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A Failed Mexican State?

Challenging the Oversimplified Narrative of Mexico's Drug War

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by

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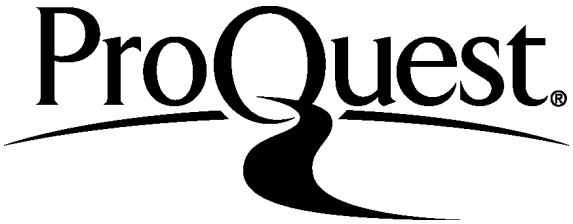

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ABSTRACT

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The general understanding of Mexico's drug war has tended toward simplistic, particularly in our assumption that the states in which the drug war exists are failed states based on a narrow definition of state legitimacy as dependent on a monopoly of violence. Through the cartels' use of violence and the use of violence by the Autodefensas born to fight the cartels, the Mexican state's monopoly of violence is put into question. Although this monopoly of violence is an incredibly important factor of any state, its central use in labeling Mexico as a failed state may not be fair or useful.

I look at the accuracy and fairness of contemporary failed state accusations for drug exporting countries by looking at Michoacán, Mexico as a case study and examining this case study in its transnational context to also include the Mexican drug trade's origins in Colombia. I explore the failed state debate through the classic theoretical literature upon which it is based, but also engage the contemporary rhetoric emanating from political actors and non-governmental organizations that seek to define state failure in clear cut terms through analytical tools such as predictive models of state failure. I use statistics on violence and cartel activities compiled by the Mexican government and NGOs to illustrate the context that informs this debate.

I have found that assessments of state failure depend too heavily on an understanding of state legitimacy as dependent on monopoly of violence. This interpretation of state failure

is often devoid of nuance, failing to reflect important differences between different substate groups that challenge the monopoly of violence (i.e. groups' organizational strength, ideological motivations, the multiplicity of groups, objectives of their violence). All these specific differences are important in the context of state stability, yet they are often not included in assessments of state failure. Uniform assessments of state failure are too broad to capture the important particularities of specific states. These assessments of state failure can be unfair because they may prematurely label a country as failing, and not useful because they may push international actors to intervene prematurely, further destabilizing already complicated areas.

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Introduction

Checkpoint Obstacle Course: The Battle for Authority

The problems within Mexican security structures, their instability and unreliability, are not visible only to analysts and government leaders. They are visible also to Mexicans during their daily routines, in something as simple as a drive to work. John Holman from Al Jazeera spoke to a farmer in Michoacán who illustrated perfectly and simply with his daily commute, the battle for authority that is ongoing in Michoacán:

> Every day in just a few kilometres I passed through three check points. First the one where the Knights Templar Cartel men searched cars, then the army and after that, the vigilante citizen groups. The vigilantes and the cartel checkpoint were the worst; armed to the teeth like Rambo and high on marijuana. It was pretty frightening.[1]

This farmer's simple story tells of the violence that pervades Mexico; it also tells of the fear Mexicans have reluctantly adapted to on a daily basis. Most central to all of these realities, however, it also shows the tug and pull between government forces, drug cartels, and Autodefensas (groups of armed civilians formed to fight the cartels). All of these groups are vying for the exclusive right to police their corresponding geographic areas.

One need only contemplate the absurdity of three independent checkpoints in quick succession of each other to understand the problems afflicting regions of Mexico in which drug interests have a stronghold. Different armed groups—those of the state and otherwise—set up checkpoints, knowing that those they searched were searched by a separate group a few kilometers back. Theoretically, these separate checkpoints are meant to police for activities rejected by each group, but to a large extent, they are also policing each other at

[1] John Holman, "Living in terror under Mexico's Knights Templar cartel," *Al Jazeera*, March 10, 2015, Accessed March 3, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/americas/2015/03/mexico-knights-templar-cartel-michoacan-150311022156168.html.

these checkpoints. Autodefensa groups are looking for cartel members; cartel members are looking for Autodefensas; police are looking for illegal weapons, drugs, and cartel members.

This battle between cartels, Autodefensas, and government forces and its resulting uncertainty for Mexican citizens creates regional instability in Mexico. Cartels use violence to protect drug interests; however, violence also emerges as a power struggle between different armed groups—both those pledged to protect communities and those pledged to protect their own illicit interests, and these objectives unfortunately do not fall neatly and exclusively within any of these groups. Autodefensas have been accused of involvement in illicit activities, with some forming cartels themselves, and government forces have been accused of corruption, benefitting from the drug trade in some senses; thus, these groups' objectives and their allegiances are not always clear.

Citizens who must drive through these checkpoints on a daily basis, as this Michoacán farmer does, stop at all three checkpoints or risk being fired on.[2] These separate groups, then, are coexisting with each other as security forces in the same area, none able to force out the others. Citizens who encounter these groups find themselves needing to respect all three as authority figures, because all three can enforce their will through violence. In regions most afflicted by the cartel related violence, there is no discernable monopoly of violence, as there is a battle for legitimacy between groups, for the right to act as the only legitimate security force.

[2] Patricio Asfura-Heim and Ralph H. Espach, "The Rise of Mexico's Self-Defense Forces: Vigilante Justice South of the Border," *Foreign Affairs*, August 2013, Accessed May 3, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/mexico/2013-06-11/rise-mexico-s-self-defense-forces.

Debate Over "Failed State" Assessments

For people like this farmer, an authority is the group that gives orders that cannot be ignored, and in his case, this can mean cartels, Autodefensas, or government forces. This farmer would face consequences for ignoring instructions from any of these groups, each with more frightening consequences than the next. This multiplicity of sources of authority for everyday Mexicans is what characterizes the crux of this thesis. In certain regions of México, authority rests with those who can use force or threat of force effectively, and in regions with a cartel and Autodefensa presence, such as Michoacán, there is no obvious monopoly of force by any one group. Since Max Weber's pioneering work on the sociology of the state, monopoly of force is considered central to the functioning of a state. In some cases, such as that of Mexico, international organizations, scholars, and political leaders use monopoly of force as an indicator of state legitimacy, and its absence as a surefire sign of state failure. In this thesis, I challenge this dominant view by contending that violence comes in many different forms, each meaning something different for the state, by arguing that we must not exclude other state functions from determinations of success and failure, and by challenging the practical utility of the "state failure" label itself.

Though there is no agreed upon definition, "state failure" essentially describes the inability of a state to perform its basic functions, such as to provide education, security, or basic governance, as a result of violence, poverty, or any other issue affecting the state. Journalists, scholars, international organizations and many others use this term casually even though "state failure" has no definitive or agreed upon definition. The consequences of this accusation, however, are not taken very casually on the receiving end. In this thesis, I look at whether this failed state classification is fair or useful. First, however, it is necessary to

establish certain understandings that are central to this study. "Monopoly of force," or "monopoly of violence" refers to a group's exclusive command of the use of violence and the right to legitimize violence. In all the ways relevant to this thesis, "monopoly of force" is used in accordance with Max Weber's argument of the centrality of this monopoly to state legitimacy, a theory which will be elaborated in Chapter I of thesis. In discussing the impact of this theory on the perception of Mexican stability, I will question the fairness and usefulness of identifying failing states and predicting failure.

In this context, fair and useful are related terms. By "fair," I mean to address the possibility that identifying states as failing may inadvertently adversely affect their strength and stability, thus negatively affecting their situation. In other words, to be called a "failed state" is not a neutral observation. The "usefulness" of these predictions, then, follows this same logic—is the prediction useful when the prediction itself contributes to the predicted outcome? Essentially, the failed state label may not be fair to the countries under scrutiny, and it may not be useful to those who seek to benefit from these predictions, given that the prediction is likely to affect the outcome.

This is a well-documented dynamic referred to as performativity. Sociologist Michel Callon describes this dynamic, arguing that analysts alter their object of analysis when they describe it. "A discourse is indeed performative," argues Callon, "if it contributes to the construction of the reality that it describes."[3] This dynamic is studied in the context of many different disciplines, and it is particularly useful in this context of the effect of failed state assessments on the states that are assessed. When a powerful international actor describes a state as failing, businesses may avoid expanding into that state, tourists may avoid travelling

[3] Michel Callas, "What does it mean to say that economics is performative?" *CSI Working Paper Series* 5 (2006): 7, accessed June 4, 2016, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00091596/document.

there, and regional powers may begin to enact containment policies among other things, and this pressure may push this state toward "failure"; therefore, in saying that a state is failing, we may inadvertently instigate the failure we describe.

Relevant Background in Mexico

Mexico represents an interesting case of social, political, and economic development. There have been many moments in recent Mexican history that have been seen as indicators of the tremendous progress to come for Mexico, principally among them, the end of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) 71 year rule upon the victory of Vicente Fox in 2000, candidate of the National Action Party (PAN). Though moments like these are indeed significant indicators of progress and potential for progress, the victory they represent has seemed hollow to Mexicans and to international onlookers given the preeminent trouble that has plagued Mexico: the drug trade. As Adam Reiss argued in 1997, "perhaps the most formidable challenge to reform, however, is Mexico's burgeoning drug trade, which reaches deep into the pockets of powerful government figures. The pervasive drug trade precludes Mexico's realization of democratic ideals, long-term economic solvency, and national stability."[4] This analysis is unfortunately still incredibly relevant. There has been great progress in Mexico, but true stability cannot be maintained without first addressing the drug trade and the violence it brings. The drug trade has precluded much positive change in Mexico, and it has invited doubt in Mexico's long-term stability.

The Mexican drug trade and the brutal violence surrounding it is not necessarily new, and in fact it seems as though it has always defined Mexican society. This, however, is by no

[4]Adam Reiss, "Illusion or Reality: Mexico's Prospects for Reform," *Harvard International Review* 19 (1997): 50, accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4276403.

means the case. The drug trade is a very globalized and increasingly globalizing problem that neither originated in Mexico, nor is currently contained within Mexico. Before being a "Mexican problem," a comical misnomer given the global nature of the drug trade, it was a "Colombian problem." The Medellín and Cali cartels were among the most powerful cartels reeking havoc in Colombia and smuggling drugs into the United States through Florida. The United States, in conjunction with the Colombian government, however, cracked down on the drug trade. The United States restricted the influx of drugs through the Caribbean and Florida, leading Colombian cartels to partner with Mexican organizations to smuggle drugs through the U.S. – Mexico border. Meanwhile, the Colombian government, with U.S. support, began dismantling the major cartels, the Medellín and the Cali cartels, and after a decade of violence, were reasonably effective in this respect. This crumbling of the Colombian drug trade as we knew it in the times of Pablo Escobar, led to the meteoric rise of the Mexican drug trade we contemplate today.

The growth of the drug trade in Mexico and the violence it has caused has created a dangerous and complicated security situation as some states have practically been lost to the cartels, spaces from which police forces have withdrawn or spaces within which police forces have simply been ineffective, contributing to a climate of chaos. Within these lost states, the failure of national security policies has almost created a state within a state where violence is committed with near-impunity and the cartels command a monopoly of force. In these areas, such as the state of Michoacán, we have seen, relatively recently, "Autodefensas" organize to combat the cartels. The Autodefensas, or self-defense forces, are local groups of armed civilians that have organized to combat the cartels that threaten their communities. Citizens formed independent Autodefensa groups in different towns and attempted to organize

collaboration through a governing board constituted of representatives from each Autodefensa group. Though these groups, particularly their leaders, have ventured beyond their own communities to found more Autodefensa groups, their stated intention was that each group would police their own town, and security would be addressed at the local level. These vigilante groups are an important development because they are relatively new contributors to the drug violence. They too seek to combat the cartels, thus rounding out the situation under scrutiny in this thesis—the fight for authority between cartels, Autodefensas and government forces.

The drug trade is no longer only a matter of policy or of international reputation, but one felt by citizens and increasingly dealt with by citizens, as in the case of the Autodefensas. As Asfura-Heim and Espach quote in their analysis of Mexico's Autodefensa groups for *Foreign Affairs*, "The drug trade is the problem of the state, but kidnappings and robbings touch us."[5] The violence has reached a fever pitch where it is no longer contained among cartels, but is impacting citizens' everyday lives, and this impact is complicating the situation even further.

Over the past few years in México, there has been an epidemic of violence. In Morelia, Michoacán in 2008 during an Independence Day celebration, unknown men threw grenades into a crowd of people who had convened in the town square to celebrate Mexico's independence. This attack killed at least eight, and injured more than 100 people.[6] It was one of the first times in which killings were carried out only to inspire fear, as those targeted were not involved in the drug trade. In 2011, a casino in Monterrey, Nuevo León was burned

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[5] Asfura-Heim, Patricio & Ralph H. Espach. "The Rise of Mexico's Self-Defense Forces"

[6] "Grenade attack kills 8 on Mexico's national day," *Reuters*, September 16, 2008, Accessed May 10, 2016, http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mexico-blasts-idUKN1634595120080916.

down in broad daylight with people locked inside, resulting in 52 deaths.[7] Survivor accounts relate that up to six men walked into the casino and asked for the manager. When the manager refused to see them, the men set fire to the casino. This was believed to be reprisal for the owner's refusal to pay protection fees charged by cartels, extortions drawn from business owners. In the last few years in Michoacán, a state known for avocado and lime production, the Knights Templar Cartel has been extorting farmers, seeking protection payments, taking ownership of orchards, and killing those who do not comply.

In 2013, for example, a man in Uruapán, Michoacán refused to sign over the deeds to his avocado orchards, and as punishment, his son was kidnapped and murdered.[8] The violence has become unignorable, as this is a laundry list of not simply violence, but violence meant to paralyze communities with fear, and the list is largely incomplete. This is a quick summary of the more shocking instances of violence, or those representative of broader trends in the violence, such as reprisal for refusal to comply with extortion demands, but this summary leaves out the instances of violence that are normalized, that no longer garner headlines.

As violence has risen in México, many assume it permeates every corner of the country; however, the violence is geographically concentrated. The Trans-Border Institute in San Diego University studies Mexican social and political issues affecting Mexican political stability, particularly issues related to the drug trade, and those issues most pertinent in the U.S.-México border region. The Trans-Border Institute is an excellent resource as an organization that is tracking the violence in Mexico and analyzing the trends that this

[7] "52 killed in attack at Mexican casino," *CNN*, August 26, 2011, Accessed May 10, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/08/26/mexico.attack/.

[8] Jan-Albert Hootsen, "'Blood Avocados':The Dark Side of Your Guacamole," *Vocativ*, November 18, 2013, Accessed May 11, 2016, http://www.vocativ.com/underworld/crime/avocado/.

violence follows. One trend that is particularly important to this thesis is the geographic concentration of the violence. In the Trans-Border Institute's 2013 report, *Drug Violence in Mexico*, authors Molzahn, Rodriguez Ferreira, and Shirk point out that "Even taking into consideration the geographic dispersion of homicides, the worst violence has remained concentrated in fewer than 10% of Mexico's 2,457 municipalities."[9] Though other states and municipalities are not necessarily immune to the violence, there is a clear concentration of this violence in specific areas, particularly those which are valuable for trafficking purposes. This typically means states that offer a route to the United States. In the case of Michoacán, the Port of Lázaro Cárdenas makes the area appealing, and the violence that has erupted because of the cartel presence creates a lawless region, which makes the area more appealing yet. These factors make Michoacán a useful case study, as the state is one such region containing a concentration of the violence, and because of this, it is also the state which gave rise to the Autodefensas, the armed civilian groups. Michoacán, for the purpose of this thesis, serves as an excellent case study given that it is essentially a microcosm of all the cartel related issues.

These statistics on Mexican violence, and on the Mexican drug trade in general, are compiled by various sources, but they are imperfect assessments of the violence, as there is a lot we cannot know. For example, not all the violence is captured in these counts, as there are many incidents that are not reported.; there are plenty of "disappeared" people, plenty of unmarked graves, or "narcofosas." This reality received international attention with the disappearance of the 43 students in Ayotzinapa and the subsequent discovery of multiple unrelated mass graves during the search for these students. Additionally, when homicides

[9] Cory Molzahn, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data Analysis Through 2012* (San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, 2013), Accessed March 14, 2016, https://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/130206-dvm-2013-final.pdf.

are counted, these counts do not necessarily differentiate between cartel related homicides and unrelated crimes. There are plenty of efforts to differentiate cartel related homicides in order to get a more accurate count of the human impact of the drug war, but these efforts are typically undertaken by outside sources, by organizations such as the Trans-Border Institute, presumably because of the government's hesitance to count homicides that they will be indirectly blamed for. These outside counts undertaken by other organizations, however, involve a certain degree of subjectivity. Every organization studying these homicide statistics has a unique way of determining which homicides are cartel-related; therefore, this count is always subject to debate. We can induce a lot, but we *know* a relatively limited amount of information.

