight recalls an illustrative incident in which a British landlord, confronting peasant discontent after fencing and denying traditional passage to the villagers of Santa María de las Cuevas, summoned Los Rurales to enforce private rights in his property. Known to be a “choleric and abusive individual, the landlord openly denounced his enemies as ‘protagonists of old atavisms [who] want to make theirs what is not theirs and who, like Proudhon, hold property to be a theft.’”⁴⁰ As in the countryside, Los Rurales also enforced the transition to wage labor driving early industry in the cities. Between 1900 and 1910, most of the national police was deployed in textile factories, mines, and in villages opposed to the arrival of big business.⁴¹ By 1905, 80 percent of Los Rurales were in factories for the sole purpose of keeping workers in line.⁴² As the revolution drew nearer, Los Rurales repressed labor discontent emerging in the historical strikes of Cananea, Acuyacan, Río Blanco, and Veladrefña. These strikes are widely noted to be key catalyzers of the Mexican revolution.

The elimination of checks on capital undertaken under the liberal dictatorship made away with institutions and sociopolitical habitus in which authority and governance had rested for centuries. By 1910, the combination of state weakness and unprecedented social grievances outdid the system’s capacity to keep antagonisms under control. Triggered, most specially, by this gargantuan capitalist process, the ensuing revolution, mobilized by the promise of land to peasants and equal rights for workers, brought liberalism in Mexico to a halt. Fed by preying and making banditry and rural protest undistinguishable from one another,⁴³ the torrent of the revolution represented, arguably, the first major uprising of an alienated people in the global periphery dispossessed by, and reacting against, a liberalization program. The explicit attachment of Los Rurales to the interests of early capital, supported by a license to *extort* in order to *police*, anticipated key but overlooked consistencies in the continuum of Mexican policing and its role in the country’s state-formation process.

Criminals and Counterrevolution

After the social uprising of the Mexican revolution (1910–20), demobilizing the masses and establishing a postrevolutionary state demanded brakes on the capitalist

process. This “deceleration,” undertaken under the postrevolutionary presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1932–38) and referred to as *Cardenismo*, aligned for a brief period the single-party state emerging from the revolution with land-demanding peasants and industrial workers. No government in Mexico before or after Cardenismo redistributed more land to peasants or supported more decisively the labor movement. The satisfaction of revolutionary demands, however, came at a price. Joining the emerging mass organizations of the party became, in praxis, compulsory. After a shattering revolution, the mass politics of Cardenismo established a national, hegemonic power by supporting rather than antagonizing peasant and working movements.⁴⁴ Mexico’s corporative system—arguably the longest-lived corporative system in history—was born.

Medin notes how Cardenismo laid down the Mexican corporatist system “as an instrument of centralization, control and manipulation to conduct a class struggle in the countryside and in the city, as well as to resist the influence of the U.S. government.”⁴⁵ However, “this political apparatus could also be put in the service of a very different national project [seeking] to curtail agrarian redistribution, discipline workers and peasants.”⁴⁶ In effect, less than a decade after this corporatist structure commenced to “round up the masses,” the arrival of Miguel Alemán to the presidency (1946–52), the beginning of the Cold War, and adverse economic conditions ended the short-lived populist orientation of the single-party state.⁴⁷ The government halted land redistribution, curtailed labor rights, and established an unprecedented and crony relationship with big business.⁴⁸ The impressive corporatist system laid down by Cárdenas and extended under Alemán allowed the PRI regime to adopt wide-ranging capitalist policies without losing control over the masses.⁴⁹ A compliant labor force controlled thereafter by government-appointed union structures, a policy of low wages, and infrastructural development benefiting industrial and agro-industrial interests allowed in the following two decades the celebrated “Mexican Miracle” of the import-substitution era.⁵⁰

The early stages of this turning point in the history of capitalism in Mexico called for a security apparatus capable of breaking opposition and enforcing it. In the short term, the creation in 1947 of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS) under President Alemán aimed explicitly at developing capabilities to crush revolutionary leftovers in the peasant and labor movements. In the longer term, the DFS was to become the most important security institution of the regime, making use of updated policing technologies such as intelligence gathering, covert operations, and counterinsurgency to safeguard the party’s interests and suppress pockets of urban and rural unrest.⁵¹ In contrast to the armed forces, dominated by regional interests,⁵² the DFS embodied a tightly centralized apparatus attached to Alemán and his successors. The DFS reinforced the central state’s ability to affect broader social processes and political geographies. The capitalist orientation adopted by the party, and the establishment of a police force able to enforce it, represented two sides of a single historical process. The means of policing adapted, but policing’s attachment to the interests of capital remained.

So did policing’s attachment to criminality. Criminal economies supported to a considerable extent the policing capabilities embodied by the DFS. Shortly after its incorporation under Alemán, the agency took over as the predominant player in the Mexican

underworld, handling lucrative extortion rackets in contraband and drug trafficking. Individuals with a staunch anticommunist reputation and a notable record in extortion, theft, pimping, and drug trafficking commanded the DFS from the beginning. The head of the DFS during this seminal period was Colonel Carlos I. Serrano. A lifetime subordinate of President Alemán, Serrano started his career in bootlegging operations in the 1930s.⁵³ He is likely to have been a key protagonist in the violence that paved the way for Alemán to become governor of the state of Veracruz in the mid-1930s—a wave of violence aimed at peasant organizations and left-wing politicians that, according to the FBI, involved Alemán in at least forty-five assassinations.⁵⁴ As governor, Alemán appointed Serrano as director for public security. In this capacity, Serrano sold nominations for local office, ran gambling and brothel operations, and was responsible for killing prominent leftist politicians such as the state prosecutor, Adolfo Moreno.⁵⁵ Flores cites multiple letters of peasants complaining how Serrano used his position to land-grab lucrative areas subsequently turned into prominent agro-industry and tourism ventures.⁵⁶

Upon becoming president, Alemán tasked Serrano with establishing and running the DFS. Archival findings, especially by Niblo,⁵⁷ underline the extent to which Serrano used this position to become what declassified memos describe as the country's key broker in the narcotics industry. A cable from the US embassy in Mexico to the US secretary of state notes how Serrano, "an unscrupulous man, is actively engaged in various illegal enterprises such as narcotics traffic. He is considered astute, intelligent and personable, although his methods violate every principle of established government administration."⁵⁸ Declassified memos describe Serrano as the head of a group of *Alemanista* associates becoming highly influential in the country's heroin business.⁵⁹ Below Serrano, Marcelino Iñurreta, the first director general of the DFS, is noted in US military memos as a person "of questionable character. . . involved in dope-smuggling activities."⁶⁰ The attaché notes how Serrano and Iñurreta "appear [to be] using the organization as a front for illegal operations to amass personal fortunes."⁶¹ Below Serrano and Iñurreta, the deputy director of the DFS, Juan Ramón Gurolla, had a nephew taken into custody by US border authorities in 1948 after attempting to smuggle opium in a car owned by Serrano.⁶² Gurolla even bragged to US officials how he used confidential information provided by the US Treasury Department in his dope-running operations. Below Gurolla, the third in command in the DFS, Manuel Mayoral, controlled marijuana sales in Mexico City's central market.⁶³ From the higher echelons of the DFS, involvement in criminal activities trickled down the hierarchy, configuring a system—a police racket—in which crime enabled in a very material sense the functioning of federal policing. As Aguayo notes, "The budget was insufficient. . . and as agents received very low salaries, commanders, delegates and agents were forced to obtain extra income. . . This constituted a practice accepted by the higher ranks as part of the rules of the game."⁶⁴

In its immediate historical context, the creation of the DFS aimed at hammering down revolutionary and Cardenista remnants in the labor and peasant movements. The operational debut of the agency took place in October 1948 with an assault against the headquarters of the largest and most militant labor union in Mexico, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana (STFRM).⁶⁵

Led personally by Serrano, the attack on the *ferrocarrileros* liquidated the most important labor movement originating in the revolution. Crackdowns by the DFS during this period extended to oil, mining, and construction workers. The DFS also led the charge against the Communist Party and its leaders—an assault involving a series of arbitrary arrests and propaganda planted in the papers that ended political communism in Mexico.⁶⁶ Similarly, the agency made its appearance by cracking down on peasant organizations opposed to the end of land reform. This involved dismantling the most prominent peasant movement emerging from the revolution, *Henriquismo*. One of the first tasks assigned to the DFS involved generating intelligence on henriquista ranks through the infiltration and surveillance of all local and state committees. The agency also spied on members of the military who sympathized with the movement.⁶⁷ The assault on *Henriquismo* reached its climax in 1952 with the brutal repression, headed by the DFS, of a massive peasant rally in Mexico City. Akin to labor, the independence of the peasant movement thereafter declined, assimilated into the mass organizations of the corporatist system.

Criminals not only established the DFS but, more importantly, the DFS was expected by the political class to behave like a criminal. By providing protection and assimilating criminal markets into the political economy of state security, the regime emerging from the revolution—broken, fragmented, crippled by corruption—was able to lay down nevertheless a centralized security apparatus able to roll back the revolutionary process, centralize the means of violence under the executive, and secure the beginning of an era of reinvigorated capitalist development. State-making, capitalism, and organized crime continued to merge in a tightly articulated process. The extent to which police rackets buttressed the repressive apparatus of the single-party regime explains why these practices were understood by those in power as a necessary compromise or the “rules of the game.”

Criminals and Counterinsurgency

The regime’s top-down corporatist system, dispensing rent-seeking and patronage incentives to disrupt social mobilization, provided for two decades of social stability. Peasants, however, lost 40 percent of their income. The salary of urban workers was cut by half.⁶⁸ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, accumulated social tensions in cities and rural areas began to surface in pockets of armed unrest. Catalyzed by the massacre of students in 1968, guerilla activity began to surface in the country’s poorest and most authoritarian regions. As noted by Ramírez, “Heightened class struggle, involving urban and rural guerilla movements as well as redoubled efforts to establish autonomous labor fronts [began to transpire] in large measure from both the uneven development of agriculture and the capital-intensive nature of exploitation within the labor process.”⁶⁹ Driven by land conflicts and political abuse, peasants in regions like Morelos, Chihuahua, and Guerrero organized and took arms against the party. In cities like Guadalajara, Monterrey, Culiacán, and Mexico City, communist-inspired urban guerrillas demanded an end to party autocracy. The state addressed the rise of violent oppositional movements by deploying counterinsurgency campaigns coordinated by the army and the DFS.⁷⁰ This string of counterinsurgency campaigns,

taking place throughout the 1970s and in parallel to the infamous CONDOR operations deployed in countries like Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Chile,⁷¹ represented the historical peak of state violence under the single-party state. These campaigns became known in Mexico as *La Guerra Sucia*.

Protection rackets in contraband and transnational drug trafficking played notable roles in the political economy of these dirty wars. The input of these markets in pacification campaigns was notorious in the agency heading counterinsurgency efforts, the Brigada Especial Antiguerrillas (BEA). Composed of about 200 members drawn from multiple security agencies and coordinated by the DFS and the army, BEA ran secret prisons to detain, interrogate, and torture suspects; killed or “disappeared” alleged guerrilla members in the sierras; coordinated paramilitary groups; and infiltrated insurgent movements and repressed the guerrilla’s social base.⁷² Miguel Nazar Haro, a graduate in counterinsurgency doctrine from Fort Gulick (Panama) who joined the DFS in the mid-1960s, established BEA. Nazar quickly became the architect and leading figure of Mexico’s dirty war and would eventually rise to direct the DFS himself (1978–82). He was also the most important paid asset of the CIA in Mexico and Central America, underlining the extent to which the DFS and BEA (whose membership was trained by US agencies) operated in many ways as client bodies of US intelligence.⁷³ Scholars, human rights organizations, national commissions on crimes of the past, and journalists have documented the series of brutalities committed directly and indirectly by Nazar. The Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (Special Prosecutor for Social and Political Movements of the Past) indicted Nazar in 2004, but his case was dismissed in 2006.⁷⁴

Nazar’s central involvement in criminal activities while heading the counterinsurgency program in Mexico underlines the role of protection rackets in the political economy of targeted pacification. In the early 1980s, for example, an FBI investigation found Nazar to be the head of a major contraband syndicate at the US-Mexico border. The contraband racket dated back to at least the mid-1970s.⁷⁵ The FBI estimated that the DFS, in this racket alone, had stolen 4,000 luxury vehicles in the United States since 1975 (Mercedes Benzes, Porches, Victorias, Maseratis, Ferraris).⁷⁶ As noted in declassified memos, DFS agents took the cars and sold them at various locations in Mexico.⁷⁷ The agency gave some of these cars to politicians “so that other contraband destined for the DFS could be passed into Mexico unimpeded.”⁷⁸ The FBI investigation pointed to Nazar as the head of the criminal operation. Around fifteen defendants apprehended in the United States (most of them members of the DFS and the Mexican government) provided testimonies to support these charges.⁷⁹

The FBI sought to press charges against Nazar. Washington, however, summoned the agents leading the investigation to discuss political ramifications. As noted in declassified memos, representatives of the US embassy in Mexico City conveyed to the FBI “in the strongest terms possible the serious political and security ramifications that such a step would generate for U.S. interests in Mexico.”⁸⁰ Acting against Nazar, the Department of State representatives noted, would lead to his resignation: a “disaster” for US interests, putting in jeopardy all clandestine operations of US intelligence in Mexico and Central America, as well as depriving the United States of its most important asset in the region.⁸¹ It was the embassy’s view that the chances of prosecuting

Nazar either in the United States or in Mexico were in any case nil because of the political protection provided to him by both governments.⁸² The US government dropped charges against Nazar and fired those heading the investigation to reassure the DFS that no further disclosures would embarrass the agency in the future.⁸³ The FBI investigation, part of which leaked to the press, exposed for the first time the extent to which DFS and BEA officials operated, in praxis, by virtue of protection rackets in highly lucrative illegal economies. As Nazar's case made unambiguously clear, rather than simply "looking the other way," US intelligence was much more proactive when it came to protecting and enabling criminal activities when these activities supported US interests in Mexico. At the same time, however, the FBI's commitment to bringing Nazar to justice underlined contradictions between different institutional mandates within the US government. Making sense of these contradictions and the way they play out in US foreign policy in Mexico is a pending task in the literature on US-Mexican relations. What surfaces, however, from the historical record is the extent to which the instrumentalization of crime—and more importantly, state violence—was permissible when such activities supported American interests. Marx captured this logic by noting that when the manipulation of the political process to engineer the rule of law in favor of capitalist interests is not sufficient, extralegal political means and violence are likely to be employed.⁸⁴

Illegal economies constituted, likewise, a notorious support for counterinsurgency campaigns deployed in the impoverished sierras of the states of Guerrero, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa—the epicenter of guerilla activity in Mexico. The head of BEA operations in Guerrero was Captain Arturo Acosta Chaparro. A graduate in counterinsurgency from Fort Bragg (North Carolina) attached to the parachuters brigade, Acosta epitomized the viciousness unleashed under the *guerra sucia* in the 1970s against guerilla suspects and the communities that allegedly sheltered them. A protected witness who worked with Acosta testified in the Truth Commission of Guerrero that throughout the 1970s Acosta arrested and tortured at least 1,500 guerilla suspects.⁸⁵ The commission was able to document 100 executions of peasants under his command.⁸⁶ Acosta is credited with pioneering the infamous "flights of death" whereby BEA officials dropped guerilla suspects from airplanes into the Pacific Ocean (near Acapulco) as a straightforward method to "disappear" them—a technique subsequently imported by military dictatorships in the Southern Cone.⁸⁷