Though this knowledge of the violence is imperfect, it is not necessarily impractical to make assumptions about the nature of the violence. When there is a spike in violence, certain circumstances make it quite obvious that the drug trade is largely to blame. For example, "According to government figures, total homicides spiked to around 120,000 over [former President] Calderón's six-year term—double the figure under the previous president, Vicente Fox."[10] Before President Calderón, national policy regarding the drug trade was essentially a gentleman's agreement where drug interests were ignored by the state, and in exchange, cartels worked in the shade and confined the violence (to a certain extent) to those involved in the drug trade. Calderón, however, declared war on the cartels. He sent troops to battle cartels, fired police leaders in an effort to weed out corruption, and set out to dismantle cartel hierarchies by arresting their leaders. This disruption reignited turf wars and drew a backlash from cartels, significantly elevating levels of violence. Though there is no surefire

[10] Brianna Lee, "Mexico's Drug War," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 5 2014, Accessed May 15, 2016, http://www.cfr.org/mexico/mexicos-drug-war/p13689.

way to know the percentage of homicides that were drug-related, it is safe to assume that this spike in violence was due to the corresponding drug policy shifts.

Assumptions concerning the violence are not certain, but they are logical. Information regarding the drug trade is difficult to compile given not only the dangerous nature of the situation, but also the biases with which this information is generally pursued. We have few objective indicators of the growth or impact of the drug trade, and in their place we instead have an almost caricatured understanding of the problem at hand. Some see the drug trade, specifically the kingpins and their enemies, as characters taken out *The Godfather*. We need look no further than Sean Penn's recent *Rolling Stone* article, "El Chapo Speaks," to see the obsession with the drug trade as a glorified luxurious industry. Penn sets one of his many melodramatic scenes as such:

> I re-engage the tequila and scan 360 degrees for where I and my colleagues may lay flat and find cover should we have been followed and a raid initiated. In the darkness, it was difficult to imagine a safe place, and El Chapo's world is anything but.[11]

The perception of the drug trade is a glorified, movie-worthy one, as indeed part of the reason for this contact with El Chapo was a desire to film a movie about his life, and the goal in peering into the drug world is not necessarily to find new information for public benefit, as indeed this interview yielded no new information. The attention and information that emerges concerning the drug trade are often gratuitous accounts of a mysterious world for which many hold a morbid curiosity. Though the world has surely enjoyed the telenovelas, nighttime TV specials, and melodramatic articles detailing the excess and danger of the narco world, this attention is a disservice to the issues dealt by the drug trade. By focusing on these

[11] Sean Penn, "El Chapo Speaks: A secret visit with the most wanted man in the world," *Rolling Stone*, January 9, 2016, Accessed May 15, 2016, http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/el-chapo-speaks-20160109.

peripheral and salacious aspects of the drug trade, we are ignoring its political and social impacts.

General Outline of this Research

In this thesis, I will move beyond this obsession with the excess and danger of the drug trade and I will show respect for the victims of this war by not ignoring their existence. I intend to provide a more complete picture of the drug trade, focusing specifically on how the violence created by the groups involved has created instability by putting in question the state's monopoly on the use of force. I first discuss the history behind the use of monopoly of force as a way to define state legitimacy. Building upon this foundation of the understanding of state legitimacy as dependent on violence, I debate how the idea of a "failed state" may be lacking as it has historically prioritized this concept of monopoly of violence at the expense of other important nuances and considerations. It is important, after all, to understand the ways in which a state is defined to adequately understand why a state is accused of failing.

I will look to Colombia as a historical reference point for this issue of state legitimacy and accusations of state failure. At the height of the violence in Colombia, the turmoil was interpreted as proof of the country's place on the verge of collapse. I will detail the dynamic of the violence in Colombia as it parallels with Mexico's current situation, that is, the different groups (cartels, Autodefensas, and government forces) vying to control a monopoly of force in their corresponding geographic areas of influence. I will discuss how this dynamic was at the root of the debate over Colombia as a failed state. The rise of predictive models for state failure actually coincided with the end of Colombia's nightmarish

experience (Failed State Index began tracking faltering states in 2005), so I will use Colombia as a more historical example of when the conversation over whether states embroiled in the drug trade could be described as failing states was carried out openly. By this I mean that Colombia was included as one of the states most on the verge of collapse, thus there were open accusations and open denials of this assessment.

Though Colombia is a fascinating case in and of itself, I used it here as a historical context for my Mexican case study of Michoacán. I discussed the current situation in Michoacán, Mexico, detailing the ways in which this battle for legitimacy, this ongoing contest for a monopoly of force, has played out between the cartels, the Autodefensas, and government forces. I have discussed what circumstances have created this current situation, and the implications of this lack of clarity in regards to establishing a legitimate authority in Michoacán. I embedded this discussion of the instability of Michoacán in the debate over monopoly of force and state failure, and referenced Colombia as a past case for the benefit of hindsight. Though there are many differences between Colombia and México, there are also important similarities.

I will carry out this study concerning the impact of failed state accusations on suffering states by engaging the history of our understanding of state legitimacy and state failure, and what labeling a state as failing can mean for states' futures. I will focus on Michoacán, Mexico as a case study, and look to violence statistics compiled by the Mexican government and outside organizations to assess the situation in México, and I will look at foreign policy discourse concerning failed state accusations, meaning statements from other political leaders. I will also examine assessments resulting from predictive models of state failure. I argue that these failed state indices misrepresent the violence and instability

affecting Mexico. Just like the media oversimplifies the drug related violence to the point of representing a caricature of reality, so too do these indices provide an oversimplified representation of states that must contend with this violence. There are of course limitations to what I can do given the near impossibility of conducting any field research, and the difficulty of finding reliable and complete accounts of what is happening on the ground in the more impacted regions of México. Though this limits the scope of this thesis, it is not a prohibitive limitation as the impact of failed state accusations relies more on perception than absolute reality anyway.

I

State Legitimacy Theory and its Affect On Perceptions of State Failure

Why View Mexico Through the Lens of Monopoly of Violence

Though expanding on the uniqueness of Mexico's experience with substate violence at the hands of the Mexican cartels and the Autodefensas is incredibly important, there is also much value to understanding the ways in which this Mexican case fits into broader theoretical discourses. The theoretical debate through which I will analyze Mexico here is that of state legitimacy. Specifically, I will focus on Max Weber's theory that state legitimacy rests in the state's ability to maintain a monopoly on the use of violence within its territory. This is an important theoretical discussion to introduce to the study of Mexico's security troubles, as this classic debate underlies most analyses of the Mexican state's current strength and predictions of its future viability. Competition between various groups for this monopoly of violence is not only a theoretical framework applied from without. This competition is also unapologetically at the heart of much of the violence and turmoil itself and behind the armed groups' motives. This is illustrated in Michoacanos' every day lives.

John Holman captured this perfectly in his description of the multiple checkpoints set up by multiple groups that Michoacán citizens traverse daily as related at the beginning of this thesis. This obstacle course of checkpoints on Michoacán roads is perhaps the best single image to represent the tug and pull between cartels, Autodefensas, and the state for the exclusive right to police territory.

It is in this situation and the broader conflict it represents that one can see that in the case of Mexico, and in the case of Michoacán specifically, the state does not in fact

command a monopoly on the legitimate use of force as we often presuppose. There are other groups that command a considerable measure of authority, namely the cartels and Autodefensas, and the challenge they pose to the state's monopoly of force does not lie only in their own use of violence, but in the formality with which they seek to execute this control, to use this violence.

These substate groups are not just temperamentally lashing out in violence in pursuit of their ends, but are organizing themselves in this pursuit. They are attempting to set up legitimate security apparatuses, doing things such as organizing members hierarchically and regionally, establishing operating procedures (as with road blocks and signals to convene), or even simply attempting to signal membership through uniforms. These formalities work to provide a sense of legitimacy to their actions. Additionally, the Autodefensas reject the presence of police and military in the communities they seek to patrol; thus, they are overtly seeking a monopoly of force in their communities. A theoretical understanding of state legitimacy as depending at least partially on a monopoly on the use of legitimate force will help elucidate the significance of these Autodefensa groups and their implications for the Mexican state.

Origin of Theories on Violence and the State

The relationship between violence and the state is at the center of a continuously evolving debate. The role of violence in state formation and state legitimacy has been discussed at length by many theorists, though each approaches this debate from a different perspective and thus illuminates our current understanding in different ways. I will explain

some of these contributions to the theory of state legitimacy in order of the centrality of violence to their conception of state legitimacy.

Thomas Hobbes was among the first theorists to discuss the relationship between violence and the state. He argued that the state was born out of a fear of violence and a need to escape the deadly wars of all against all. "For as long as every man holdeth this Right, of doing any thing he liketh;" argued Hobbes, "so long are all men in the conditions of Warre."[12] He argued that in a state of nature, ungoverned by any, people were in a state of perpetual war because of competing interests, and that people forfeited a measure of personal sovereignty to escape this violence. Under Hobbes' thinking, then, people accept the power of the state because of a fear of violence. Thus, though his discussion of violence and the state is different than what is discussed in this thesis, Hobbes lays an important foundation in beginning to discuss the relationship between violence and the state. He explicitly discusses the notion that to a certain extent, the existence of the state depends on violence—whether through the state's ability to prevent debilitating violence (as with Hobbes, to put it simplistically), through the state's coercive use of violence in establishing the rule of law, or through an assurance that the use of force will be monopolized by the state and used justifiably.

Before Hobbes, Jean Bodin discusses more indirectly in the *Six Books of the Commonwealth* the role of violence, or more specifically of coercion, in the existence of the state. Bodin argues that "the first attribute of the sovereign prince…is the power to make law binding on all his subjects in general and on each in particular."[13] Here, the discussion of violence is more implicit. The value of rules and rulers depends on the ability of the state to

[12] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 190.

[13] Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1955), 43.

enforce the laws. Bodin touches on two important points here. First, he implicitly makes the case that a successful state depends on its ability to use violence, if necessary, to enforce laws established within its borders. Second, he argues that leadership in a state is claimed by the people who are capable of enforcing their will, specifying that this is not always the state. Bodin writes "if the prince can only make laws with the consent of a superior he is a subject; if of an equal he shares his sovereignty; if of an inferior, whether it be a council of magnates or the people, it is not he who is sovereign."[14] This early conception of the state speaks to the case of Mexico, characterized by violence and the accusations levied against the state as a result of this violence, which I will discuss more in depth in later chapters. That is, the accusation that if substate groups have began to enforce their will through violence, they are usurping the state's role, and establishing themselves as legitimate leaders. It is in this light that Mexico is inserted into these classic debates of state legitimacy and the role of violence in this legitimacy.

Immanuel Kant later adds his voice to this discussion of violence and the state and to which degree one is reliant on the other. Kant writes that "the power of the state to put the law into effect is also irresistible, and no rightfully established commonwealth can exist without a force of this kind to suppress all internal resistance."[15] His argument here poses an important point that is still discussed today in the context of states with weak or failing internal security structures, which posits that an inability to suppress resistance to its established rule of law poses an existential threat to the state, because if a state cannot fulfill its defining purpose of establishing order, then it is hardly a state at all. Here, Kant also contributes to the debate about the role of violence in determining state legitimacy.

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[14] Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth.*

[15] Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge, 1991), 81.

Arthur Schopenhauer has a similar view of the relationship between violence and the state, positing that though not a singular characteristic of the state, violence is inseparable from the existence of the state. In discussing rule, Schopenhauer states, "the prince says: I rule over you, by force; but in doing so my force excludes any other, for I will not tolerate another force next to mine, neither one stemming from without, nor of one against another internally."[16] Here, we begin to see a more outright discussion of the need for the right to violence to belong exclusively to the state, a debate which lies at the heart of the troubles consuming Mexico. Schopenhauer also elaborates on the inseparability of violence from the state. He argues that societies dependent on the rule of law (or rule by a monarch) were established by force. Force, argues Schopenhauer, cannot be abolished from the world as it is integral to its political formation. The correct fight from this perspective is not to get rid of force, but instead to demand that force exist on the side of, or better said, in the service of justice.

The understanding of the relationship between violence and the state that is most specific and thus most central to understanding Mexico's Autodefensa dilemma is Max Weber's argument of the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force. Weber argues that "the state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory."[17] He further claims that without a command on the use of force, the concept of the state would be "eliminated." He qualifies this, clarifying that there are of course other characteristic functions of a state; however, here, he discusses the centrality of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force as that which most

[16] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Essays, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[17] Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), Accessed February 8, 2016, http://polisci2.ucsd.edu/foundation/documents/03Weber1918.pdf

fundamentally defines a state. Under this understanding, only the state should have the legitimate authority to use force, or to permit other institutions to use force, giving the state also the power to legitimate violence. Weber's characterization of a successful state is very important to an analysis of the cartel and Autodefensa violence in Mexico, as it is this violence that leads onlookers to question the long term viability of the Mexican state, and when people question the viability of the Mexican state as a result of the violence, they do so through the lens of this Weberian understanding of statehood. Whatever their differences, many political theorists agree that force, and a monopoly of it, are central to a state's legitimacy. This suggests that the current Mexican state, like the Colombian one before it, is a failed state. Indeed, this is how both states appear in the current-day indices analyzed next.

Who Identifies Failed States and How

"Failed state" is quite a consequential term that is thrown around, seemingly casually, in a myriad of different professional spheres, and yet remains incredibly ambiguous. J. Eli Margolis, a Defense Intelligence Agency officer, writes about the push to create predictive, quantifiable models that can identify failing states. In doing so, he identifies the different sectors that are in one way or another using predictive models to single out failed or failing states. Some models are tied to government (Country Indicators for Foreign Policy [CIFP]), others to business (Political Instability Index, Global Political Risk Index), others to academia (Index of State Weakness, State Fragility Index), and others yet to nonprofits (Failed State Index [FSI]).[18] This assortment of groups attempting to identify failing states demonstrates many things about our understanding of state failure.

[18] J. Eli Margolis, "Estimating State Instability," *Studies in Intelligence* 56 (2012): 14, Accessed May 20, 2016,

First, there is obviously no consensus about what characterizes a failing state. Of course, once a state is obviously failed in that it is in total disorder, has no governing capacity, and no identifiable government to its people or to the international community, there is more agreement about identifying this state as failed; however, there is less consensus about what factors predict this demise. Though different models may converge in their use of certain indicators, they do not look at *all* of the same indicators, and they diverge in the significance granted to each indicator. This may be because of disagreement over which failings are more detrimental to a state and thus more likely to cause its failure, or it may be because these models are sponsored by different sectors and these sectors see different failings as more or less detrimental.

This leads to a second point which we must glean from the diversity of these predictive models, which is that state failure is not necessarily sought to be measured as an objective reality that solely describes the failing state, but is rather measured in the context of its effects on the group that is sponsoring this assessment. To a business, economic stability is a more important factor in state success and state failure, while to a government agency, particularly a defense agency, political instability and political violence is a more salient factor. "Who identifies a failed state?" then, is not a simple question to answer, as many different groups, with many different interests, using many different models identify failed and failing states, and this diversity implies a lack of objectivity, and perfectly represents the lack of consensus on the concept.

I will examine one such model, the Failed State Index, to better observe its aim, its successes and shortcomings, but more importantly the ways in which it is countered. The

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https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol.-56-no.-1/pdfs-vol-56.-no.-1/Estimating%20State%20Instability%20-Extracts-Mar12-20Apr12.pdf.

Failed State Index, produced by the nonprofit Fund for Peace and published annually in *Foreign Policy* represents one such attempt to quantify state failure, to make it more easily agreed upon, and also importantly, to rank states together. The Failed State Index uses 12 indicators in identifying and ranking failing states—demographic pressures, refugees and internally displaced persons, group grievance, human flight and brain drain, uneven economic development, poverty and economic decline, state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law, security apparatus, factionalized elites, and external intervention.[19] The report claims that the two clearest warning signs of state failure are uneven development and "criminalization or delegitimization of the state, which occurs when state institutions are regarded as corrupt, illegal, or ineffective."[20] The latter particularly speaks to the tendency to discuss Mexico, and more so Colombia in the 90s and even into the early 2000s, as countries on the brink of becoming failed states, considering that the violence magnified the corruption already present.