Less noted in historical accounts, however, is the extent to which Acosta and BEA counterinsurgency efforts operated in Guerrero by virtue of what declassified memos at Mexico's National Archives (AGN) describe as "clandestine dealings in the drug business."⁸⁸ Memos note how Acosta and his corps were involved in drug transactions with opium growers during counterinsurgency campaigns.⁸⁹ According to Padgett, who collected dozens of firsthand testimonies, Acosta even owned marijuana and poppy plantations in the sierras.⁹⁰ Despite a brief interlude in prison for drug trafficking in the 2000s and his inclusion in the Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA's) database,⁹¹ Acosta continued to enjoy support from the Mexican military and served as a notorious "link" between the federal government and drug traffickers until his assassination in 2010. Under Acosta, the deputy commanders of BEA operations in Guerrero, Major Javier Barquín Alonso and Major Francisco Quiroz

Hermosillo, are also noted in memos for their involvement in drug trafficking. Intelligence cables document the activities of a little-known paramilitary organization known as *Grupo Sangre*: a death squad attached to BEA and employed to commit some of the most brutal acts of the dirty war in Guerrero. The level of atrocities committed by Grupo Sangre and described in the memoranda is overwhelming: its members, for example, forced peasants suspected of guerrilla membership to drink gasoline before setting them on fire. Concurrently, Grupo Sangre dispatched narcotics to the US border using the very military planes employed for counterinsurgency operations in the region.⁹²

BEA's response to guerrilla challenges in urban dwellings reflected similar dynamics. The head of counterinsurgency operations in Mexico City was BEA's official Arturo Durazo.⁹³ Durazo and other BEA officials headed the División de Investigaciones para la Prevención de la Delincuencia (DIPD). This was BEA's branch for counterinsurgency operations in Mexico City.⁹⁴ Durazo took public pride that his organization was "prepared to kill guerrilleros like dogs . . . regardless of whether judges absolved them or not."⁹⁵ The everyday DIPD's political economy consisted in "facilitating, assisting and then robbing and often murdering bank robbers, drug traffickers and other criminals."⁹⁶ Appointed by President José López Portillo (1976–82) to head the entire police force in Mexico City in the late 1970s, Durazo expected new police recruits not only to "fend for themselves" but to report monthly quotas to the high ranks of DIPD.⁹⁷ Shortly after appointing Durazo to run Mexico City's police, the president vindicated his choice in a private conversation with the US ambassador by noting how "law enforcement and illegal activities frequently intertwine, not only in Mexico, but in other countries as well."⁹⁸ Accused of cocaine trafficking in courts in California and Florida in the early 1980s, Durazo was apprehended by the FBI during a visit to the United States but immediately released and allowed to return to Mexico.⁹⁹ The criminal ethos of Durazo's DIPD survived the "dismantlement" of the agency and, under different names ("Jaguares," "La Hermandad") remained entrenched at the higher echelons of Mexico City's police.¹⁰⁰ By virtue of these rackets, the state not only brought "order" to criminal markets but, more importantly, instrumentalized these economies to support in a very material sense the routines of security, policing, and repression at the height of rural and urban protest in Mexico.

Criminals and Drug Enforcement

By the late 1970s, the alleged threat of communism and the "internal enemy" began to give way to a novel securitization narrative, the war on drugs. The debut of the global "war" on drugs was the 1977–78 CONDOR program in Mexico. CONDOR was a US-led drug enforcement program aimed officially at boosting Mexico's policing capabilities in unprecedented fashion and conducting large-scale, militarized drug enforcement campaigns in the country's poppy-growing regions. Under CONDOR, the US government provided federal agencies in Mexico with seventy-six aircraft (including thirty helicopters), remote sensing devices, high-aerial reconnaissance equipment, computer terminals, telecommunication kits, and training programs.¹⁰¹ Watt and Zepeda estimate total US transfers under CONDOR at US\$532 million (adjusted for

inflation). Expanding at an unprecedented scale the policing infrastructure available to the federal government, US transfers under CONDOR are comparable, for example, to total US transfers during the first two years of “Plan Mexico” during the “Drug Wars” in the 2000s.¹⁰² Making use of this new infrastructure, CONDOR operations on the ground focused on aerial spraying and the deployment of 15,500 soldiers and 350 agents from the PJF (about 80 percent of its force) in regions where opium production concentrated—particularly the sierras of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Guerrero.¹⁰³ The DEA, CIA, and State Department oversaw CONDOR operations.¹⁰⁴

The equipment and mobilization of federal forces under CONDOR aimed, however, at suppressing more than just poppy cultivation. If the slopes of southern Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Guerrero represented the area in Mexico where opium production was the highest, they also represented the area in which guerrilla activity was densest. A key mandate in the mobilization of drug enforcement under CONDOR, never revealed to the public, was to provide cover for counterinsurgency operations and make the new policing infrastructure available for the suppression of guerrillas. As noted in a declassified CIA memorandum, Mexican security forces operating under CONDOR were “to take advantage of the eradication campaign to uncover any arms trafficking and guerrilla activity.”¹⁰⁵ CONDOR operations were to “devote as much effort to internal security as eradication.”¹⁰⁶ The infrastructure of CONDOR (especially aircraft and helicopters) was to be used to airlift troops to fight insurgents.¹⁰⁷

The counterinsurgency mandate of CONDOR led to the most brutal assault on peasant communities since the revolution. Pulitzer-winning journalist Craig Pyes, reporting a series of atrocities from Sinaloa, noted how “Mexico’s acceptance of the program had more to do with acquiring police hardware to suppress peasant insurgency movements than drug enforcement.”¹⁰⁸ José Ángel Gómez Mora, a journalist from Sinaloa, noted in his chronicles hundreds of extrajudicial executions and the eviction of thousands of peasants in the poppy-producing enclaves of Guasave, Guamúchil, and Culiacán.¹⁰⁹ According to a 1977 study by the Prisoners Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, 90 percent of the 457 inmates in Culiacán (Sinaloa’s capital) apprehended under CONDOR were poor peasants.¹¹⁰ Unsealed court records and declassified intelligence memos at the AGN document the systematic use of torture and arbitrary detention of peasants. Multiple memos note how detainees were subject to electric shocks, rape, introduction of spikes between the nails and the fingers, torture of children and wives, and crucifixions, among others.¹¹¹ The profile of the two generals heading CONDOR military operations, José Hernández Toledo and Manuel Díaz Escobar, underlined the counterinsurgency ethos of the drug enforcement program.¹¹² Hernández led in 1968 the military contingent responsible for massacring 350 students in Tlatelolco Plaza in Mexico City.¹¹³ Díaz, on the other hand, directed the assault and murder of 120 students in the 1971 massacre of *Jueves de Corpus*.¹¹⁴

CONDOR bolstered the capabilities of federal agencies to “pacify” discontent. As important, however, was the extent to which these pacification campaigns were used by the federal government (in particular, the DFS) to recoup expanding poppy and cannabis production in the sierras. Under CONDOR, DFS and PJF officials began to lay down a network of protected drug traffickers through selective enforcement. As noted by Pyes, “While lower-level agents pilfered to augment salaries . . . , the field commanders—using access to

comprehensive intelligence data supplied by American law enforcement—ran a sophisticated protection racket based on selective enforcement and arresting drug traffickers who would not pay.”¹¹⁵ James Mann, a US congressman who visited Sinaloa at the time (representing the House Select Committee on Narcotics), expressed distress about the highly selective nature of CONDOR, a practice he referred to as a “lack of aggressiveness on certain areas.”¹¹⁶

This centralized network of protected traffickers laid down by CONDOR was the so-called Guadalajara cartel. Intelligence memos at the AGN note how the head of drug enforcement of the CONDOR Program, PJF commander Carlos Aguilar Garza, began to articulate this trafficking network by extorting multimillion-dollar bribes from selected drug traffickers and killing or arresting others.¹¹⁷ A memo notes, for example, how the Sinaloan trafficker Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo—who would subsequently codirect Guadalajara—became at this hour an asset of the federal government, paying dues to Garza and his team after a brief arrest.¹¹⁸ Aguilar also incorporated during CONDOR other traffickers who would later play notable roles in the Mexican drug business, such as members of the Beltran and Carrillo clans. Importantly, Aguilar and his men extorted drug traffickers with the knowledge of the attorney general of Mexico—a fact underlining the extent to which these practices were part of the “rules of the game.” An intelligence memo notes, “When the attorney general was shown the arbitrariness and plundering of millions of pesos that [Aguilar and his team] obtained from drug traffickers, he promised to fire them but instead simply rewarded them with (new) appointments.”¹¹⁹ Aguilar’s file at the AGN is an encyclopedia of abuse, murder, and torture undertaken as part of an effort to recoup an expanding drug market under the pretense of drug enforcement. After CONDOR, Aguilar joined the DFS, directed at the time by Miguel Nazar. He was subsequently appointed head of drug enforcement in the strategic drug corridor of the state of Tamaulipas. Assassins gunned down Aguilar in 1993.

It was at this hour that the concept of “cartel” was socialized in Mexico—portraying drug organizations as overly powerful, highly autonomous entities rather than agents operating by virtue of protection schemes afforded by the state. Framing in equivocal terms the filters through which the public, the media, and scholars would look at drug trafficking in subsequent decades,¹²⁰ the official and flamboyant narrative of the Mexican *narcotraficante* masked its embeddedness with the highest echelons of political power and the country’s security services. Supported by a formidable ability to frame the public discussion, the single-party state established the “conceptual and social limits [to] be taken into consideration to cognize drug trafficking” by the public.¹²¹ Merging counterinsurgency operations in the sierras with drug enforcement, and instrumentalizing rather than suppressing drug markets in order to mobilize policing and counterinsurgency campaigns, CONDOR served as a mold for subsequent deployments of the “war on drugs” in Andean countries in South America.

The downfall of the DFS came in 1985 after a DEA investigation into the torture and murder of its agent Enrique Camarena in the city of Guadalajara made public the extent to which the DFS was involved in the drug business.¹²² The investigation revealed extensive marijuana plantations operated by the DFS (one of the largest marijuana plantations detected by law enforcement to this date anywhere in the world).¹²³ The

Camarena affair generated a huge diplomatic scandal, and the Mexican government responded by shutting down the agency in 1986. Over half of DFS agents, however, simply transferred to the PJF¹²⁴—setting the PJF to become the new nationwide, centralized police force attached to the executive. As noted below, the “dismantlement” of the DFS inaugurated a recurrent practice in Mexican policing whereby huge police scandals led to cosmetic changes and the creation of “new” federal policing institutions. Subsequent institutional changes in federal policing in Mexico aimed less at dismantling than preserving these entanglements. But whereas DFS rackets nurtured a police force aimed at putting down urban and rural insurgencies in a context of Cold War politics, the PJF and its successors operated amid a globally unparalleled criminal “epidemic” framed by the world’s most extensive (neo)liberalization program.

Police Rackets and the PJF

The dismantlement in the mid-1980s of the DFS and its Cold War policing ethos hinted at the end of a “long” historical cycle in Mexico. Removing the limited restraints that Cold War security imposed on capital, the neoliberal program introduced in the aftermath of the debt crisis by President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–88) and vastly expanded under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–94) represented one of the most radical neoliberal programs implemented anywhere in the world. As noted by Cypher and Delgado-Wise, “Probably no nation in the world more fervently adopted the Washington Consensus than Mexico. No other nation has held to the precepts of the consensus with more determination.”¹²⁵ The top-down nature of the party’s corporatist system proved “essential,” according to President Salinas, for imposing profound structural adjustment “without the expected social mobilization.”¹²⁶ Invested in enclosing the remaining commons (*ejidos*), deregulating labor markets, activating NAFTA, creating reserve armies of labor to lower costs in US manufacturing, downscaling social subsidies, undertaking one of the world’s most extensive privatization programs, etc., the transition to advanced liberalism in Mexico would see, in time, banditry expand to “epidemic” levels. The only historical event comparable in Mexican history to this watershed process, Concheiro Bórquez notes, is the similarly gargantuan liberalization program undertaken a century before by the liberal dictatorship of *Porfiriato*.¹²⁷

Following the dismantlement of the DFS, the PJF took over as the central policing apparatus of the executive. The PJF was the country’s ministerial police, tasked with investigating and conducting arrests associated with federal crimes—meaning, in praxis, narcotics. Its membership quickly expanded from a few hundred to over 3,000 agents in the mid-1980s. The PJF in the 1980s and 1990s operated largely by virtue of extortion rackets, some of which it inherited from the DFS. Protection rackets under the PJF were organized into what is colloquially known in Mexico as the *plaza* system—a system of regional jurisdictions or “plazas” operated by subnational PJF bureaus and coordinated by PJF headquarters in Mexico City. Under the plaza system, a PJF regional director (*delegado*) held the “right” to extort criminal rents in his jurisdiction. In parallel, he was also bound to channel monthly “quotas” to PJF directors in Mexico City. Policing under the PJF was a massive, well-structured,

rent-seeking enterprise. Poppa describes the plaza system as a model of regional PJF “franchises.”¹²⁸ Valdez characterizes it as a system of PJF “shareholders.”¹²⁹ For Serrano, the plaza represented a “system” whereby “local and federal judicial police, not criminals, were the key actors controlling the flows.”¹³⁰ Plazas, according to Serrano, “were the strategic transit points [serving] as checkpoints for the collection of bribes, the monitoring of the movements of criminal actors, and ultimately the surveillance of the drug market.”¹³¹ Importantly, the plaza system was the mechanism through which the government established protection rackets over the growing flows of cocaine making use of Mexican territory.¹³² PJF officials delegated the logistics of these activities to criminal organizations operating in their regions. These criminal organizations were also subsequently called “cartels” (Cartel del Tamaulipas, Cartel de Tijuana, Cartel de Juarez, etc.)