In the cases of Latin American states battling cartel and paramilitary violence, corruption and violence go hand in hand, but the real crux of the debate over failed states is the violence in particular. Because there are high levels of violence, and perhaps equally so because this violence tends to be quite gruesome, people have taken to discussing Mexico, and in its time, Colombia as well, as a failing state. The Fund for Peace's Failed State Index, in explaining "how you know a failed state when you see one," asserts that "of course, a government that has lost control of its territory or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of

[19] J.J. Messner et al., *Fragile States Index 2015* (New York: Fund for Peace, 2015): 17, accessed April 5, 2016, http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi15-report.

[20] Brad Amburn, "The Failed State Index 2005," *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2009, accessed April 5, 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/22/the-failed-states-index-2005/.

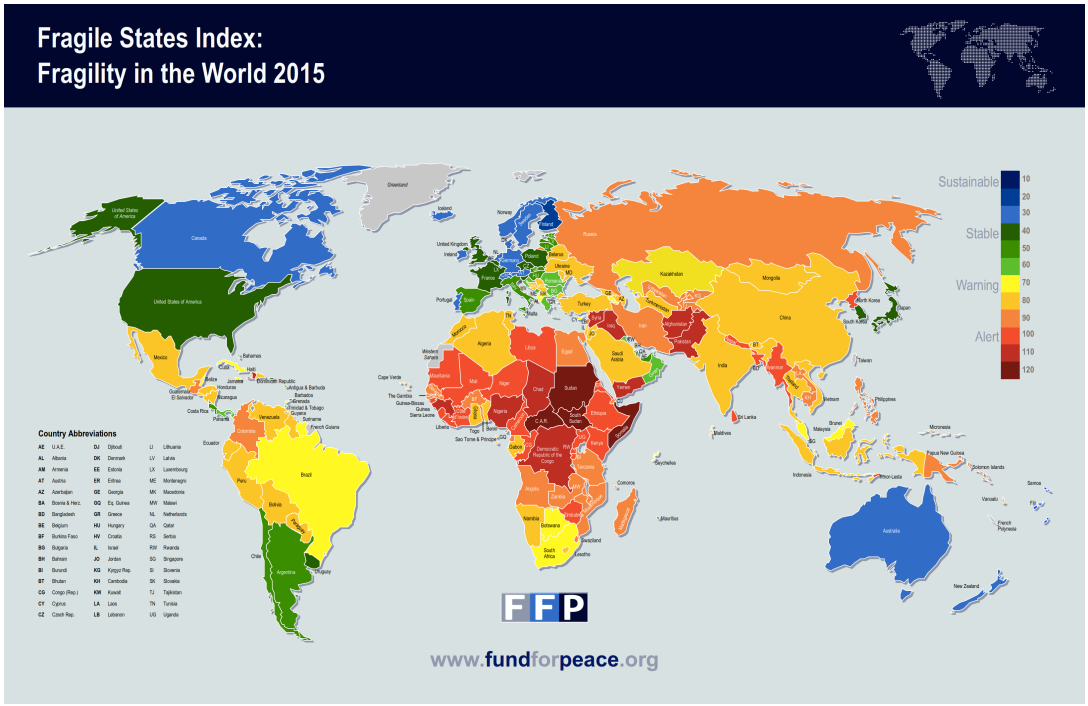
force has earned the label."[21] Here, one side of the debate at hand, that is the side that argues for the monopoly of violence in determining state legitimacy, is articulated directly and in no unclear terms. The Failed State Index, as with conversation in most spheres regarding the issue of state failure, identifies state failure based on a Weberian understanding of state legitimacy. That is, if a state is defined as "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory,"[22] then a failed state is by consequence a state that has lost this monopoly. This is the most common logic behind the argument positioning Mexico as a failing state. This is only one side of this debate, however.

Disagreement Over Utility and Fairness of "Failed State" Assessments

As there is a community of policy makers, academics, business people, and philanthropists arguing that the presence of high levels of violence is a marker of state failure, so too are there policy makers, academics, and philanthropists arguing that the presence of this violence in drug war states is an insufficient indicator of state failure. There is a generalized unease about using violence as the primary indicator of state failure, and about ranking countries with such different circumstances together in one list, using the same indicators. Analyses attempting to find and establish systematic ways to identify failing states are often, and almost infallibly met with resistance. It is difficult to identify "failed states" without also capturing states that do not quite fit the bill, particularly when the definition itself is surrounded by such haze. The following map illustrates the Fund for Peace's ranking of countries in terms of their stability, or likelihood to fail:

[21] Ibid.
[22] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation."

Figure 2: 2015 Fragile State Index[23]



In this case, Fund for Peace has ranked 178 countries, and out of those 178, 125 countries are ranked in their "warning" categories, indicating that they are at risk for failure (yellow to red on the map). That would mean that 70% of all countries are at risk for failure. A primary criticism is that predictive models of state failure label too many countries as "failing," and if a model is capturing too many countries in its "failing" categories, they are not particularly useful.

Many voices, especially from within Latin America, find particular fault in this use of violence as a primary indicator of state failure, finding that violence is not on its own an apt indicator, and that the use of violence in these analyses is itself often simplistic. Mexican sociologist, Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo argues in "Puéde México Ser Colombia?" that

[23] "Fragile State Index 2015," *Fund for Peace*, accessed June 3, 2016, http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015.

using the violence in Mexico as proof of state failure is unfair and based on an assumption that this violence is more widespread than it actually is, and more centrally focused than it actually is.[24] The violence is largely limited to specific geographic areas and is usually carried out in defense of drug trade interests. It is not present throughout the country, and it typically does not target the federal government nor is it meant convey political messages. Violence itself, he argues, cannot be seen simplistically across various countries because the unique characteristics of the violence are also important, not just its general presence.

Robert Rotberg, founding director of the Intrastate Conflict Program at the Harvard Kennedy School, contributes to this argument of the significance of the degree of centrality of violence when using it to predict failure. In discussing why he does not believe Colombia deserves to be considered a failing state, he argues that "Although [Colombia] could deteriorate into further failure, at present the Colombian government still performs for the 70 percent of the nation that remains under official authority."[25] Though Colombia's authority is challenged by armed substate groups, these groups have established their authority in different regions, though never in the capital, and they have failed to thwart the central government as a security force. The argument here is that the presence of competing forms of organized violence is not enough to constitute state failure so long as this violence remains regionally isolated and does not challenge the central security functions of the state.

Rotberg provides necessary nuance to the discussion of the role of violence in determining state legitimacy, or state failure when this violence is wielded by a private group; however, his discussion of the particularities that do and do not define a failing state imply that this determination of state failure depends on an exactitude which it actually does

[24] Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo, "¿Puede México ser Colombia?," *Nueva Sociedad* 220 (2009): 92

[25] Robert I. Rotberg, "The new nature of nation-state failure," *The Washington Quarterly* 25 (2002): 92

not possess. Rotberg goes on to argue that when the Colombian government can reestablish its authority in the regions it has lost, Colombia will "move away from possible failure toward the stronger side of the equation."[26] State failure, however, is hardly an "equation," and to assert with certainty which states are "failing" and which are not belies the uncertainty that shrouds our understanding of state failure, as there is much disagreement over what constitutes failure.

A clear and easily delineated example of the general disagreement over quantifying state failure, however, is the turmoil that arose over the first annual Failed State Index report in 2005 which listed Colombia among its top fifteen failing states, ranking it 14th, between North Korea and Zimbabwe. This report was published in August of 2005, and by September of the same year, a group of diplomats and academics submitted a response challenging the validity of the report's claims through an article titled "A Failed Index?" In this response, Colombian Ambassador Luis Alberto Moreno, argues that "one flagrant example of the index's flawed methodology is the fact that Colombia, a middle-income country with a long constitutional tradition and a democratically elected government enjoying popularity ratings of more than 70 percent, receives the same score as a desperately impoverished African country whose government is in exile."[27] Ambassador Moreno points out the flaw with which most find fault, and that is the overreliance on substate violence as an indicator for state failure despite successes in other spheres. This criticism speaks to the broader disagreement with using violence to define a state and thus define its failure.

[26] Ibid., 93.

[27] Luis Alberto Moreno, "A Failed Index?," *Foreign Policy* 150 (2005): 4, accessed Febrary 20, 2016, http://www.jostor.org/stable/30048498.

Moreno, in this case, suggests that perhaps higher political stability is more indicative of the stability of a country than a lesser degree of violence could be.

With this comment, however, Ambassador Moreno joins his co-contributors in criticizing also the problem that arises in ranking countries together, and expresses concern that countries' failures and successes are not adequately ranked in relation to each other. Basically, the sum of these indicators does not add up to relative degrees of failure that seem logical when comparing whole pictures. Colombia's violence was startling, but does its whole picture add up to that of Zimbabwe's, who was ranked 0.1 points below Colombia in the Failed State Index? Ambassador Moreno and the colleagues that join him articulate a central point that the sum of all these important and understandable indicators in indeces like the Failed State Index does not add up to the real risk, and that this misrepresentation becomes obvious when countries are ranked together, as sometimes countries with better scores exhibit greater volatility, or simply that states with very different problems are seemingly comparable in the rankings. There are great inconsistencies to address in the "failed state" debate.

These criticisms call into question the utility of predictive models of state failure, and in many ways, the utility of the failed state concept in general. In "The Fallacy of the 'Failed State,'" author Charles Call first echoes the common criticism of the narrowness of the definition of a failed state, and a criticism of using the same measures to compare vastly different states. He argues that "not only does the term 'failing state' reflect the schoolmarm's scorecard according to a linear index defined by a univocal Weberian endstate, but it has also grown to encompass states as diverse as Colombia, East Timor, Indonesia,

North Korea, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, and the Sudan."[28] Call remarks on the absurdity of comparing vastly different states with vastly different conflicts using the same standard. Furthermore, it is difficult to seriously consider a ranking that asserts that conflicts in vastly different states such as Zimbabwe and Colombia, as previously stated, are highly comparable.

Call, however, takes his criticism further, arguing not only against the utility of the now wildly popular predictive models, but arguing more broadly that "the 'failed state' concept is largely useless and should be abandoned except insofar as it refers to wholly collapsed states—where no authority is recognisable either internally to a country's inhabitants or externally to the international community."[29] This is a bolder, but not necessarily outrageous suggestion, considering that as things are now, there is no definitive way to identify a state that is failing, only a state that has failed. States are labeled as "failing states," and though this label is not definitive, nor agreed upon, and though the standards used to make these identifications are flawed, the label still carries important implications. Our understanding of a failing state is vague, but the consequences of assigning this label are serious and worth pause.

Rotberg's assessment of the correct way to react to state failure is a perfect example of these consequences. Rotberg argues:

> The mechanisms for amelioration are also more obvious than obscure. In order to encourage responsible leadership and good governance, financial assistance from international lending agencies and bilateral donors must be designed to reinforce positive leadership only. Outside support should be conditional on monetary and fiscal streamlining, renewed attention to good governance, reforms of land tenure systems, and strict adherence to the rule of

[28] Charles T. Call, "The Fallacy of the 'Failed State'," *Third World Quarterly* 29 (2008): 1491, accessed February 21, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455126.
[29] Charles T. Call, "The Fallacy of the Failed State," 1492.

> law. External assistance to create in-country jobs by reducing external tariff barriers (e.g., on textiles) and by supporting vital foreign direct investment is critical.[30]

The anticipation of treatment such as that described here is what is often responsible for the staunch rejection of state failure rhetoric by those to whom it would generally be applied. If a country is deemed a failed or failing state, more stable states will undertake state-building initiatives such as these in the interest of increased global stability since part of the concern over failing states is the threat of spillover conflict in neighboring stabler states. This degree of foreign intervention not only challenges perceptions of sovereignty, but these prescriptive state-building interventions do not have a spotless record of success. The aversion to the failed state label is not an aversion to harsh language, but an aversion to very real consequences.

In the context of Mexico, Abarca incorporates Charles Call's arguments and further emphasizes that determining and analyzing failed states requires more discerning standards, as the complexities and diversity of national conflicts do not fit a uniform system of identification. With Mexico, he argues that, considered with attention to the unique characteristics of its violence, it is not appropriate to declare Mexico a failed state. He argues that it is more accurate to say that Mexico is dealing not with state failure, but with "ungoverned spaces,"[31] a reference to the concentration of the violence in particular geographic spaces and its absence on a national level. Basically, state failure implies that the violence is centrally focused, while this violence is regionally dispersed. These criticisms and these suggestions speak to a broader point that perhaps state failure should be judged on

[30] Robert I. Rotberg, "The new nature of nation-state failure," 95.
[31] Andres Galeana Abarca, "Ungoverned Spaces in Mexico: Autodefensas, Failed States, and the War on Drugs in Michoacán" (MA thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014).

an individual basis and should incorporate more than a Weberian understanding of state legitimacy as dependent on a monopoly of force.

Stergios Skaperdas, professor of Economics at UC Irvine, writes about the threats to state legitimacy posed by groups that grow in a power vacuum created by weak security apparatuses. He qualifies our focus on the centrality of violence to determinations of state legitimacy, however, arguing that "Genuine propaganda or not, the outward projection of the provider-of-public-good image is often an important, if not necessary component of organizations that have matured enough to compete with the state itself."[32] Skaperdas is contributing to the argument that a laser focus on monopoly of violence as the main determinant of state legitimacy is too narrow. State success, state legitimacy depends on other factors as well—representativeness of the government, distribution of wealth, and as in this argument, on the provision of public goods.

Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, international relations scholar at Bilkent University and political economy scholar at the University of Sydney respectively, however, have a much more fundamental grievance with the failed state debate, seeing it as a tool in dividing Global North from Global South. They argue that there is a "need for a critique of more contemporary representations of post-colonial states that commonly revolve around an element of deficiency or failure in the character of 'quasi-states,' 'weak states,' 'collapsed states,' 'failed states,' or 'rogue states' in the study of the 'Third World.'"[33] Bilgin and Morton challenge our use of failed state rhetoric, arguing that it has served as a method of classifying the Global South, specifically former colonies as "failing." They point out that

[32] Stergios Skaperdas, "The political economy of organized crime," *Economics of Governance* 2 (2001): 186.

[33] Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, "Historicising representations of 'filed states': Beyond the cold-war annexation of the social sciences?" *Third World Quarterly* 23 (2002): 57.

state failure is often interpreted in relative terms—by how effectively developing states replicate Western state structures, using the Weberian conception of the state as the ideal by which Western states define themselves.

Furthermore, Bilgin and Morton argue that these failed state labels primarily serve Western policy objectives; that is, they are used to justify state building policies for friendly failing states and to justify policies of containment for enemy failing states, arguing that these enemy failing states are often characterized more in the context of their foreign policy (i.e. "rogue states"), though they denote the same basic status, that they are less than the states responsible for these classifications.

I think Bilgin and Morton contribute a very important perspective to the debate about the usefulness of failed state rhetoric, chipping away at the ever-present implication that failed state assessments are entirely objectively quantified assessments like our predictive models would imply. I particularly agree with their critique that state failure is thought of in relative terms because, though predictive models may use uniform indicators to try to move away from determining failure by comparing countries against examples of success, the reality is that failed state rhetoric is often employed in these relative terms. We can see this logic in the Latin American backlash to the high rankings of Latin American states in Fund for Peace's inaugural Failed State Index as cited earlier in this chapter. Latin American diplomats defended their countries by arguing that other countries were in more dire straits, they saw their success as relative to more embattled states. Similarly, in Western developed states, we often identify failure in countries most unlike us.

I agree that state failure is often a concept exported from the West that can serve Western political objectives. Though accusations of state failure are sweepingly applied,

Bilgin and Morton reject the notion of state collapse too completely. At the very least, in cases where there is no recognizable authority internally to citizens and externally to the international community, we can say a state has failed. I would argue not that we should never recognize failure, but rather that we accuse states of this failure too easily and that our definition of failure is too narrow when it depends primarily on a state's command of violence.