Two retired PJF officials (PJF-1 and PJF-2) and a former DEA undercover agent (DEA-1) active in the late 1980s and 1990s and interviewed for my doctoral dissertation provided an unprecedented insight into the role of illegal activities in supporting federal policing under the PJF.¹³³ Rent-seeking was multilevel, hierarchical, and generalized. Everyday policing was “generated” in a very material sense by the lucrative extorting opportunities opened by the *charola*. At the lowest levels of a PJF jurisdiction, subofficials, internally referred to as *Zetas*, were compensated with low salaries as well as paid for their own operational expenses by means of extorting contraband, narcotics, and human trafficking at local levels. As noted in all three interviews, they were expected to repair their own patrol cars and buy gasoline, bullets, etc. at their own expense (PJF-1, PJF-2, DEA-1). Patrol vehicles were often *coches chocolate*—cars stolen in the United States, legalized clandestinely by officials at the national registry, and presented to PJF officials as “gifts” by drug traffickers and contrabandists (PJF-1). A former DEA agent who worked with PJF officials in the 1990s explained how subofficials were provided “close to zero” funds by their regional offices. “They often accepted carrying out ‘dirty jobs’ for us in return for money” (DEA-1). *Zetas* collected money from criminals, arrested those who did not pay, and managed extrajudicial enforcers (*madrinas*). PJF-1 described how “lower PJF sub-officials were tasked with collecting money from the *pollos* (human traffickers) and *fayuqueros* (contrabandists).” These two economic activities represented highly valuable rackets. According to him, “a single month of taxes from *fayuqueros* and *pollos* in a border plaza could easily reach a million dollars” (PJF-1). According to PJF-1, drug shipments in transit required safe passage from the regional delegado. “During my time in PJF, all shipments had to be cleared by the *Jaguar*. The *Jaguar* was the regional director. Protected vehicles were given what we called *viada* [pass]” (PJF-1). *Zetas* were also responsible for gatekeeping access to federal highways in which high-level meetings between traffickers and officials took place. They also secured highways when airplanes landed in adjacent clandestine land strips. PJF-1 described multiple-day fiestas where PJF officials and drug traffickers mingled. Parties were rich in cocaine and entertained by women forced into prostitution. Underlining how federal policing was guided by a rent-seeking ethos resembling a franchise model, *Zetas* were not only expected to live by the *charola* but to report a monthly rent—“poner la polla”—to the regional director above them (PJF-1).

Above Zetas, PJF regional directors, or *Yankees*, purchased jurisdictions from national headquarters (PJF-1, PJF-2, DEA-1). The price tag to head a jurisdiction was proportional to the value of illegal activity and entailed down payments ranging from a few hundred thousand to over a million dollars. According to PJF-1, “the price-tag to purchase a plaza was expensive because it enabled to tax drug trafficking, human trafficking, contraband of goods and to sell positions in lower positions at considerable prices.” Newly appointed PJF regional *comandantes* sent vanguard groups or “*estacas*” (integrated by Zetas) to new jurisdictions in order to “negotiate terms” with municipal authorities (PJF-1). Yankees represented the link between PJF headquarters in Mexico City and the higher echelons of organized crime. Establishing new agreements in a plaza often involved high-level meetings of regional commanders and major drug traffickers (PJF-1). One of the PJF officers noted how he personally “performed sweeps (*barridos*) to check for surveillance equipment in hotel rooms where PJF directors from Mexico City and drug traffickers met” (PJF-1). Services provided by the PJF to drug traffickers included escorting shipments, providing traffickers with PJF badges and bodyguards, supporting the logistics of aerial transportation, manipulating radars at headquarters, and undertaking targeted killings and arrests (PJF-1, PJF-2). Importantly, Yankees provided regular payments to superiors in Mexico City. Pimentel describes how national directors dispatched subordinates in official aircraft “to pick up the suitcases filled with money and gifts obtained from organized crime.”¹³⁴ DEA undercover agents often witnessed how PJF officials staged planes with money shipped to Mexico City (DEA-1). PJF-1 expressed how paying a regular rent to headquarters was a key and pressing concern for a Yankee heading a regional jurisdiction. Although it is unlikely that the plaza system operated as smoothly as portrayed in these testimonies, it involved a considerable degree of routinization, demands, and expectations considered “normal” by everyone and socialized throughout the PJF hierarchy. The political class expected PJF to support itself by racketeering illegal economies.

According to all interviewed officials, involvement in criminal activities under the PJF was “systematic,” driven by “necessity” and an “expectation” in the relationship between the ranks. Interviews by Azaola and Ruiz with federal police officials of the Federal District (PJDF) convicted for kidnapping showed that individuals joining federal policing did so with the chief purpose of accumulating wealth. Most agents “recognized that, had they not entered the police, they wouldn’t have become involved in organized crime.”¹³⁵ At least half of interviewed police officers became involved in crime following direct orders from their superiors. Oppenheimer notes how the use of the PJF by the regime to “regulate” drug markets in the late 1980s placed the institution in the position to racketeer new activities when necessity and opportunity presented.¹³⁶ Davis explains how the quick erosion of the single-party regime during this period reduced the availability of patronage, increased budgetary scarcity, and drove law enforcement into many more antisocial activities such as kidnapping and armed theft.¹³⁷ A kidnapping wave in the mid-1990s in Mexico City, for example, was largely the result of the growing predatory ethos in the ranks of PJF.¹³⁸ Like mafiosi collecting *pizzo*, life as a PJF officer was pressed by a constant need to obtain and generate money through illegal means to make ends meet and comply

with quotas. Rather than a practice confined to its highest or lowest echelons, criminal enablement was a systemic practice making federal policing materially possible.

At the beginning of his administration, President Salinas appointed PJJ comandante Guillermo González-Calderoni as the national drug “tsar.” His appointment as the “top cop” of *Salinismo* came despite (or because of) his connections with cocaine traffickers from the state of Tamaulipas—Mexico’s historical drug and contraband corridor. The organization handling Tamaulipas was the Gulf cartel—a network ran by an established family of smugglers connected to the highest circuits of regional and national power.¹³⁹ According to an investigation by Switzerland’s attorney general, the Gulf cartel owed its rise to support provided by the Salinas administration and, in particular, the president’s brother, Raúl.¹⁴⁰ González-Calderoni later admitted in public his ties with the leaders of the Gulf organization and provided details on the kind of logistical support provided to them by the PJJ.¹⁴¹ Before his assassination in McCallen in 2003, he noted to reporters the extent to which criminal enablement generated “policing” at every level of the PJJ.

They don’t only pay to get appointed. They also pay to get a job, or to get a certain geographical territory. People will pay a lot of money for an appointment at the border. If they do not have enough cash to pay for it, then they will have to borrow the money. But they are counting on making it back. For a border region, people will pay a lot of money.... For a border assignment, you can get charged U.S. \$1 million. And then you would have to pay \$200,000 or \$300,000 per month to your bosses in Mexico City in order to remain in that position.¹⁴²

In parallel, González-Calderoni was a prominent operator of clandestine operations directed against political opposition under Salinas. Astorga notes how González ran the espionage system directed against members of *Neo-Cardenismo*—a collection of social movements, unions, and peasant organizations mobilizing against the Salinas candidacy in the 1988 presidential election.¹⁴³ According to González’s own account, “I was the one in charge of investigating politicians since 1988.”¹⁴⁴ González explained that the information generated by surveillance operations of the opposition “was delivered to [the president’s brother] Raúl.” González subsequently headed operations against prominent labor leaders opposing Salinas, including the president’s chief enemy in the labor movement, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, whom he personally detained.¹⁴⁵ González also stated that the Salinas administration had resorted to operatives from the Gulf cartel to assassinate key members of the opposition, including prominent leaders of *Neo-Cardenismo* such as Francisco Javier Ovando and Roman Gil Hernandez.¹⁴⁶

After the end of the single-party state in 2000, a series of press scandals exposing the agency’s involvement in kidnapping rings shook the PJJ. Retaining most of its membership, the agency was transformed into the Agencia Federal de Investigación (AFI). Genaro García Luna, a former intelligence official who specialized in political surveillance, established and directed the AFI from the onset. In the following years, over half of AFI agents were to be investigated by the government for alleged involvement in criminal activities.¹⁴⁷ In parallel to the AFI, the federal government also

established a militarized police force to contain surging criminality. Established with 20,000 members drawn from the armed forces, the creation of the *Policía Federal Preventiva* (PFP) set in motion a growingly militarized dynamic in federal policing in Mexico. In 2006, the government incorporated the AFI and the PFP into a single federal policing body, the *Policía Federal* (PF). García Luna, later charged in US courts for involvement in drug trafficking, also established and directed the PF. The agency, by 2018, totaled 30,000 agents.¹⁴⁸ Finally, in 2018, the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018–) integrated the PF into the armed forces. Expanded to 80,000 agents, the now-called *Guardia Nacional* completed the militarization cycle of federal policing in Mexico.

As shown by the trials in US courts of García Luna and leading figures of the PF, huge investments in policing infrastructure undertaken since 2006 failed to disrupt the multilevel prevalence of rackets mobilizing federal policing in Mexico. Similarly, the drug-trafficking charges brought by US law-enforcement agencies in 2020 against Mexico's previous defense minister, General Salvador Cienfuegos (2012–18), suggest that these entanglements are likely to persist despite the incorporation of federal policing into the Mexican military.¹⁴⁹ While reflecting the strong institutional hysteresis of criminality within the police,¹⁵⁰ the apparent failure to disrupt criminal rackets in federal institutions is more aptly understood, at least in the framework advanced by this essay, if we reject the idea that the aim of policing in Mexico is the suppression of illegal economies. What the historical trajectory of policing in Mexico suggests, rather, is the centrality of criminal economies to the country's *pacification* project.

In summary, the entanglements between the criminal and the police described by this article were key pillars behind the everyday policing routines and targeted interventions bringing order and discipline to Mexican society. Rather than corruption or deviance, the police protection racket was a key mechanism supporting Mexico's state-formation process. Federal police and law enforcement were less invested in suppressing crime than in instrumentalizing some of this crime to pacify the sharp antagonisms in Mexican society. If the federal police was an important producer of social order in Mexico, then the "fabrication" of this order owed considerably to criminal activities. Focused on the history of the criminal and the police under the single-party state, this article does not extend its analysis into the present civil conflict and the multipolar connections between a decentralizing political landscape and a growing pool of criminal actors. The entanglements between policing and criminal organizations in the current civil conflict continues to be a key gap in the vast literature devoted to "drug war" Mexico. The discussion section below, however, ventures some reflections on the present state of violence and provides examples of promising research directions.

Discussion and Research Directions

Bandits and criminals may embody resistance and antagonism to established power structures but they often also enlarge and strengthen the repressive and policing apparatus of the state. Whereas Hobsbawm noted banditry's potential to turn into rioting and revolt, Blok underlined banditry's proximity to power—bandits as capitalism's

protopolice. Each perspective stresses a particular moment in the relationship of banditry and capitalism: banditry as an expression of social antagonisms edging revolution, then banditry co-opted to put revolutionary tendencies down. The co-optation of the social energy deposited in the bandit, however, is a key part of the capitalist process—and this dynamic was captured less by Hobsbawm than by Blok. By turning bandits into police, capitalist elites reversed Hobsbawm’s revolutionary process. The entanglements of the criminal and the state survived early state-formation processes, entrenched thereafter as police protection rackets. These rackets nurtured in key ways the pacification capabilities of modern states—and continue, of course, to do so. States were never in a position to “monopolize” crime but rather “instrumentalized” some of this crime to build and support security apparatuses aimed at a particular, alienated social class. Often associated with *disorder*, the illicit economies represented in the bandit and the criminal were, in other words, key to the production as much as the sustainment of a particular form of *order*—the liberal social order. Nurturing rather than opposing the policing process, police rackets are nevertheless strangers to political and modern state-formation theory. This article, showing how this mechanism affected in historically significant ways the course of Mexican history, recuperates a conversation in which illegality features prominently in the consolidation of political modernity.

Akin to the bandit, the police is also somewhat of a stranger to mainstream political theory. Critical studies of policing recover its overlooked importance and cast the police as modernity’s central institution: the fabricator, as Neocleous puts it, of the modern social order. Policing, like banditry, is less of a concrete historical figure than a dynamic process adapting itself to the evolving landscape it polices. In nineteenth-century Mexico, *Los Rurales* were invested in pacifying a liberalized peasantry in a context of early nation-state formation. *Los Rurales* policed, especially, the antagonisms transpiring from an alienated peasantry and the proletarianization of labor. By 1910, the level of social antagonisms generated by an extreme primitive accumulation process surpassed the ability of the state to police them. The Mexican revolution represented the first mass uprising in the global periphery in which the masses played a central part. Next came the longest party autocracy of the twentieth century, policed by the surveillance, infiltration, interrogation, and counterinsurgency technologies embodied by the DFS. The DFS was created explicitly to neutralize revolutionary leftovers and employed thereafter to keep new ones from flaring up. In the late 1970s, the transition from a “Cold War” to a “Drug War” securitization narrative provided a new framework to expand the infrastructure of federal policing. The CONDOR program made use of this narrative not to dismantle drug trafficking as purported but to deploy pacification campaigns paid, paradoxically, with state rackets in contraband and drugs. This narrative and infrastructure were subsequently deployed in other regions of the world. Finally, by the 1980s, the end of the DFS and the rise of the PJF reflected broader and more meaningful changes: the end of party autocracy, the end of the Cold War, and most importantly, a transition to a particularly radical version of advanced liberalism. The PJF and subsequent federal policing agencies (presenting an increasingly militarized mindset) operated in a social landscape dotted less with “peasant wars” than by pauperized, criminally driven, violent social eruptions.

But if policing in effect changed in accordance with an evolving historical context, two critical processes driving policing remained constant. The first, echoing critical views on policing, was the historical attachment of policing to the interests of capital. Policing assisted with its violence the crystallization of a particular form of social order—one in which the alienation and unequal distribution of resources and skills was indispensable. The second consistency was the extent to which criminal economies, paradoxically, made the policing project possible. Federal policing aimed not at suppressing crime but suppressing social protest *by virtue* of enabling crime. The embeddedness of policing and crime, encouraged by Mexican elites, transcended the act of “corruption” often employed to depict it as it embodied a process of key importance to the constitution of Mexico’s modern state. A top-down license to accrue rents by enabling crime allowed the police to put the brakes on revolutionary inertias, suppress social movements, push back on insurgencies, police problematic and destitute populations, and support the everyday policing routines so central to capitalist rule.

More recently, Mexico’s transition to neoliberalism altered the relationship between state and criminality. Structural drivers, rather than merely political ones, transformed this relationship at its root, laying down the social, political, and economic conditions of a new criminal and political landscape. While not the purview of this article, a few points on how liberalization affected social violence in Mexico seem warranted, if only because of the little attention paid to structural drivers by the specialized literature. Violence in Mexico can be argued to owe to political weakness, but political weakness owes, at least partially, to structural developments. Capitalist transitions, writes Wolf, sever ties between economic resources and political power, exacerbating tensions not only through their own action but by generating “contradictions” in the traditional systems of power. When market forces go unchecked, “the crisis of power deranges the networks which link the peasant population to the larger society.”¹⁵¹ Accelerated liberalism in Mexico brought a growing “contradiction” between the economic and political spheres. This contradiction, rather than pluripartidism, lessened the state’s ability to centralize and control the means of violence—especially the means of violence embodied by the bandit and its illicit economies.