Diane Davis and Anthony Pereira contribute to Bilgin and Morton's general argument about the narrow historical context present in our understanding of state failure. Pereira argues that this conceptualization of state legitimacy as dependent on the state's ability to centralize and monopolize the threat and use of force is modeled on the trajectory of European state-building and as such, though it is a valuable foundational principle about the importance of violence, "such a model of state formation is useful but incomplete."[34] In many cases, but in Mexico, and Colombia before then in particular, the state commands a weaker monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and is less centralized with respect to its deployment of violence. Though this lack of a clear monopoly is not ideal, its absence alone is not enough to write off a state as doomed to fail. This is an important critique because focusing too intently on monopoly of violence to define state legitimacy leads us to ignore other important functions of the state, such as the provision of resources as discussed above. This assumption that lack of a monopoly of violence defines failure judges state legitimacy through a framework that may be too narrow.

Additionally, even working within this narrow framework of state failure as the result of a loss of the monopoly of force may ignore important context. A lack of a monopoly of

[34] Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 388.

violence characterizes states as inching toward failure as they lose their monopoly; however, Pereira posits that perhaps some developing states never truly attained this monopoly the way their European counterparts did. Also of importance, with the increase in armed and organized substate groups, the attainment of this monopoly is more difficult. An exclusive use of this model of state legitimacy ignores the reality of different trajectories of state building

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Continued Relevance of Debate Over State Failure

This debate is one unlikely to fade into the rearview, considering the important implications it has for those on either side of the debate. Those in powerful, stable countries from which "failed state" accusations emanate are concerned with identifying failed states in an effort to prevent those failures from impacting their own stability, particularly when the matter at hand is a multibillion dollar transnational drug trade. In the Fund for Peace's 2005 Failed State Index report, they comment that "the dangerous exports of failed states—whether international terrorists, drug barons, or weapons arsenals—are the subject of endless discussion and concern,"[35] On the side of developed and stable countries, this debate is significant because there is a desire to embark on nation-building operations to restore governing capacity and prevent the problems present in these criticized countries from spreading elsewhere.

Fund for Peace is partially motivated by this desire to maintain global stability by preventing conflict and "failure" at the state level. The logic is that if one country collapses, they destabilize a region, thus Fund for Peace seeks to stop that initial domino. Fund for Peace is a research nonprofit that specializes in providing analytical tools, such as the Failed

[35] Brad Amburn, "The Failed State Index 2005."

State Index, to policy makers, and providing workshops and other educational opportunities at the local level in an attempt to stem security problems in individual countries. They seek to *prevent* conflict and thus their objectives are often premised on the idea that failure can be predicted.

On the side of those receiving this "failed state" label, this debate is also very important. The moniker of "failed state" implies that others are entitled to "help," to reestablish control, and this is seen as a challenge to these states' sovereignty and legitimacy to an important extent. Again, through our understanding of performativity as discussed earlier, a lack of legitimacy drives other countries to intervene in the state, further delegitimizing it as a sovereign state. Outside perception of a lack of state legitimacy causes actions that delegitimize the state. The analyst thus affects her object of analysis. It is not strange, then, that many challenges to this failed state rhetoric come from within Latin America, from within Colombia and Mexico. It is my belief that these critiques, though of course founded in important and logical understandings of the theoretical debate, are at least to a certain extent also motivated by a desire to reject the "failed state" label and the practical implications that accompany it. This is a very important debate with very serious implications; therefore, it is important to understand its theoretical foundations as discussed here. In the following chapters, I will discuss the practical expressions and impacts of this debate through a Mexican case study.

II

From Colombia to Mexico: Understanding Mexican Drug Violence Through Colombian Experiences

If there is one outstanding disservice to the analyses of transnational crimes, particularly those emerging from outside Latin America, it is the insistence upon evaluating countries in isolation for the benefit of a neat case study. The very nature of the issue at hand, however, makes this approach unhelpful. Though separating a country case study from its broader transnational context may make its examination much simpler, this decision also renders it incomplete. My intent here is to incorporate Mexico's experience with organized crime and the resulting Autodefensas into its corresponding transnational context. This work concerns the development of the Autodefensas in Michoacán, Mexico and their future implications for the country; however, an analysis of Mexico's drug wars and their Autodefensas is incomplete without a consideration of Colombia's similar history. It is nearly impossible to even consider the Mexican drug trade an entirely Mexican problem, not least of all because of the obvious global nature of a multi-country illicit drug trade. El Chapo proudly explained to Rolling Stone readers, after all, that he "suppl[ies] more heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana than anybody else in the world."[36] These problems are global not only because of this current reach, but because of their historical progression to our current situation, as when this problem was "eradicated" in Colombia, it emerged in full force in Mexico. This problem, then, is not new, but rather the eruption of immense pressure in Mexico driven out of Colombia. The Mexican Autodefensas themselves, risen to combat the cartels in Mexico, draw parallels to the Autodefensas in

[36] Sean Penn, "El Chapo Speaks."

Colombia, risen in the 90s to combat the Colombian cartels and leftist guerrillas. There is an underlying, though sometimes apparent fear in Mexico that a mishandling of the current drug-related problems, the Autodefensas among these, will result in a recreation of a Colombian war zone on Mexican soil. The drug trade in Colombia and the drug trade in Mexico, however, are not separate phenomenon, but instead part of the same history. When pressures in Colombia drove the drug trade out, the trade was driven to Mexico; therefore, I will not disentangle these two case studies in order to explore them as separate occurrences, but rather understand the drug trade as a single historical problem that spans both these countries. This chapter will provide a brief history and analysis of Colombia's experience with the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) in the ways necessary for a fruitful understanding of Mexico's current dilemmas.

Colombia's Drug Trade

Colombia has a long and painful history with the drug trade. Insight Crime, dedicated to documenting the reality of organized crime in Latin America, explains concisely:

> "Colombia's drug trafficking industry has its roots in the longtime legal and illegal trading routes that crisscrossed the country. These contraband trails stretched up and down the Andes but always passed through Colombia to move to and from the Pacific or Caribbean coasts that make this country a prime depot and embarkation point for any product. Drug production began en masse in the 1960s with marijuana, but the drug trafficking industry got its real start after Chilean chemists taught Colombians how to process coca into cocaine hydrochloride (HCL) in the early 1970s. The contraband traders were soon moving both HCL and coca base from Peru to Bolivia to laboratories in Cali and Medellin where the two largest cocaine cartels in the world would emerge."[37]

[37] "Colombia," *InsSight Crime*, Accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/colombia#drug_trafficking.

These infamous Medellín and Cali cartels would terrorize Colombia for years. The social and political climate in Colombia was one of such upheaval and instability at the height of the drug wars that even the morbid portrayal of the Colombian drug war in modern popular culture fails to adequately convey the gravity of the times. Jonathan Hartlyn, in discussing the impact of drug trafficking on Colombian democracy, writes that "drug traffickers [had] killed peasants, laborers, guerrillas, newspapermen, social and political activists, police and military, criminal investigators and judges, cabinet ministers and other high government officials," and more importantly that they had done all of this with almost total impunity.[38] All of this violence was carried out to protect a multibillion-dollar narcotics trade.[39] To truly explain the boldness with which the drug kingpins ruled Colombia, it would suffice to remind everyone that Pablo Escobar, one of the richest, most ruthless, and most notorious drug lords in history, made a successful bid for a Colombian Congressional seat in 1982.[40] The instability and downright terror that was unleashed by the cartels was further compounded by the activities of left wing guerrillas that took control of swaths of territory and governed these areas with brutality, killing those who disagreed with them, profiting from the drug trade, and seeking rents, protection fees, from residents in their controlled areas.[41]

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[38] Jonathan Hartlyn, "Drug Trafficking and Democracy in Colombia in the 1980s," Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques I Socials, 1993, https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/worpap/1993/hdl_2072_1411/ICPS70.pdf.

[39] Erin Carlyle, "Billionaire Drug Lords: El Chapo Guzman, Pablo Escobar, The Ochoa Brothers," *Forbes*, March 13, 2012, accessed January 3, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2012/03/13/billionaire-druglords-el-chapo-guzman-pablo-escobar-the-ochoa-brothers/#1957fe3672fd.

[40] Stringer, Jacob. "Pablo Escobar." *Colombia Reports.* 8 Jan 2013. Web. 15 Jan 2015.

[41] "The Guerrilla Groups in Colombia," *United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe,* 2015, accessed January 13, 2016, http://www.unric.org/en/colombia/27013-the-guerrilla-groups-in-colombia.

Colombia's Leftist Guerrillas

The left wing guerrillas in Colombia are embedded in Colombian politics, as opposed to the opportunistic development of the cartels. Whereas the cartels developed with the primary objective of profiting from the drug trade, only seeking political influence later to protect their ambitions, the leftist guerrillas developed as a primarily political group. The start of Colombia's leftist guerrillas can be effectively traced back to "La Violencia," a years-long struggle between Colombia's conservative and liberal parties that broke out after the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, the leader of the Liberal Party in 1948.[42] During this time, militias began to form and in 1966, after years of evolution and growing unification of various guerrilla groups, these guerrilleros adopted the name Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), Spanish for Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.[43] The FARC were the biggest leftist guerrilla in Colombia, but they were not the only one. The ELN, Ejercito de Liberación Nacional or Army of National Liberation, was the other principal leftist guerrilla. The ELN, though similar to the FARC in most respects, differed only in that they were more ideological, made up largely of intellectuals, and in that they initially refused to take part in the drug trade out of principle.[44] The FARC and ELN were quite similar in the ways important to the history relevant here, that is in respect to their role in the violence that besieged Colombia. The guerrillas killed on ideological grounds to maintain control of the regions they claimed; however, those guerrillas also needed money to fund their ideological war and for Colombians, these two realities meant more violence.

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[42] "FARC," *InSight Crime*, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/farc-profile

[43] "FARC," *InSight Crime.*

[44] "The Guerrilla Groups in Colombia," *United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe*.

> In the mid-1970s, the guerrillas changed their bylaws and began collecting taxes from the numerous marijuana growers in the south of the country. They later expanded that mandate to include coca leaf plantations. During the same period the FARC began kidnapping en masse and extorting large and small businesses. In the early 1980s, the FARC began taxing cocaine laboratories that operated in their areas of influence.[45]

The guerrillas, then, not only created violence of their own, through kidnappings and extortions, but also profited from the violence of the cartels.

To add to the violence and volatility already rattling Colombia, the dynamic between the cartels and guerrillas proved to be yet another violent and volatile factor contributing to the already horrific status quo. The cartels and guerrillas were in turns collaborating with each other or engaged in bloody feuds with each other. Collaboration between cartel and guerrillas often came in the form of guerrillas protecting cartels' territories. Their feuds, however, could be quite startling. A good example of this is the chaos that was unleashed when a guerrilla abducted Martha Ochoa, the sister of a prominent drug trafficker. In response to this slight, traffickers formed and funded Muerte a Secuestradores (Death to Kidnappers).[46] The group's primary purpose was to return Martha Ochoa to her brothers, and they did so by unleashing a string of theatric murders meant to terrorize the guerrillas and bring a stop to the kidnappings of the powerful. This episode of violence between cartels and guerrillas is only an example of the turmoil that existed between them, but it demonstrates that the violence that rained on Colombia was not only the result of individual groups' activities, but often the result of interactions between these groups. These groups' activities often had very violent intersections. Given the many actors in Colombia's security

[45] Ibid.

[46] Fabio Castillo, *Los Jinetes de la Cocaina*, (Equipo Nizkor & Derechos Human Rights), accessed January 15, 2016, http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/libros/jinetes/.

saga, these many sources of violence, Colombians, both those inside and outside government, were desperate for a more effective way to combat the violence that had interrupted their daily lives. From this frustration with the cartels and guerrillas alike, were born the Autodefensa groups of Colombia, vigilante groups intent on battling the unspeakable violence that had become a routine part of many people's lives.

Colombia's Autodefensas

These Autodefensas, however, in Colombia's complicated history, would not become Colombian heroes. They would not be remembered as kind-hearted, selfless heroes that would save Colombia, as much as they would be remembered as yet another component of the violence Colombians endured. Their impact on Colombian history would prove more harmful than helpful.

Colombia's vigilante groups, the Autodefensas, given the country's tumultuous and complicated history, do not have a simple origin story. The Autodefensas did not rise to fight a single national threat. The security threats afflicting Colombian citizens were manifold; thus, the Autodefensas were from the start not a singular group with a singular concern, but instead were disparate bodies that were discussed as one. One of the primary motives behind the formation of Autodefensa groups and the motivation most similar to that in the Mexican case study of this thesis, was the infamous cartel violence of Colombia. This violence and unrest caused by the cartel violence and cartel operations in general spurred the formation of Los Pepes, whose name derived from "Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar," Spanish for "Persecuted by Pablo Escobar." The group was founded by three brothers, Fidel, Carlos, and Vicente Castaño, who identified themselves as three such people in a vast group of others

wronged by Pablo Escobar. Caitlin Trent writes on Colombia Reports that "in 1989, the brothers—together with former [Ejercito Popular de Liberación] guerrilla 'Don Berna'—deserted the cartel to form 'Los Pepes," a feared vigilante group whose purpose was to bring down the Medellín Cartel and kill Escobar with help from sectors of Colombia's security forces."[47] This origin story complicates our understanding of Los Pepes, as often those wronged by Pablo Escobar were wronged during their business interactions in the drug trade. In other words, Los Pepes were not innocent bystanders who stood up against the feared Medellín Cartel.

Feeling wronged by Escobar, the Castaños formed this group with the sole purpose of finding and killing Pablo Escobar and used Carlos Castaño "as their intermediary with the police, who worked closely with the paramilitary group to gun Escobar down in 1993."[48] The goal to kill Pablo Escobar in particular leads to the important point, however, that Los Pepes were not entirely separate from and against the cartels. Given their intent to kill Escobar, they were generously funded by the Cali Cartel, Pablo Escobar's primary rival in the Colombian drug trade. The story of Los Pepes is not a story of heroism, but one of corrupted men killing other corrupted men.

Colombian authorities, however, at various points, offered more than tacit consent to the actions of these groups within Colombia. The authorities were at many points collaborating with Autodefensa groups to attack common enemies. In the context of the monopoly of violence and its centrality to state legitimacy, it is counter-intuitive for the state to grant the right to violence to another group; however, presumably, the state saw a greater

[47] Caitlin Trent, "AUC," *Colombia Reports,* December 5, 2012, accessed January 14, 2016, http://colombiareports.com/auc/?nohdjmgdjecjmgdb.

[48] "AUC," *InSight Crime*, May 24, 2011, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/component/content/article?id=974:auc.

threat in the violence of the cartels and guerrillas and thus saw Autodefensas as a necessary lesser evil in reigning in the other two entirely unhinged sources of organized violence. In situations such as 1980s and 1990s Colombia, and modern day Mexico for that matter, government and police corruption is a considerable factor inhibiting the success of anti-organized crime missions; however, the success of the government in their opposition to organized crime is also inhibited by the restrictions faced by law enforcement, thus the lure of using substate armed groups that are unrestrained by professional ethics to pursue common objectives.

The Colombian government could not easily resort to excessively violent or terroristic methods to fight the cartels as the Colombian government was, even at a low point in its history, bound by certain norms and ethics. Los Pepes, however, and Autodefensas in general, are not bound by these rules. The Autodefensas could terrorize Pablo Escobar, target his family, cause limitless collateral damage in their pursuit of Escobar, and though in many ways this was their principal selling point as it made them more likely to kill Escobar, this lack of ethical inhibition was also in essence the gravest threat posed by the Autodefensas. For the Colombian government, the Autodefensas were a frightening juggernaut that, though at their start were spiraling in a favorable direction, their volatility would surely soon send them spiraling back. The Autodefensas were at first supported by the state and thus in a sense existed partly through the consent of the state, but these groups soon took on a life of their own and were not only no longer contained by the state, but in fact became a third threat for the state.

Colombia's drug war was arguably the best known wave of violence to crash through Colombia; however, the cartels were not the only groups to inspire the formation of

Autodefensas in Colombia. In both Mexico and Colombia, Autodefensas were, fundamentally, groups of citizens seriously affected by local instability who chose to form or fund armed groups to combat the violence and instability that threatened their interests and wellbeing. In the case of Mexico, these threats are exclusively the cartels. In the case of Colombia, Autodefensas also formed to combat the Leftist guerrillas after their violence and extortion became unbearable. The Leftist guerrillas became a physical and economic threat, so the Autodefensas formed to protect their threatened interests in the guerrillas' areas of influence. The Center for Justice and Accountability recounts how in response to the Leftist guerrillas, "Colombian landowners and members of the armed forces created paramilitary militias to wage a counter-insurgent 'dirty war' in the 1980s."[49] These Autodefensas set out to quell the violence unleashed as a part of the guerrillas' ideological war. Given the chaos created by the guerrillas, the Autodefensas were initially welcomed by the government and by communities as a group that could potentially curb the violence. Despite the almost equally brutal violence employed by the Autodefensa paramilitaries, when polled about which threats they saw as most pressing for Colombia's welfare, only 8% of Colombians identified the paramilitaries as the most pressing threat while 9% cited common criminals and 39% cited guerrillas.[50] This perception is incredibly important to note. It shows how, given the fear instilled by the guerrillas, many Colombians saw Autodefensas as more tolerable or as a welcome tool in countering the guerrilla threat. This perception extended to the Colombian government, as they did not just passively accept the existence of the

[49] "Colombia," *The Center for Justice and Accountability*, 2016, accessed January 14, 2016, www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=400.

[50] Angel Rabasa & Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability,* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001): 56-57.

Autodefensas, but collaborated with them as well because at least initially, the Autodefensas and the Colombian government shared a common enemy—the guerrillas.

The Autodefensas of Colombia, then, are varied as they formed in response to different pressures. There were Autodefensa groups whose purpose was to combat the cartels, others who formed to counter the Leftist guerrillas, and these Autodefensa groups were broken down further into regional subgroups. The majority of these Autodefensa groups, however, united under the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia. "The AUC—commonly referred to as the paramilitaries," explains the United Nations Regional Information Centre, "is an umbrella organization formed in April 1997 to consolidate most local and regional paramilitary groups."[51] Most Autodefensa groups consolidated under the AUC umbrella and when the Autodefensas negotiated with the government from then on, they did so as a consolidated group rather than as individual Autodefensa groups.

Any perception of the Autodefensas as simply noble heroes of Colombia would prove short-lived and ill-founded, however, as the Autodefensa groups would quickly prove that they were as involved in the illicit activities they proclaimed to challenge. The Autodefensas were very involved in the drug trade, using this lucrative option to fund their operations and to profit personally. Carlos Castaño, member of Los Pepes and head of the AUC, "stated in 2000 that '70 percent' of AUC operational funding was from drug money and described it as an undesired but necessary evil."[52] Autodefensas needed more funding than was otherwise available for a non-sanctioned armed group; thus began their foray into the drug world.

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[51] "Colombia," *United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe*.

[52] Randy Beers & Francis X. Taylor. "Narco-Terror: The Worldwide Connection Between Drugs and Terror," *U.S. Department of State Archive,* March 13, 2002, accessed January 15, 2016, http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/8743.htm.

People speculated the Autodefensas' involvement in the drug trade before this became more obvious.

Fighting a war as they were, the Autodefensas needed resources, and their arsenal of resources was an initial indication of the depth of their involvement in the drug trade. De Leon comments on this concern, arguing that the Autodefensas were superiorly armed compared to the Leftist guerrillas, indicating that they were more profoundly involved in the lucrative drug trade.[53] Some Autodefensas protected civilians from Leftist guerrillas and cartels, some simply worked for cartels protecting cartel interests (land, airstrips, cargoes, etc.), and some attempted to serve both civilians and cartels. Despite a long-lived insistence by the Autodefensas that this involvement in the drug trade was a necessary evil that they scorned but needed, an immoral means to a moral end, their public support nonetheless suffered, as "the alliance with these powerful economic interests gave paramilitary groups access to weapons, cars and communications equipment, but it also distorted their original purpose."[54] Even those Autodefensas who did not have cartel interests in mind from the beginning, were quickly corrupted, and the groups that in the beginning were portrayed as a solution to the cartel violence and guerrilla violence, quickly became a menacing third facet of the violence terrorizing Colombians. This reality could serve more broadly, however, as a reminder of the corruptibility of all, as though many groups and individuals are capable of acting ethically and resisting corruption, one must not assume that anyone is immune to these pitfalls. Herein lies a prime debate regarding an unrestricted armed group such as

[53] Katherine Aguirre Tobón, "El tráfico de armas en Colombia: una revisión desde los orígenes a los destinos," *Revista Latinoamericana de Seguridad Ciudadana* 10 (2011): 51.

[54] "AUC," *InSight Crime*.

Autodefensas, that these groups are often tolerated or supported under assumptions that their intentions and actions will always be helpful and ethical.

Tide Turns Against Autodefensas

Though initially Autodefensas enjoyed support from the authorities and from the public, their increasing involvement with the drug trade and their growing role in causing violence in Colombia would put this support in question. The Autodefensas formed to fill a desperate need for security for Colombian citizens and Colombian authorities, but their betrayal of these expectation turned the tide of support and quickly changed the direction of the debate concerning the acceptability of the Autodefensas' actions because "despite friendly relations with the Colombian authorities, the AUC's interests began to increasingly clash with Colombian business and political interests as the paramilitaries continued to wreak havoc throughout the country, forcing fierce condemnation by foreign states and eventually its terrorist status by the United States."[55] The violent tactics of the Autodefensas and the increased instability they caused put them out of favor with practically everyone involved in or following the situation in Colombia. Citizens were fed up with the violence added to their lives by the Autodefensas; the Colombian authorities were angered by the Autodefensas' collusion with the cartels and consequential anti-government activities; and the international community came to label the Autodefensas a terrorist organization. This final blow was indeed a decisive one because though Colombians' own frustration with the Autodefensas was enough to move them to work against the group, international pressure to eradicate an

[55] Caitlin Trent, "AUC."

internationally recognized terrorist threat, such as the AUC, would be another pressure moving Colombians to act.

As relations with the Autodefensas began to sour, however, the Colombian government found that the difficulty in ending the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia was a byproduct of the way the Colombian government initially handled the situation. The Colombian authorities initially supported the Autodefensas as a welcome ally against the cartels and the Leftist guerrillas, thus, the Colombian government was tasked with the challenge of dismantling a group they helped legitimize. Authorities initially saw a benefit in collaborating with the Autodoefensas; however, the Autodefensas, particularly as a unified body under the AUC, eventually spiraled out of control and became unmanageable. As Morgenstein explains, "these paramilitary groups also achieved a blurry status at the margins of the law, receiving tacit support from legal authorities. At times, authorities overtly sanctioned paramilitary activities—for example, by coordinating AUC and official police or military efforts."[56] At one point, these groups no longer served the interests of the state. Squashing a now insubordinate militarized group, however, was no simple task given this dubious legal status the Colombian government had given them. The actions of the Autodefensas were illegal, but they were tolerated and in many instances, supported by the authorities, so this dubious status complicated the government's ability to control the Autodefensas. This dubious status is perhaps the most overreaching commonality between Colombia and Mexico's Autodefensas, as, though the level of government support for Autodefensas was far greater in Colombia's case, in both cases, Autodefensas were at the very least tacitly legitimized by the state. Because of this quasi-legitimate status, removing

[56] Jonathan Morgenstein, "Consolidating Disarmament: Lessons from Colombia's Reintegration Program for Demobilized Paramilitaries," *United States Institute of Peace,* November 2008, Accessed January 16, 2016, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr217.pdf.

the Autodefensas as a security threat depended not on ordering their disbandment, but on negotiating with them.

Despite this difficulty, however, disbandment was certainly on the horizon for the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia. Disbanding the Autodefensas, however, would prove problematic given this complex relationship with the state. The Colombian government struggled to find the adequate way to deal with Autodefensas who, though they broke the law, also served the needs of the state for a time. As Michael Tatone argues, "finding the right balance of 'transitional justice' is always difficult."[57] Though the Autodefensas' legal transgressions are often obvious, the circumstances surrounding their crimes are anything but simple. Eliminating Autodefensas in cases like Colombia and Mexico is complicated because, though they must disband and though their actions are wrong to a large extent, they rose out of a security gap left by the government, thus, the government finds itself in a tricky situation in dealing with the Autodefensas. Mexico has weighed and continues to weigh a similar dilemma. The government must deal with the Autodefensa groups, but the decision to address the Autodefensas threatens the ire not only of the group itself, but also of their supporters for whom the tug and pull between the authorities and the Autodefensas has taken on a greater meaning—a statement on the incompetencies of the state and citizens' right to remedy these incompetencies. All options will be flawed, but one must consider which decision can offer the greatest long-term stability.

[57] Michal Tatone, "AUC Leaders to be Freed," *Insight Crime,* May 8, 2013, accessed 15 Jan 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/auc-leaders-could-soon-be-freed-under-terms-of-colombia-peace-agreement.

It's Complicated: Colombian Government's Relationship With Paramilitaries

In examining the turmoil in Colombia that erupted from the existence of all of these armed groups, it is far too simplistic to assume that there were clear fault lines between the groups, that there was a clear separation and all worked loyally for the others' destruction. The involvement of the Autodefensa paramilitaries and Leftist guerrillas with the drug trade has been discussed and even early on was a well-known fact, but there is one unbefitting collusion that I have yet to touch on in any meaningful detail—the state's involvement with the Autodefensa paramilitaries. When the dust began to settle on the disbanding Autodefensas in 2008, the government's involvement with these groups began to be acknowledged.

The extent of the Colombian government's involvement with the paramilitaries became clear during the "parapolitics scandal" in Colombia. Over 100 members of Congress were investigated for alleged deals and concessions they made with paramilitaries in exchange for protection against guerrillas, and these roughly hundred members were a small portion of the thousands of political officials informally accused.[58] This scandal reached very close to Colombia's president, Álvaro Uribe, as those close to him were investigated for their involvement. President Uribe's cousin and close political ally, Mario Uribe "[faced] charges of allegedly seeking the political backing of paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso in 2002 just before national elections and of negotiating with another warlord the purchase of land in areas under paramilitary control."[59] The government criticized the existence of the paramilitary Autodefensa groups, but when the government was for a time unwilling and for

[58] Stanford University, "United Self Defense Forces of Colombia." *Mapping Militant Organizations.* Accessed April 28, 2016. https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/85#cite60.

[59] Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Colombia's 'parapolitics' scandal casts shadow over president,' *The Guardian*, April 23, 2008. Accessed April 28, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/23/colombia.

a time unable to disband the Autodefensas, they began cooperating with the Autodefensas, working around them, rather than working solely to destroy them. This dynamic was a badly kept secret, but as Colombia began to settle after the height of the violence, the extent and details of the involvement became clearer. The complexity of the security crisis in Colombia is truly illuminated in situations like these.

Colombian political leaders, such as the Congressmembers investigated had concerning ties to the paramilitaries, but this involvement permeated different levels of the Colombian government, including principally the Colombian military. Colombian authorities, but also largely human rights organizations were at the forefront reporting on the involvement of the Colombian military with the paramilitaries.

Outraged cries emerged from affected Colombian towns, accusing the Colombian military of assisting paramilitaries in brutal attacks on towns seen as sympathetic to the Leftist guerrillas. The military did not take these accusations particularly seriously, and furthermore often did not even confirm the attacks on these towns, but human rights organizations took note, and despite threats to their operations, investigated the ties between the Colombian military and Autodefensa paramilitaries.

One example was the Third Brigade investigated by the Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch concluded through testimonies of victims and previous Third Brigade members that the Third Brigade and the paramilitary Colima Front worked closely enough to be virtually indistinguishable. They shared intelligence, and the Third Brigade often provided logistical support to the Colima Front. One specific deadly case of this collaboration is the Riofrío Massacre, where "On October 5, thirteen members of the Ladino family living in Riofrío, Valle del Cauca, were murdered by a combined force of the Third

Brigade soldiers and paramilitaries."[60] Later allegations from within Riofrío assert that the combined forces tortured and killed the thirteen after trying to extract information regarding the guerrillas known to frequent the area.[61] The role of the Colombian government, then, was not that of the forces of good battling the substate forces of evil embodied by the paramilitaries, Leftist guerrillas, and drug cartels. The divisions between these three four groups wielding violence to meet their ends were hazy at best.

The state's involvement with the paramilitaries complicated the government's ultimate effort to eliminate the Autodefensas as a threat to government authority. The government had never officially legitimated the Autodefensa groups, but operations such as the Ríofrio Massacre validated the Autodefensas as an armed substate group. The Autodefensas actively sought official recognition as a political group, in hopes that when peace talks seriously began, they could be at the negotiating table with the Leftist guerrillas and the government. Though the Colombian government tried to avoid this outcome, their involvement with the paramilitaries made it difficult to disband them. The Colombian authorities were finally faced with the problem of eliminating a group they helped legitimize, a group they largely helped strengthen through logistical support, through information sharing, and by helping arm them.

In examining Mexico's current struggle with the Autodefensas, it is necessary to weave Colombia through the discussion. There is a strong lure toward arguing that Mexico's current situation is simply a reenactment of Colombia's woes in the 1990s, but this is not the goal here.

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[60] Human Rights Watch, "The Ties That Bind: Colombia and Military-Paramilitary Links," *Colombia*, February 2000, Accessed April 28, 20016, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/colombia/.

[61] "Report No 62/01, Riofrío Massacre," *Iner-American Commission on Human Rights,* April 6, 2001, Accessed April 28, 2016, http://cidh.org/annualrep/2000eng/ChapterIII/Merits/Colombia11.654.htm.

Despite the similarities between Colombia and Mexico, the regions of Mexico that have been impacted by the drug trade do not contend with any notable guerrilla presence. Additionally, though in both cases, the governments tried their luck too much by collaborating with Autodefensas, there was much collusion between the two in Colombia's case. There are important differences between these two cases because Mexico and Colombia are not parallel cases, but rather distinct episodes of the same history of the drug trade. I will explore these differences more in depth later in this analysis.

III

Michoacán, Mexico as Case Study for the Rise of Autodefensas and the Implications of Their Existence

The Mexican government governs a large police force and military, seemingly capable of maintaining order, but this police force and to a large extent, the military, is riddled with corruption. The most omnipresent threats currently facing Mexico, however, are the violent, terroristic, and undeniably powerful drug cartels and the web of security failures and civic complexities these have spawned. Among these complexities are the Mexican Autodefensas who possess a surface appeal that hides the complexities and innumerable and unignorable implications they represent for Mexican society. In Mexico, there is a police force and a military tasked with controlling cartel violence, but apparently incapable of doing so. In this void, Autodefensas have risen to provide the security their communities desperately need, but in their path have left uncertainty, concern, and doubt over their role in the realm of Mexican security. Though they rose to provide a necessary public service owed to their communities but never adequately provided by the state, and though they are motivated by a justifiable rage against the drug cartels and disillusionment in state sponsored security, their actions nonetheless carry dangerous implications for their communities because they are an armed and apparently lethal group who answers to no one; because they are a self-established justice system with no checks or protocol to prevent them from harming innocents in their quest to bring the guilty to justice; because they are an unsustainable justice system; and because though their creation is understandable to anyone witnessing the State's inability to reign in the violence in Michoacán, the Autodefensas fail to understand

the hesitation with which onlookers perceive them. The Autodefensas emerged out of the chaos, but the justice system they created is not sustainable—a system in which an armed civilian serves as judge, jury, and executioner; where torture is a typical method of interrogation; and where circumstantial evidence is enough to sentence someone to death. Even if Autodefensas can bring an immediate decline in the violence, they are not instituting a system. This is simply the chaos of the Autodefensas providing a reprieve from the chaos of the cartels.