The literature on Mexico’s current conflict focuses, often too narrowly, on political decentralization and multiparty politics to explain the eruption of criminal violence. What this literature suggests, not without reason, is that the state’s decreasing capacity to “regulate” criminal markets lessened its capacity to “control” their built-in violence. The literature emphasizes how the end of the single party and its integrated and stable drug racket gave way to increasingly fragmented and antagonistic “synapses” between a decentralizing political system and a fragmenting landscape of organized crime. Ríos, for example, notes how political decentralization in the 1990s strengthened protection rackets at levels of government (municipal) that had formerly participated in drug markets in limited ways.¹⁵² Trejo and Ley argue that party rotation in gubernatorial races was a key instigator of intercartel wars because the political system could no longer guarantee long-term commitments in criminal markets.¹⁵³ Duran-Martinez and Snyder associate the explosion of violence to the demise of the “one protector, many criminal organization” model operating under the single-party regime.¹⁵⁴ Others document how political and *de facto* power at subnational levels became contingent on

controlling a growing pool of criminal rents, feeding in turn Mexico's killing spree. The predominantly *political* literature on violence in Mexico casts state weakness and the empowerment of local actors as the decisive cause driving conflict in contemporary Mexico.¹⁵⁵

But while political factors associated with the end of the single-party state and its regulatory powers in criminal flows are clearly important, this exclusively "political" perspective overshadows the extent to which Mexico's transition to advanced liberalism not only weakened the state's ability to contain banditry but also encouraged conditions turning banditry into an "epidemic." As Gamblin and Hawkes note, one of the most striking gaps in the literature about violence in Mexico is the extent to which socio-economic factors are absent in the equations making sense of it.¹⁵⁶ Recent contributions are making a difference. For example, in a study looking at the effects of trade liberalization on organized crime, Herrera shows how NAFTA drove large parts of the Mexican peasantry to join drug trafficking organizations and other criminal groups. Using panel data on drug violence from 2007 to 2011, Herrera finds that exposure to trade was associated with violence in both drug-producing and drug-smuggling regions.¹⁵⁷ From a similar perspective, Maldonado shows how liberalization policies in communal agriculture and the arrival of the agroindustry drove peasants to invest in illegal crops such as opium and cannabis.¹⁵⁸ Looking at the "enclosures" of the commons, Jense shows how forced disappearances attributed to the "Drug War" overlap strongly with changing patterns in land tenure.¹⁵⁹

Hinting at the role of criminals in securing a capitalizing economic landscape, some have looked at the role of extortion groups linked to drug trafficking in the agro-industrial landscape of avocado and lemon production in Michoacán.¹⁶⁰ From gender perspectives, Gamblin and Hawkes reflect on the effects of neoliberal dispossession on the formation of violent masculinities among the foot soldiers fighting and hoping to survive these wars.¹⁶¹ Their analysis of male homicides shows how impoverishment and extreme inequality undermined men's capacity to access a dignified standard of living and embody a less violent understanding of their gender.¹⁶² What brings these literatures together is their commitment to show, perhaps more than anything else, the relationship between extreme liberalism and social violence in Mexico—the intrinsic insecurities of the capitalist process.

Drawing from bandit and critical policing studies, this article contributed a long-term historical periodization of federal police agencies in Mexico. It documented the persistent ties between the bandit and the police across multiple historical cycles, noting the functionality and historical input of their embeddedness in Mexico's state-formation process. The article argued that police protection rackets are a notable state-making mechanism because they made policing and pacification possible in a material sense, supporting violent state interventions shaping in significant ways the course of Mexican history. Unsurprisingly, the saliency of these entanglements, absent in our understanding of Mexico's political past, is also lacking in the frameworks seeking to make sense of the country's violent present. What is to be the input of this massive wave of banditry and crime into the broader historical process engulfing contemporary Mexico? Judging by the historical record, the success of bandits and criminals in the current conflict will lie in their instrumentality to advanced forms of

capitalist power. Banditry's potential will crystallize in Blok's police; Hobsbawm's bandit will pass on revolution.

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Notes

1. "Former Mexican Secretary of Public Security Arrested for Drug-Trafficking Conspiracy and Making False Statements," The United States Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York (press release, December 10, 2019).
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8. Mittrani, *Rise of the Chicago Police Department*.
9. Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 143.
10. See Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Georgios Papanicolaou, "A Neoliberal Security Complex?," in Philip Whitehead and Paul Crawshaw, eds., *Organising Neoliberalism: Markets, Privatisation and Justice* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 105.
11. Notable examples include Robert J. Antony, "Peasants, Heroes, and Brigands: The Problems of Social Banditry in Early Nineteenth-Century South China," *Modern China* 15, no. 2 (1989): 123–48; Nathan Brown, "Brigands and State Building: The Invention of Banditry in Modern Egypt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2

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12. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), 23.
 13. *Ibid.*, 22.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 24–28.
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24. Gallant, "Brigandage, Piracy, Capitalism, and State-Formation," 30.
25. *Ibid.*
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36. *Ibid.*, 49.
37. *Ibid.*, 54.
38. *Ibid.*, 57.
39. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 10.
40. Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, vol. 1, 119.
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44. See Samuel León, *El cardenismo, 1932–1940* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010); Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1974).
45. Tzvi Medin, *El sexenio alemanista: ideología y praxis política de Miguel Alemán* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1990), 60.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Alemán's wide-ranging policies altered in a fundamental sense the subsequent ideological orientation and class affiliation of the single-party state. Policies introduced by his government to favor capital and big business included, for example, changes to the agrarian code and article 27 of the constitution—often considered the revolution's most important social "triumphs." Alemán's reforms allowed landowners to apply for *amparos* (legal protections) to secure their property and challenge attempts to redistribute their land. The government also curtailed credit to collective agriculture. Public funding shifted to finance private farmers and large-scale agro-industrial projects. The president also introduced changes to the country's labor laws. For example, it began to apply criminal sanctions to those who would strike or failed to live up to a collective labor contract attached to the party's official unions. The most important business executives in the country came to occupy key roles in the public banks and government economic agencies while the government ousted officials with Cardenista leanings from public posts. The pro-capitalist changes implemented by Alemán's administration are described in Medin, *El sexenio alemanista: ideología y praxis política de Miguel Alemán*; and Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).
48. See Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 253–310.
49. The economic and political shift under Alemán entailed important long-term consequences for the masses. Industrial workers lost more than half in real wages from 1939 to 1947. Wages would not recover their 1939 level until the late 1960s and only for a brief period. Likewise, rural wage laborers lost 40 percent of their income during this period. As Niblo points out, the drive toward industrialization in Mexico in the 1940s involved a sharp transfer of resources from the rural population to private and public investors. After Alemán, Mexico became one of friendliest economies for big business in the world. Mexico ranked lowest in revenue per capita in Latin America until the late 1960s. This owed at least partly to the extensive tax-breaks that Alemán and subsequent governments provided to big business. Public spending in social services was one of the lowest in Latin America despite the regime's alleged commitment to redistribution. See Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 2, 259–60; Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 5.
50. See Dan La Botz, *The Crisis of Mexican Labor* (New York: Praeger, 1988).
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52. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico*, 79–150.
53. Juan Alberto Cedillo, *La cosa nostra en México (1938–1950): Los negocios de Lucky Luciano y la mujer que corrompió al gobierno mexicano* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2011).
54. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 161.
55. Carlos A. Flores Pérez, *Historias de polvo y sangre: génesis y evolución del tráfico de drogas en el estado de Tamaulipas* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2013), 109.