Zones of Impunity: Geographic Concentration of Cartel Violence

The drug trade in Mexico and the violence it has created is a global topic, impacting or interesting people on a global scale because of the reach of the cartel networks and because of the morbid levels the violence has reached in Mexico. Globally, the drug trade is seen as a Mexican problem. Within Mexico, the drug trade, and importantly the violence it has caused, is further narrowed to, or concentrated in specific states. Globally, the cartel violence is seemingly perceived as an issue permeating every corner of Mexico with equal intensity; however, to understand the issue of cartel violence, it is important to note, as Bonner points out, that the majority of drug related homicides have occurred in 6 of Mexico's 32 states.[62] Within some of these embattled states, the respective cartels have managed to establish zones of impunity where cartels run swaths of territory with complete impunity, where they have effectively replaced the Mexican government as the ultimate authority. In his analysis of the effectiveness of the decriminalization of small-scale drug

[62] Robert C. Bonner, "The New Cocaine Cowboys: How to Defeat Mexico's Drug Cartels," *Foreign Affairs* 89 (2010): 41, accessed May 4, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25680978.

possession as a way to counter the innumerable problems created by the cartels, attorney Justin Shapiro illustrates the current situation in Mexico, explaining:

> With the use of heavy-duty military equipment, drug cartels are setting up 'states within the state' and enforcing their own sets of laws. These areas, isolated by roadblocks are protected by military-like platoons utilizing state-of-the-art night vision goggles, electronic intercept collection, encrypted communications and information systems, sea-going midget submarines, helicopters, automatic weaponry, mines, booby traps, fifty-caliber sniper rifles, military-quality hand grenades, and grenade machine guns.[63]

Shapiro asserts that in many cases, cartels have created spaces within which they are the authorities; however, he also gives a necessarily rambling explanation of why these cartels are so formidable, as, though they are substate security threats, they are as well armed as the state and as capable of carrying out their objectives.

The power of the cartels and the violence they threaten and carry out have created spaces where the rule of law is effectively nonexistant, and these lawless spaces have, in some instances, created groups intent on combating the violence in light of government failure to do so. Although every state is different and contends with different circumstances, choosing a representative case study becomes an easier task as one notes that the violence is concentrated in particular states that possess strategic importance to cartels, and when the finer point of focus is the multiplicity of sources of authority as it is in this work, choosing an adequate, representative case study becomes easier yet, as Michoacán is home to government security forces, cartels, and Autodefensas.

[63] Justin Shapiro, "What Are They Smoking? Mexico's Decriminalization of Small-Scale Drug Possession in the Wake of a Law Enforcement Failure," *University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 42 (2010): 125, accessed May 3, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41307711.

Why Michoacán?

The state of Michoacán was not chosen arbitrarily by cartels, but rather because of its strategic characteristics. Within Michoacán, the cartel presence is not random, but strategic—based on the characteristics and circumstances in Michoacán which allow drug production and trade to thrive and make the territory worth fighting for to the cartels. Illicit organizations such as the Mexican drug cartels need host communities within which to thrive, communities with the relevant conditions—ranging from geography and climate to social indicators—that will allow the group in question to prosper. In Michoacán, there are many such factors that draw cartels. The Sierra Madre del Sur mountain region and the avocado regions of the state are used to grow marijuana and poppy; they are home to the cartels' meth labs; and these regions are also the seat of the cartels themselves. The coastal region is an entry point for meth precursors, and the cities and the state at large are used for extortion revenues.[64]

Although Michoacán is geographically convenient and has a climate that is friendly to drug cultivation, Michoacán's social indicators are also worth noting. According to Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), in 2014, 59% of Michoacanos were living in poverty, with 14% lacked the financial resources to satisfy even their basic nutritional needs.[65] Relatedly, Michoacán is also one of the states from which most Mexican immigrants in the United States originate, in 2013,

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[64] Veronica Macias, "Narcotráfico, Arraigado En La Tierra y La Sociedad de Michoacán," *El Economista*, March 2, 2014, accessed April 23, 2016, http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2014/03/02narcotrafico-arraigado-tierra-sociedad-michoacan.

[65] "Pobreza 2014: Michoacán," *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social*, acessed April 23, 2014, http://www.coneval.org.mx/coordinacion/entidades/Documents/PPT%20Pobreza14/Michoac%C3%A1n%20Pobreza%202014.pdf.

ranking second only behind Guanajuato.[66] These conditions, the physical characteristics of the state which draw in cartels, and the social conditions of the population that create circumstances that are friendly to the cartels' growth contribute to the concentration of the drug trade in the region. People in Michoacán are often in situations abject enough to push them to see cartel presence as a source of much needed income at the very least. These low socioeconomic levels also hint at the lack of state concern for this region.

Additionally, once a cartel presence is established and policing becomes more difficult, these circumstances, this lawlessness, become another reason for the viability of the territory as a base for cartel activity. Michoacán is geographically and socioeconomically strategic, it contends with a strong cartel presence, and it contends with extreme violence at the hands of these cartels. Consequently, Michoacán is also home, in many ways, to a brutalized population who is weary of a police force and military who have been largely ineffective, and thus the state is also home to the first Autodefensas, groups of civilians who have taken up arms to defend their communities against these cartels.

Even after armed conflicts between the Kinghts Templar Cartel and the Autodfensas, there continues to be a high production of crystal meth in Michoacán, one of Michoacán's main illicit exports, with meth labs scattered throughout the state.[67] Ioan Grillo explains in *Insight Crime*, a website dedicated to documenting the realities of organized crime in Latin America, that meth production in Michoacán has not been derailed by the ongoing pressure on the cartels from Autodefensas and government security forces, citing the discovery of a

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[66] "Los 5 estados mexicanos con mayor emigración a EU," *CNN México*, June 29, 2013, accessed April 23, 2016, http://www.adnpolitico.com/gobierno/2013/04/02/algunos-estados-llevan-mano-en-acuerdo-migratorio-temporal.

[67] Carlos Arrieta, "Hallan tres laboratorios de droga sintética en Michoacán," *El Universal*, January 3, 2016, accessed April 23, 2016, http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2016/03/1/hallan-tres-laboratorios-de-droga-sintetica-en-michoacan.

meth lab among a lime orchard in Michoacán, and asserting that "the bust was not an isolated incident, but one of a series of labs found in Michoacán in the last month. Another three labs have been discovered around state capital Morelia, including one near the city's fruit and vegetable market, with more than 100 plastic barrels alongside meth precursors."[68] These labs have been found in territories from which the Knights Templar had been driven out by Autodefensas; thus, though Michoacán is constantly embroiled in a tug and pull between the cartels and the armed community groups who enjoy temperate successes form time to time, the state is nonetheless still a principal source of Mexican drug production. Contrary to the assurances of the Secretary of Public Security in Michoacán that organized crime has been driven out, where the Knights Templar is no longer present, other cartels have stepped in, principally the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (Jalisco Cartel New Generation) and La Nueva Familia (The New Family) to profit from the region's drug production.[69] When one organization is dismantled, others rise to fill the power vacuum. These new organizations are typically a new grouping of old players, and an ongoing concern is that former Autodefensas are joining the ranks of these new cartels.

Michoacán Police Presence

There is a police presence in Michoacán, but as evidenced by the gruesome cartel presence in the state, they have been relatively incapable of reigning in the cartels in the region. This ineffectiveness has created a desperation in the communities ravaged by this

[68] Ioan Grillo, "After Vigilante War, Drug Trafficking Returns to Michoacan, Mexico," *InSight Crime*, October 13, 2014, accessed April 11, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/vigilante-war-drug-trafficking-michoacan-mexico

[69] Juan Carlos Peña Romero, "Aparecen mantas de nuevo grupo criminal en Michoacán," *El Universal*, February 6, 2016, accessed April 23, 2016, http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2016/02/6/aparecen-mantas-de-nuevo-grupo-criminal-en-michoacan

cartel violence—a desperation that is giving rise to armed civilians who intend to fill this security vacuum.

The police force's inability to reign in cartel operations and bring a stop to cartel related violence is due both to the inefficiency of the police force and the power of the cartels, though these two are increasingly intertwined. The Mexican police force is incredibly corrupt; however, although there are fundamental flaws in the Mexican police force that create a force prone to corruption, reason for this corruption is also the cartels' immense power in Mexico and the cartels' access to often superior resources that make them apt to propagate this corruption.

One of the most basic reasons for these high levels of corruption among Mexican police, applicable of course to the force in Michoacán, is the low police salaries that not only produce lower commitment to their duties among police officers, but lead them to supplement their low salaries with cartel payments in exchange for impunity for these cartels. Causa en Común, a Mexican NGO, released a report questioning whether Mexicans have the police force they deserve, concluding that the police force has proven ineffective in dealing with Mexico's security concerns, and citing in particular the low salaries of Mexican police. The lowest paid officers in México earn 4,374 pesos per month, which is about 300 dollars per month,[70] and this low salary is meant to compensate officers for often 24-hour shifts in which they risk their lives confronting deadly cartels. Although one expects law enforcement officers to carry out their duties out of a commitment to their communities, one must also understand their motivation to cooperate with cartels in exchange for higher incomes. We

[70] Gerardo Soriano-Palma, "Factores Políticos Limitan el Desarrollo Policial en México: Causa en Común," *Causa en Común*, accessed April 23, 2016, http://123probando.com.mx/causaencomun/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Radiografia-policial-en-MX_-27072015.pdf.

must rationally acknowledge that these officers are not simply selfless heroes, but individuals responsible for their and their families' economic survival through a job that does not allow them the necessary resources.

Ioan Grillo states that, "members of all ranks are paid about 9,000 pesos ($675) per month, although some complain they have yet to receive their salaries."[71] This salary is already an increase from what has characterized Mexican police through the development of the Mexican drug wars, and does not reflect as clearly those who are paid substantially less as reported by Causa en Común. Police salaries are often too low to allow officers to support their families, and too low considering the immense risk run by police officers battling cartel operations. These officers are expected to serve as the first line of defense against spiteful and horrifically violent cartels in exchange for a salary that often does not even cover their basic needs. The risks expected of them are not reflected in their salaries.

The lure of higher payments from cartels in light of low police salaries is indeed a principal source of corruption. Peter Andreas, in writing on the political economy of narco-corruption reasons that "drug smugglers must purchase an essential service monopolized by government officials: the non-enforcement of the law."[72] Andreas goes further, citing a study by the National Autonomous University of Mexico which "found that cocaine traffickers spend as much as $500 million a year on bribery, which is more than double the annual budget of the Mexican attorney general's office."[73] This amount is astonishing even without accounting for the certain rise in the amount paid in bribes since 1998.

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[71] Ioan Grillo, "After Vigilante War, Drug Trafficking Returns…"

[72] Peter Andreas, "The Political Economy of Narco-Corruption in Mexico," *Current History*, April 1998.

[73] Ibid.

Although the low salaries and high bribes are staggering, and are a principal cause and source of police corruption, often times, corruption also stems from fear, not greed. The choice when dealing with bribes is often not to accept the bribe or not accept the bribe, but rather to accept the bribe or be murdered by the cartels. As Bonner points out, "Those who could not be bribed were intimidated; the cartels threatened to kill them and their families, and often they did. The phrase in Spanish is *plata o plomo?*—'money or lead?'"[74] There is immense pressure on police officers from cartels who threaten violence and have repeatedly proven their capacity to carry out the violence they threaten. Police know not to feel safe just because of their association with the government, as cartel influence within government and within police forces have made it nearly impossible for the government which these officers serve to guarantee anyone's security. Shapiro points out the Mexican government's inability to guarantee the security of informants, explaining that "informants have even been murdered inside guarded federal 'safe houses' which function solely to protect such witnesses. Such events stem from institutional corruption and from information leaks, and certainly act to deter other potential informants from coming forward with information.[75] Police, then, not only have to resist bribes well beyond their salaries, but must endure threats of violence from groups that are very capable of carrying out their threats, while working for a government who has proven incapable of protecting them, considering, as Shapiro shows here, that even those considered to be under the highest levels of security are easy targets. Police must resist bribes while they are underpaid and ignore threats while their government is incapable of protecting from these threats.

[74] Robert C. Bonner, "Cocaine Cowboys," 42

[75] Justin Shapiro, "What Are They Smoking?," 125

While there are very obvious reasons for higher levels of corruption, such as the cartels' superior funds in paying off police, the cartels' already existing influence, and their willingness to use gruesome levels of violence to achieve their ends, there are also structural problems within Mexican police that create circumstances among which cartels can thrive, either by creating conditions for corruption, or simply by establishing an inefficient strategy for the handling of cartel activities. The Mexican police is notoriously unorganized, as "the 1,661 police departments in Mexico commonly keep information they may have acquired to themselves and fail to inform others of their plans."[76] The confusion created by this disorganization has obviously been insurmountable given the police's resulting inefficacy in dealing with the drug cartels, creating confusion, poor dissemination of necessary information, and an overlapping of responsibilities. This inefficiency further complicates the task of controlling drug related security threats to communities, as police forces already hobbled by corruption are even less capable of effectively tackling these issues because of internal structural inefficiencies. Mexico counts on 370 police officers for every 100,000 citizens, compared to 225 officers per 100,000 citizens in the U.S.[77], yet despite their manpower, their actions are effectively thwarted by their inefficient use of these numbers.

Local police forces have typically been known to be inefficient; therefore, in attempting to remedy the cartel violence in Mexico, different administrations have sought to replace local police with other bodies. Confronted with an entirely out of control network of cartels and ineffective local police forces, former President Felipe Calderón sought to replace local police forces with the Mexican military in the most afflicted areas. As soon as he took office, then-President Felipe Calderón "sent 4,000 troops to patrol the hills of his home state

[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

[Michoacan]," and in the following years, cartel violence soared.[78] During Calderón's six year term, police in the most violent areas were replaced with the military because of the military's superior training, higher salaries, and because with the military, there was a higher capacity to coordinate and have control over anti-cartel operations as opposed to with the many scattered and uncoordinated local police forces.

Though using the military had its benefits, there were also drawbacks: despite appearances, the military was not immune to corruption. The military was also more aggressive, and, though this was much of the reason for deploying them to battle the cartels, it presented drawbacks in that the military has been accused of human rights violations for their actions while pursuing the cartels.

The main criticism of Calderón's use of the military for this purpose, however, as Flannery sums up, was "that [Calderón] embraced a macro military solution and allowed troop movements to take precedence over effective local policing."[79] The strategy did little to aid in the police force's long-term stability, and instead supplanted them with the military. The military, though more aggressive, was not suited to deal with local policing long-term. Many were particularly critical of the intention to use the military in local roles, arguing that the military, though perhaps useful as a last resort, should not be routinely used for internal security and in law enforcement roles.[80] This criticism brings to light an important consideration that increased militarization in the fight against rampant violence is simply

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[78] Nathaniel Parrish Flannery, "Calderón's War," *Columbia SIPA Journal of International Affairs*, April 16, 2013, ccessed April 23, 2016, http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/calderons-war/.
[79] Ibid.

[80] George Withers, Lucila Santos, and Adam Isacson, "Preach What You Practice: The Separation of Military and Police Roles in the Americas," *Washington Office on Latin America,* November 2010, accessed November 3, 2016, http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Regional%20Security/2010/preachwhatyoupractice.pdf

another short-term patchwork solution. It may immediately provide forces to combat violence, but it is not a solution, as it does not address one of the underlying issues: local police ineffectiveness. Here, increased militarization can represent a short-term solution, whereas police reforms would represent a long-term solution that addresses the underlying problem of police ineffectiveness.

Current President Enrique Peña Nieto has also sought to take the responsibility for fighting the cartels from local police and concentrate this responsibility in a higher, more centralized force. Aaron Daugherty of *Insight Crime*, writes about the federal officers being sent to Michoacán under President Peña Nieto's security strategy that "the federal agents are being deployed alongside an expected ramp up in Peña Nieto's 'Mando Unico," or Single Command initiative. The program aims to replace local police agencies thought to be infiltrated by organized crime with a single police force commanded at the state level".[81] In addition to addressing the corruption inhibiting the police's capacity to control cartel-related violence, both President Calderón's and President Peña Nieto's strategies have sought to reorganize the structure of police groups in México, to centralize their operations further either at the state level as with Peña Nieto or at the federal level with Calderón, and though neither strategy has been completely ineffective, their successes have not been enough to bring the security desired by the communities most affected by the ongoing cartel violence. Every new effort brings the country a step forward, but none has brought enough safety to the country to inspire trust in the government for the people most affected by the violence.