56. Ibid.
57. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*.
58. Ibid., 178.
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60. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 259.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., 259.
63. Cited in: Luis Astorga, "Organized Crime and the Organization of Crime," in John Bailey and Roy Goodson, eds., *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 72.
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65. Elisa Servín, "El delator, una figura cotidiana del alemanismo priista," *Antropología. Boletín Oficial del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* 101 (2016): 144–56.
66. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 203–4.
67. Servín, "El delator, una figura cotidiana del alemanismo priista."
68. Gillingham and Smith, *Dictablanda*, 2.
69. Miguel D. Ramírez, *Mexico's Economic Crisis: Its Origins and Consequences* (New York: Praeger/Greenwood, 1989), 78.
70. See Gladys McCormick, "The Last Door: Political Prisoners and the Use of Torture in Mexico's Dirty War," *Americas* 74, no. 1 (2017): 57–81; Laura Castellanos, *México armado, 1943–1981* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 2013).
71. See Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
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 125. James M. Cypher and Raúl Delgado Wise, *Mexico's Economic Dilemma: The Developmental Failure of Neoliberalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 7.
 126. Cited in Enrique Krauze, *Carlos Salinas de Gortari. El hombre que quiso ser rey* (video), Serie México Siglo XX, Colección Sexenio, 1998.

127. Elvira Concheiro, *El gran acuerdo: gobierno y empresarios en la modernización salinista* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1996), 75.
128. Terrence Poppa, *Drug Lord: A True Story; The Life and Death of a Mexican Kingpin* (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2010), 19.
129. Guillermo Valdés Castellanos, *Historia del narcotráfico en México* (Mexico City: Aguilar, 2013).
130. Mónica Serrano, "States of Violence: State-Crime Relations in Mexico," in Pansters, ed., *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 138.
131. Ibid.
132. The foreclosure of the Caribbean route (Colombia-Caribbean-Florida) and its relocation to Mexico (Colombia-Northern Mexico-Texas) in the mid-1980s increased exponentially the value of the Mexican drug racket. The PJF was situated in a privileged position to recoup this market because cocaine originated elsewhere (Colombia) and thus required infrastructure ran by the federal government (airports, federal highways, border customs, ports, etc.). Emphasizing the successful control exerted by the PJF during these two decades, Valdés characterizes the plaza system as one of "PJF shareholders." The plaza system under the PJF managed to keep cocaine traffickers in a subordinate position (as well as violence levels remarkably low) until political decentralization, beginning in the late 1990s, empowered increasingly antagonistic synapses between drug traffickers and powerbrokers at local levels. The porosity of the US-Mexican border expanded further under NAFTA, facilitating flows and guaranteeing Mexico's position as the most prominent drug corridor in the world. Pansters notes how the growing share of cocaine consumed in the United States arriving from Mexican corridors rose from 20 percent in 1984, to 30 percent in 1989, to 50 percent by the mid-1990s, and to 80 percent by 2000. In other words, after the 1990s, the development of cocaine markets took place amid political decentralization and the weakening of the federal state, but the violence that followed resulted less from the increased value of drug markets than from the central government's declining ability to establish an effective protection racket over these flows. See Valdés, *Historia del narcotráfico en México*; Wil G. Pansters, "Drug Trafficking, the Informal Order, and Caciques: Reflections on the Crime-Governance Nexus in Mexico," *Global Crime* 19, no. 3-4 (2018): 315-38.
133. Personal interview with PJF-1 official in Mexico City, October 2019; personal interview with PJF-2 official in Mexico City, November 2019; personal interview with DEA-1 official in San Marcos, TX, April 2019.
134. Stanley Pimentel, "Mexico's Legacy of Corruption," in Roy Godson, ed., *Menace to Society: Political-Criminal Collaboration around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 184.
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136. Andres Oppenheimer, *Bordering on Chaos: Mexico's Roller-Coaster Journey toward Prosperity* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).
137. Diane E. Davis, "The Political and Economic Origins of Violence and Insecurity in Contemporary Latin America: Past Trajectories and Future Prospects," in Daniel M. Goldstein and Enrique Desmond Arias, eds., *Violent Democracies in Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 84.
138. Humberto Padgett, *Jauría: la verdadera historia del secuestro en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2011).

139. See Carlos Antonio Flores Pérez, *Historias de polvo y sangre: génesis y evolución del tráfico de drogas en el estado de Tamaulipas* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2013); Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, *Los Zetas Inc.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021).
140. In 1994, Switzerland's prosecutor general, Carla del Ponte, initiated the most comprehensive judicial investigation undertaken to this date on Mexico's drug trafficking police rackets and drug-related corruption. Del Ponte's credentials included having worked as Giovanni Falcone's counterpart in Switzerland during the *Maxiprocesso* hearings in Sicily. She also presided over two United Nations international criminal tribunals. Del Ponte's investigation was triggered by an attempt by Salinas's brother, Raúl, to withdraw (via his wife) about \$100 million from a bank account in Geneva (about \$200 million today). In the following days, the Swiss attorney general located seventeen bank accounts belonging to the president's brother under false aliases. The Swiss authorities began an investigation to determine the origin of the president's brother's money. Del Ponte based her report on the testimonies of ninety drug traffickers from Mexico, the United States, and Colombia. It documented the grand-scale involvement of the president's brother and PJF officials in extorting fees from Mexican and Colombian cocaine traffickers. The investigation estimated that Raúl had extorted more than half a billion dollars (around \$867 million today). Building from copious archival work, the best work on the "politics" behind drug markets during the Salinas period is Flores Pérez, *Historias de polvo y sangre*. See also "Raúl Salinas, Citibank, and Alleged Money Laundering," *Report to the Ranking Minority Member, Permanent Sub-committee on Investigations, Committee on Governmental Affairs, US Senate, GAO, October 1998*. For a brief account, see Tim Golden, "Swiss Recount Key Drug Role of Salinas Kin," *New York Times* (September 19, 1998).
141. Frontline, *Drugwars: Interview with Guillermo Gonzalez Calderoni*, PBS, 1995.
142. *Ibid.*
143. Luis Astorga, "México, Colombia y las drogas ilegales: variaciones sobre un mismo tema," *Análisis histórico del narcotráfico en Colombia* 40 (2003): 40–65.
144. Frontline, *Drugwars*.
145. Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 196.
146. Sara Schatz, *Murder and Politics in Mexico: Political Killings in the Partido de la Revolución Democrática and Its Consequences* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, vol. 10, 2011), 63.
147. *Libro Blanco: Agencia Federal de Investigación, 2000–2006* (Mexico City: Procuraduría General de la República, 2007).
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150. As Sabet notes, attempts to reform the police "do not occur in a vacuum but within a dense network of pre-existing institutional rules, including persistent informal rules that . . . might contradict reform efforts." See Daniel Sabet, *Police Reform in Mexico: Informal Politics and the Challenge of Institutional Change* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 40.
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152. Viridiana Ríos, "How Government Coordination Controlled Organized Crime: The Case of Mexico's Cocaine Markets," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 8 (2015): 1433–54.

153. Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, "Why Did Drug Cartels Go to War in Mexico? Subnational Party Alternation, the Breakdown of Criminal Protection, and the Onset of Large-Scale Violence," *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 7 (2018): 900–37.
154. Richard Synder and Angelica Duran-Martinez, "Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 52, no. 3 (2009): 253–73.
155. Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, "Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the US-Mexican Context," in Eric L. Olson, David A. Shirk, and Andrew W. Selee, eds., *Shared Responsibility: U.S.-Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime* (Washington, DC: Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars; San Diego, CA: Transborder Institute, 2010); Jerjes Aguirre and Hugo Amador Herrera, "Institutional Weakness and Organized Crime in Mexico: The Case of Michoacán," *Trends in Organized Crime* 16, no. 2 (2013): 221–38; Ríos, "How Government Coordination Controlled Organized Crime"; Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, "Why Did Drug Cartels Go to War in Mexico?"
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162. *Ibid.*

Author Biography

Alejandro Lerch earned his bachelor's degree in political science at the National University of Mexico. He undertook a master's degree in international security at Sciences Po Paris and earned his PhD at the University of Cambridge. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Graduate Institute of Geneva under a Swiss Excellence Postdoctoral Grant.