[81] Arron Daugherty, "Mexico Recycles Security Strategy in Embattled Michoacán," *InSight Crime*, October 8, 2015, accessed April 23, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/component/content/article?id=7139:recycling-security-strategies-in-mexico

Michoacán Autodefensas

Michoacán is one of the states most ravaged by cartel violence under the oppressive presence of the Knights Templar cartel, and thus is also a state many look to in order to judge the effectiveness of security strategies. This is also a state in which people have been most disillusioned by their government's inability to protect them from the cartel violence, where people have been unimpressed by the steps taken by different administrations to curb the high levels of violence, and consequently, Michoacán is also the state within which groups of Autodefensas began to organize to address the high levels of violence themselves. Autodefensa groups are groups of civilians who have taken up arms to defend their hometowns from the cartel violence. Although there are notable leaders in the Autodefensa movement, such as José Manuel Mireles, the founding Autodefensas' original intent was that these Autodefensa groups would remain local. Their founding principle, after all, was that local fighters with vested interests in these communities would protect their homes where the state had failed to do so. For example, leaders will travel to neighboring towns to encourage civilians to take up arms, but once there is an Autodefensa group established in that town, the leaders will step back.

There have been some successes for which the Autodefensas deserve credit, as their primary objective when the first groups were formed in Michoacán was to do away with the Knights Templar Cartel which was responsible for much of the violence in Michoacán. They have enjoyed successes in this pursuit, as the Knights Templar has been pushed out of Michoacán partly due to the efforts of the Autodefensas; however, there are also many more complex implications to consider in regards to the justifiability of a citizen vigilante group.

The Autodefensas, as with any group of people expected to act together, particularly considering the situation for which the Autodfensas were founded, is bound to deal with a certain measure of instability; however, the Autodefensas exist under immense and varied pressures, making them more than just somewhat unstable, making them volatile. Autodefensa groups vary from place to place, as do their relationships with the police. In Michoacán, Autodefensas initially rejected the local police under the argument that these were corrupt and ineffective, choosing to not only expel the Knights Templar, but also expel police who would attempt to disarm the Autodefensas; thus, due partly to this rejection, the Mexican authorities, and of course the Knights Templar, vehemently pushed the dissolution of the Autodefensas. Though there are still outstanding Autodefensas, the authorities succeeded in breaking them up by incorporating some into a government police force, the Rural Forces.

Additionally, though there are many citizens who support the existence of these Autodefensas in their communities, there are also many who disagree with their intention to replace government security or who accuse Autodefensas of looting their homes and thus simply representing another security concern. These external pressures have made the Autodefensas volatile as there are many disagreements in the government about how to address the Autodefensas and many disagreements within the organizations about how to respond to these threats to their organizations.

Though the narrative promoted by onlookers concerning the Autodefensas has often been a romantic one of kind-hearted heroes saving their communities from evil, we must not overlook the complexities of the situation in an effort to fit these current circumstances into this desired narrative. Autodefensas have been fuelled by a very legitimate frustration and

they have had some immediate successes; however, if we have learned anything from the catastrophe of the drug trade which at this point dates back decades, it is that we need to look beyond the immediate benefits and instead consider long term consequences as well.

Consequenes of Autodefensa Presence

Autodefensas initially rose because of a weakened state, but their presence further weakens the state by acting as another antagonist to state forces and preventing the government from overseeing policing duties and having a presence in areas in which Autodefensas have established themselves. If a government's legitimacy is determined in large part not just by their ability to establish law and order, but also largely by their ability to enforce this, then the Autodefensas' existence instead of police in certain areas and the government's inability to effectively disband these groups is a hugely delegitimizing move. This, in many ways perpetuates police ineffectiveness—ironically the Autodefensas' foundational motivation. The presence of the cartels, and the power these exerted through their use of violence already made relevant the issue of state legitimacy, as the violence put in question the state's monopoly of violence. The Autodefensas, however, make this discussion even more relevant as they represent a third group vying for legitimacy and thus heightening the uncertainty cast on the stability of the Mexican state.

As this threat of the authority exerted by the Autodefensas through their use of violence, another consequence emerges: through the government's at least tacit consent of the Autodefensas' presence, these groups are emboldened and increasingly legitimized. Autodefensa interests will not always coincide with state interests, and upon this inevitable disagreement, the Mexican government will be forced to resolve the conflict by countering a

group they helped legitimize. Reporter Laura Castellanos sets up this discrepancy perfectly in describing how 400 Autodefensas were incarcerated as of February 24, 2013, "for possession of firearms reserved for the federal forces, despite the fact that the government illegally legitimized their weapons, registered their heavy weaponry, and participated in joint operations with them."[82] Unsure of how to handle Autodefensas initially, the government, sought to contain rather than eliminate Autodefensa groups by registering their weapons, and at times even collaborating with these vigilante groups in police operations. Government officials, however, could not legitimize the Autodefensas' weapons, as the prohibition of these weapons except for military use is included in Mexico's constitution, and thus this legitimization would have required approval by Mexico's legislative branch. When the government decided, however, that the threat of the Autodefensas was greater than the benefits they offered, government forces were faced with eliminating groups they had previously legitimized through their tacit consent and at times outright collaboration. These Autodefensas' legal representation directly relies on this inconsistency, arguing that these civilians were led to believe they were acting within the law. The Mexican authorities' inconsistent handling of the Autodefensas has been a delegitimizing move for the state.

Finally, Autodefensas are an armed and very violent group. Their motivation to use violence has been in pursuit of a more respectable end than that of the cartels; however, when dealing with a lethal and relatively uncontrolled group, one must be particularly wary of the possibility of the corruption of these groups. While some Autodefensas have joined cartel operations, other groups have splintered off to form separate cartels to fill the power vacuum left by the Knights' Templar Cartel that has been driven out. There is a new cartel in

[82] Laura Castellanos, "400 autodefensas presos, por portación de armas que fueron registradas por el gobierno." *Aristegui Noticias*, February 24, 2013, ccessed April 23, 2016, http://aristeguinoticias.com/2402/mexico/400-autodefensas-presos-ilegalmente-por-portacion-de-armas/.

Michoacán filling this void, La Tercera Hermandad, or The Third Brotherhood. La Tercera Hermandad (H3), is a cartel made up of former members of the Knights Templar Cartel, former members of the Jalisco Next Generation Cartel, and former Autodefensas.[83] The Autodefensas were initially tolerated by the state given that their initial goals coincided with state interests; however, after months of pressure from all sides on these cartels, their actions no longer suit state interests, or the interests of the communities they initially formed to protect. Given this change in the Autodefensas, it is necessary to consider whether this is simply the product of a particular set of circumstances or whether it is an eventuality of groups like this, that is, is it simply the circumstances in Mexico that corrupted the Autodefensas or is this corruption more attributable to the characteristics of this type of violent and relatively unrestrained group?

[83] Andrés Becerril, "Autodefensas dan origen a otro cartel; nace en Michoacán La Tercera Hermandad o H3," *Excelsior*, June 5, 2014, accessed April 29, 2016, http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2014/05/06/957619.

IV

Mexico and Colombia in a Global and Comparative Perspective

It is very rare to see a discussion or analysis of Mexico's drug violence that does not include a comparison to Colombia. This joining of the Mexican experience to the Colombian experience in discussions of the current manifestation of the drug war is useful given the common sense benefits of being aware of past examples of a same problem in an effort to avoid the repetition of mistakes. The Mexican drug war, however, is not a separate problem that is coincidentally similar to Colombia's drug war. The Mexican drug war and Colombian drug war are part of a single history, and it is in this way that I include Colombia in this discussion, as historical context.

Drug policy researchers Coletta Youngers and Eileen Rosin explain this relationship well, calling on the concept of the "balloon effect." They explain, "In the past, when coca cultivation has declined in one geographic area, it has increased in another in what is known as the balloon 'effect.'"[84] When pressure is placed in one area, the problem is simply displaced, expanding in another area. Here, Youngers and Rosin refer specifically to coca cultivation, but the same can be said for the drug trade in general. When authorities put pressure on cultivation in one place, cultivation spikes elsewhere; when authorities put pressure on smuggling routes, routes are forged elsewhere; when one cartel is pulled apart, another gains power. The same is true for the drug trade at a higher scale. As the drug trade was gradually stomped out in Colombia through the efforts of the Colombian government

[84] Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 113.

and with United States assistance through Plan Colombia, the trade was not eliminated, but rather pushed into Mexico. Here too, we see the balloon effect where concerted pressure in Colombia did not destroy the drug trade, but simply forced the drug trade to expand into Mexico.

Acknowledging that the Mexican drug trade and the Colombian drug trade are part of a single, continuous history, then, it is useful to place Mexico in its transnational context. It is important, however, to understand, that these two cases represent two different phases of the drug trade in two different countries; thus, we should not quickly assume that these two different cases must have identical outcomes. There are important fundamental similarities between Colombia and Mexico, but there are also important differences.

Similarities Between Mexico and Colombia

Though it is incredibly important to keep a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Colombia and Mexico, there are of course also important similarities we must acknowledge, such as the circumstances that have tended to lead to the spikes in violence in both Colombia and Mexico. Richard Snyder and Angélica Durán Martínez, both political scientists at Brown University, elaborate on these circumstances, citing specifically the effects of state sponsored protection rackets, and more importantly the eventual breakdown of these same arrangements. In both Mexico and Colombia, authorities kept relative peace by tolerating illegality and corruption, or put more specifically by maintaining protection rackets.

In Colombia, Snyder and Durán point out the difference between Medellín and Cali. In Medellín, there was greater confrontation between the authorities and the Medellín Cartel,

whereas in Cali, there was a more stable system of protection rackets between authorities and the Cali Cartel—"traffickers obtained enforcement prerogatives (lighter sentences) and legislative advantages in exchange for providing regular payments to politicians and police officers and helping them prosecute their Medellín rivals."[85] Consequently, in Cali, there was relative stability while in Medellín, Colombians experienced a brutal wave of violence at the hands of the Medellín Cartel.

This same dynamic is evident in Mexico in the difference between the violence present during Felipe Calderón's administration and the levels of violence preceding him. Mexico underwent over 70 years of single party rule under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) before President Vicente Fox, National Action Party (PAN) candidate ended this continuous succession of hand-picked PRI presidents. The PRI had controlled almost everything in Mexico, including the drug trade. During PRI rule, the drug cartels operated under the eyes of the government. Cartel leaders paid bribes to government officials and in exchange these officials ignored the cartels' actions. It was obviously an extremely corrupt system, but one that provided a measure of stability and comparably acceptable levels of violence. The Mexican government tolerated the cartels, "But Mexican drug gangs under the PRI had to follow strict rules. They were supposed to act discreetly, spurn kidnappings, avoid killing civilians, and not encroach on another cartel's turf."[86] In Mexico too there was an elaborate system of state sponsored protection rackets that maintained relative stability for a time. George Grayson, a leading scholar on Mexican politics, further points out that "if in fact the cartels broke the rules of the game, the PRI had the capacity to come down on them

[85] Richard Snyder & Angélica Durán Martínez, "Drugs, Violence, and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets in Mexico and Colombia," *Colombia Internacional 70,* (2009): 83.

[86] Jason Beaubien, "As The Drug War Rages On, Will Mexico Surrender?" *National Public Radio,* August 6, 2010, accessed May 19, 2016. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129009629.

like a ton of bricks."[87] This era in Mexico's history of violence can be compared to Mexico during and after Calderon's Administration when these protection rackets began to break down. Calderón declare a war on drugs, deploying the military to local communities to address drug violence and began arresting prominent cartel leaders. When Calderón decided to abandon these protection rackets and crime tolerance as de facto policy, Mexico underwent a spike in drug related violence.

Where cartels can effectively buy the non-enforcement of the law, violence is scarcer, yet despite this absence of extreme violence, the state still faces a crisis of legitimacy as the state's actions are directed by a second entity, even if not through violent coercion, and thus this puts in doubt the state's authority. This crisis of legitimacy, however, is intensified at the points where these state sponsored protection rackets, this tolerance of illegality, break down. At these points, violence erupts and the state's inability to control the violence and its multiple sources shows clearly a division of authority.

Differences Between Mexico and Colombia

There are of course differences between Mexico and Colombia in regards to these states' reactions to the drug trade. Frequently overlooked, each country faced different security challenges. We often assume that because in both cases the violence was structured around a multibillion-dollar narcotics trade, both cases must be identical, but this is not the case. I will outline some of these differences here.

[87] Ibid.

Different Aspirations for Government Influence and Proclivities for Violence

An important consideration in analyzing the threat that Pablo Escobar posed to the Colombian state was his boldness in challenging the state—a boldness that led him to try to integrate himself into the state rather than simply influence it. Because Escobar's wealth and power was the product of an illegal trade, the state represented an obstacle to be overcome. Even then, however, this could mean operating alongside the government through protection rackets, bribing and working discreetly. The Medellín Cartel under Pablo Escobar chose a different route. Escobar was not content to work quietly. He tried to assert authority over the state rather than bribe for tolerance of his operations. Escobar sought to weave himself into the government, to become a legitimated part of the decision-making apparatus rather than influence it indirectly.

The illegality of the drug trade in Colombia was obviously an obstacle, if perhaps a relatively surmountable one, but extradition to the United States represented a much bigger concern for traffickers; therefore, Pablo Escobar forewent no effort to try to bend the law to his will to overcome internal legal barriers and prevent extradition to the United States. Whereas in Colombia, Pablo Escobar could build his own luxury prison and then escape it when he felt it was necessary, if he were extradited to the United States, he would be tried for trafficking into the country, and would live out the rest of his life in an American jail. These concerns, internal legal restrictions and the threat of extradition, were challenges that the cartels needed to resolve with the government, and the Medellín Cartel exhibited boldness and brutality in their quest to do so.

Where the Cali Cartel sought to buy compliance from the state, the Medellín traffickers responded to the threat of extradition "by building strong links with the political

establishment. Pablo Escobar built a support base in Antioquia to be elected to Congress and Carlos Lehder founded a nationalistic political movement with Nazi overtones."[88] The Medellín traffickers were clearly not content to influence the state; they sought to become a part of the state. Carlos Lehder, another drug lord of the Medellín Cartel, did this by defending his actions with his political views while Pablo Escobar bypassed any impediment that his involvement in the drug trade should have represented and went on to become a congressmember. Escobar did not seek to influence policy makers; he sought to become a policy maker. Of course Escobar's past inevitably caught up with him and he was forced out of Congress. Escobar's ascension to Congress, however, made one thing clear, that in Colombia, the challenge to the state's authority was not veiled or in any way simply implied; it was very direct. When Pablo Escobar's aspirations for the legitimization of his power were dashed, however, he asserted himself in a way that was more jarring than the idea of a drug lord congressmember—he began to attack Colombia.

In Colombia, Pablo's Medellín Cartel unleashed violent attacks that were very centrally targeted. Again, where some traffickers would deal with the illegality of the drug trade in discreet ways and be content to work in the shadows, Escobar and the Medellín Cartel used their capacity for violence to challenge the state head on. Benjamin Lessing, political scientist at the University of Chicago, recounts this tendency in his analysis of armed conflict between cartels and the state:

> Before his death at the hands of state forces in 1993, Escobar assassinated leading presidential candidate Carlos Galán, as well as a standing state governor, an attorney general, some 30 judges, over 400 policemen, and the director of a major national newspaper; he kidnapped and held hostage members of the country's political elite for nearly six months; and he bombed hundreds of civilian and state targets, including the headquarters of the

[88] Dina Siegel and Henk van de Bunt, *Traditional Organized Crime in the Modern World*, (New York: Springer, 2012), 137.

> Colombian intelligence agency DAS, an airplane meant to carry Galán's successor César Gaviria, and the offices of that same newspaper.[89]

Whereas the Colombian government for a time found their capacity for violence insufficient to quell the cartels, the Medellín Cartel used their capacity for violence to brutally coerce tolerance of their actions from the Colombian government and people, and eliminate resistance where coercion did not work. Escobar's violence was not meant to defend regional stongholds or protect local interests of the trade, but was instead ambitiously deployed to demobilize the central government.

This is an important contrast with the Mexican cartels. Mexico definitely has not had a shortage of violence resulting from the drug trade. According to the World Bank, Latin America accounts for 30% of homicides in the world despite the fact that it is home to only 9% of the global population, and of the 50 cities in the world with the highest homicide rates, 42 are in Latin America.[90] In 2015, 10 of the 50 cities with the highest homicide rates were in Mexico.[91] The important difference, however, is that while they have operated violently in their areas of influence, Mexico's major cartels have typically avoided direct confrontations with the state, and unlike Escobar's Medellín Cartel, Mexican cartels have sought to operate by bribing officials and working alongside corrupted officials rather than integrating themselves into official Mexican politics.

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[89] Benjamin Lessing, *The Logic of Violence in Criminal War: Cartel-State Conflict in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2012), 21.

[90] "Latin America accounts for more than 30% of the world's homicides," *World Bank*, March 5, 2014, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/02/11/en-america-latina-sufre-mas-del-30-de-los-homicidios-mundiales.

[91] Amanda Macias and Pamela Engel, "The 50 Most Violent Cities in the World," *Business Insider*, January 23, 2015, accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.businessinsider.com/the-50-most-violent-cities-in-the-world-2015-1.

The chronology of the Latin American drug trade is at least partially responsible for this change. The Mexican cartels grew out of the ashes of Colombia's drug war; therefore, Mexican cartels came to dominance after Pablo Escobar's death and the relative decline of Colombia's major cartels. Mexican cartels, then, learned from the mistakes of their predecessors. We cannot expect the Mexican and Colombian cartels to operate identically when one witnessed the rise and fall of the other.

Pablo Escobar's megalomania was astounding, even for a billionaire fugitive cocaine kingpin, and it was dangerous—this was not lost on Mexican traffickers. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs recognizes this evolution, commenting that "modern-day cartels have learned much from the days of Escobar, and have reorganized themselves very differently since then."[92] They refer specifically here to the lower profiles kept by modern-day Mexican cartels, less centrally targeted violence and less of a public presence for kingpins.

Malcolm Beith looks into Mexican cartel leaders' behavior more in depth, also arguing that though Mexico has no shortage of drug related violence, an all important detail is that these drug lords avoided provoking the state. Beith points out the Arellano Felix brothers, Tijuana drug lords who he describes as "bloodthirsty," recounting that they had a penchant for random violence, but even then they avoided provoking the state, choosing instead to coexist with a corrupted system.[93] Similarly, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, known as the "Lord of the Skies" for flying drugs into the

[92] "Mexico's Drug War: Not Another Colombia," *Council on Hemispheric Affairs,* January 17, 2012, Accessed on June 2, 2016. http://www.coha.org/mexicos-drug-war-not-another-colombia/#_edn10.

[93] Malcolm Beith, "Colombia Is No Lesson For Mexico (Part 1)," *InSight Crime,* November 28, 2011, Accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/colombia-is-no-lesson-for-mexico-part-i.

United States on his large fleet of jets, "rarely challenged the authorities directly, preferring instead to co-exist with a corrupt political system."[94] El Chapo Guzmán, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel fared so well for so many years that popular belief was that he was working alongside the government. Though cartels do pose a threat for the Mexican government as well, the threat they pose is different than that which was present in Colombia. Whereas in Colombia, Escobar sought to overtake the government, to legitimize his power through Congress and then to destroy the government when they did not allow this, in Mexico, cartels seek not to supplant the government, but to secure their existence alongside it, to operate in the shadows. Just like not all violence is the same, not all cartels that execute violence represent the same type of threat.

A Numbers Game: Colombia fights 3 armed groups while Mexico fights 2

Another key difference between Colombia and Mexico is simply but importantly the amount of actors present. During the height of Colombia's violence, the Colombian authorities had to contend with drug cartels, Autodefensas, and Leftist guerrillas whereas in Mexico, the security challenges structured around the drug trade exclude the powerful Leftist guerrillas that exist in Colombia, and these Leftist guerrillas continue to have influence in Colombia despite the eventual decline of Colombia as the epicenter of the drug trade.

In his analysis of the complexity of the use of force in the 21th century and the struggle states have faced in reigning in non-state actors, Kenneth Watkin points out that "Colombia has faced some of the worst political violence in the western

[94] Ibid.

hemisphere, confronting three different protagonists, the "narcos" (narcotraficantes ilegales transnacionales); the insurgents consisting of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN); and the United Self Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC groups) or paramilitaries."[95] In comparing Mexico to circa 1980s to 1990s Colombia, one must be cognizant of the fact that though the Mexican government has had to deal with Leftist insurgents mounting violent protests by blowing up oil pipelines and attempting to carve out a spot for themselves in the political landscape, these groups do not even nearly resemble the threat posed by Colombian Leftist guerrillas at the height of their influence.[96] In Colombia, the authorities and public were forced to face the Leftist guerrillas as a serious threat to Colombian security and a direct threat to state authority whereas in Mexico, the guerrilla presence is smaller and not at a level to be ranked alongside the cartels as a substate security threat.

Centralized Colombian Autodefensas vs Fragmented Mexican Autodefensas

A third important difference between Mexican and Colombian substate security threats is the different organizational structure of the Autodefensas. In Colombia, Autodefensas began as various independently formed Autodefensa groups, but these disparate groups eventually united under a single banner. Stanford University's Mapping Militants Project which tracks the evolution of militant

[95] Kenneth Watkin, *Fighting at the Legal Boundaries: Controlling the Use of Force in Contemporary Conflict*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[96] Charles Parkinson, "Guerrilla Oil Pipeline Attacks Surge Amid Colombia's Peace Talks," *InSight Crime*, December 12, 2013, accessed June 2, 2016. http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/guerrilla-oil-pipeline-attacks-surge-amid-colombias-slow-peace-talks.

organizations, recounts how "In 1997, the [Castaño] brothers established the AUC, a distinct group that consolidated local and regional paramilitary groups."[97] This centralized organization of the AUC was an important development in Colombia's security saga because when Colombian Autodefensas unified, they became more tactically powerful as their capacities were concentrated, they became a bigger threat to the government, and they gained more leverage with the government. Indeed part of the logic behind unifying was that as a single group of tens of thousands of paramilitaries, when peace was negotiated between the government and the Leftist guerrillas, the paramilitaries under the AUC would have a place at the negotiating table.

Mexican Autodefensas, however, have not similarly unified. Mexican Autodefensa groups exist relatively independently in each town. Michoacán Autodefensa leaders travel from town to town attempting to form new Autodefensa groups comprised of affected locals from these towns. In a report analyzing these militias and their implications for Mexican security, Dudley Althaus and Steven Dudley explain that Autodefensa leaders venture into a new town only on invitation from locals who have formed their own Autodefensa groups or expressed interest in forming a group of their own. Althaus and Dudley go further to briefly explain the structure of the Autodefensa movement in Michoacán, explaining that "The movement is overseen by a board, comprised of militia bosses from each of the

[97] "United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," *Stanford University Mapping Militant Organizations*, August 28, 2015, accessed June 2, 2016, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/85.

communities, that reaches decisions by vote, leaders say."[98] In Michoacán, there is an attempt to concentrate the power of the Autodefensas by uniting Autodefensa groups under central leadership as in this case through board governance, but this attempt has been largely ineffective. Although Autodefensa leaders have taken on expansionary objectives, bringing new municipalities into the fold, Autodefensas have largely continued to operate as independent groups. Central leadership through this board of militia bosses has not produced much noteworthy unity of action. We can see this in the Autodefensa reaction to government attempts to incorporate Autodefensas into Rural Forces within the government. Some Autodefensas joined the Rural Forces, others refused out of principle, seeing the government as part of the problem. Additionally, though in Michoacán there is some weak organization of disparate Autodefensa groups, across states, this coordination is entirely lost. Autodefensa groups in the state of Michoacán are not coordinated with Autodefensa groups in neighboring Guerrero. As a whole, the Mexican Autodefensa movement is much less centrally organized than that in Colombia.

Althaus and Dudley try to break down a comparison of the Mexican and Colombian Autodefensa movements, identifying points of comparison in the following table:

[98] Dudley Althaus and Steven Dudley, "Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacán's Militias," *Wilson Center* and *InSight Crime*, 12, Accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/images/PDFs/2016/MichSelfDefense_Althaus_Dudley.pdf.

Analytical Framework—"Self-Defense" Groups in Mexico and Colombia[99]

	Colombia	Mexico
Makeup/support/ financing	Small and large landowners; large agri-business; large business; drug traffickers who were also large landowners	Small and large rural landowners; small and large businessmen; rival drug traffickers
Motivations/Context	Guerrillas kidnapping and extorting	Criminal group extortin and kidnapping
Financing	Mix of small and large business interests; criminal interests	Mex of small and large business interests; criminal intersts
Arms	Assault weapons; grenades; RPGs	Assault weapons
Recruits	Poor, mostly rural males	Poor, mostly rural males
Training	Military training and counterinsurgency	Minimal training
Relationship with State	Proxy army	Parallel army; intelligence

Althaus and Dudley point out important similarities between Mexican and Colombian Autodefensas, such as their funding sources, their use of military grade weapons, and demographics of their membership while also pointing out important differences, such as the lack of formal training among Mexican Autodefensas. Of course the authors' intent here is to communicate similarities and differences in an essentialist way and thus there will always be details that could have been added; however, I think it is important to point out two particular potentially helpful additions to this table. As discussed in this section, the Mexican and Colombian Autodefensas differed in the centrality of their organization. This is a noteworthy difference that should be included because Colombian Autodefensas gained tactical, physical strength through their unification under the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) umbrella organization as well as negotiating power through this AUC organization in their dealings with the Colombian government—both qualities that Mexican

[99] Dudley Althaus and Steven Dudley, "Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacán's Militias," *Wilson Center* and *InSight Crime*, 18 Accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.insightcrime.org/images/PDFs/2016/MichSelfDefense_Althaus_Dudley.pdf.

Autodefensas lack because of their more fragmented organization. This difference is an important consideration in determining the threat each group of Autodefensas represents for their respective government. The other important difference between Colombian and Mexican Autodefensas not included in this table is the ideological influence behind Colombian Autodefensas that is absent among Mexican Autodefensas, which I will discuss in the following section.

Ideological Influence in Autodefensa Movements

Colombian Autodefensas were considered right-wing militias, possessing an ideological facet that Mexican Autodefensas do not possess. To understand this difference, it is important to consider the threats each group of Autodefensas were meant to combat. Whereas Mexican Autodefensas emerged to combat drug cartels, Colombian Autodefensas formed to combat primarily the Leftist guerrillas; therefore, though plenty of Colombian Autodefensas were motivated by a pragmatic desire to end the cartel or guerrilla violence in their home towns, plenty of members were also motivated by an ideological opposition to the Leftist guerrillas.

In providing some context for the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) for their analysis of criminal networks in Mexico and Colombia, Luis Jorge Garay-Salamanca and Eduardo Salcedo-Albarán state that the "AUC concentrated support of extreme right sympathizers within the state—and most significantly from high ranks of the military forces. In this sense, AUC blended, since its beginnings, politics with

organized trans-national crime."[100] The formation and motivation of Colombian Autodefensas was more complex from the very beginning, incorporating ideology.

Ugarriza and Craig contribute to the discussion of the significance of this dynamic in their analysis of the relevance of ideology to contemporary armed conflict, posing that a rationalist approach explains the motivation of armed groups as a simple pragmatic response to real physical threat, a reaction to socioeconomic or political grievances, or greed for power. The authors go on to assert that "The dominant paradigm that has emerged from [their] research is one of greed versus grievance. Are rebels driven by opportunities for self-enrichment through conflict? Or are they motivated by desires to address grievances held by a wider group?"[101] This debate concerning the motivation of armed groups juxtaposes Mexican and Colombian Autodefensas. Mexican Autodefensas were formed primarily to address a real physical threat that itself was not politicized, the drug cartels, as described in Ugarriza and Craig's cited "rationalist" approach whereas the Colombian Autodefensas, though also formed to address real physical threats, addressed a politicized group in the Leftist guerrillas and thus were at least partially ideologically motivated themselves, thus representing a group motivated not simply by "greed," but by "grievance" as well.

This difference is important because it dictates the way in which the respective governments may address these threats and would logically also imply different levels of determination within these groups. Ultimately, the Colombian and

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[100] Luis Jorge Garay-Salamanca and Eduardo Salcedo-Albarán, "Institutioanl impact of criminal networks in Colombia and Mexico," *Crime Law Social Change* 57 (2012): 185.

[101] Juan E. Ugarriza and Matthew J. Craig, "The Relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts: A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57 (2012): 447.

Mexican governments needed to disband these Autodefensas despite initial support for their actions, and in this pursuit, the groups' motivations are vitally important. Where in one case, disbandment may depend on building a more effective security apparatus to mitigate the threat of violence, in the other case where ideology is a motivating factor, appeasement involves incorporating ideological principles into the government. The presence of ideology may also indicate greater staying power, as ideological motivation may be more likely to maintain Autodefensas engaged and help grow group membership. The presence of ideology in the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia is an incredibly important difference between the AUC and Mexican Autodefensas, and one that is often overlooked.

Conclusion

These differences are very important for the sake of conveying that we cannot easily generalize between different countries, but they are also important because these subtle differences imply different levels of stability, yet are not often taken into consideration in debates about state failure. Predictive models of state failure aim to make a science out of these predictions and so they essentialize the concerns they consider down to a short list of indicators incorporated into models. This essentialization, however, by definition removes these nuances from the debate about countries' stability and likely future trajectory. For example, a predictive model could incorporate violence as an indicator. This violence could be measured quantitatively through something like homicide rates. Using these statistics, however, would not capture the nuances of whether that violence is aimed centrally at the government or whether it is regionally contained; the study would then lose important context.

Fund for Peace uses "security apparatus" as an indicator in their Failed State Index. This indicator is meant to measure the state's monopoly of force by identifying violent substate actors present in the country and using quantitative data and a qualitative review to measure these substate actors' impact on the state and thus rank the state's security apparatus accordingly. Quantitative data, as discussed above in relation to homicide rates, would be devoid of nuance. A qualitative review could correct for some of this, but this review would be dependent on one organization's interpretation of state failure when there is no consensus on what actually constitutes a failing state.

Carrying this logic further, we must consider once more the problem of performativity. A predictive model would incorporate quantitative data, that on its own is not telling enough, and would review and analyze that data according to the analyst's own interpretation of a hotly debated concept: state failure. These predictions are then sold as almost a science, an analytical tool for countries to plan their responses to a presumptive failing state. International actors will begin to treat that country as a failing state, attempting to contain it and separate themselves from it or will intervene to fix it. These pressures, however, can jeopardize that state, increasing instability and thus also its potential for failure.

These considerations, these problems that exist within our insistence upon identifying failing states based on their monopoly of violence, brings me back to a central question: is it fair or useful when we accuse states of failing based primarily on their monopoly of violence? As I hope this thesis has demonstrated, a lack of a monopoly of violence is not itself enough to determine state failure, and this monopoly of violence is not always a uniform characteristic that either exists or does not exist; rather, there is a gradient and states possess this monopoly to different extents based on the different characteristics of the challenging substate groups as discussed in the previous section. In this context, our use of "state failure" as an accusation is perhaps not fair given the complexity that is not captured in this assessment.

Accusations of state failure can be unfair because they may be inaccurate as is the case with Mexico and Colombia as discussed throughout this thesis, but this accusation can also be unfair because of its potential to cause state instability through

the dynamics of performativity, that is that in describing states as failing, we instigate their failure. In this context, our practical application of state failure is not fair because it is causing problems, or at the very least exacerbating problems in cases in which this label is employed. Countries labeled as failing are then not given a fair chance to succeed.

This consideration of the fairness in using the failed state label leads me to a related question of whether this failed state label is *useful*. Given the flaws in identifying failing states when the "failed state" label is surrounded by such ambiguity and given the consequences in publically labeling states as "failed," is the failed state label even useful for those in the developed world who employ this label? Predictive models of state failure are very imperfect models, so the utility in employing them to guide intervention is dubious. Additionally, given the consequences "failed state" accusations can cause, the utility of this label is further questioned. If in accusing a state of failing, we are inadvertently decreasing its stability, this label is not proving very useful as it is partly causing the outcomes we fear. There are many flaws in our conception of state failure, chiefly among them our overreliance on monopoly of violence as a determinant of this failure, the frequent inability to capture important nuances in our country analyses, and our role in causing state failure by publically acknowledging a country's likelihood of failing. I hope not only that I have cast some much needed doubt on the reliability of state failure predictions, but also that others may undertake this mission to provide greater clarity to discussions of state legitimacy and state failure in order to correct the ways in which we have thus far interacted with suffering states.

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