

EDITORIAL

Foreword for "Citizen Security Dialogues: Dispatches from Mexico"

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For decades, a select few regions have achieved successes in interventions geared toward building and fostering safer, non-violent communities. This is the case, for example, of Central Europe, the United States, and Canada, where a constant production of policy inputs and outputs determines what works – and tends to correct what does not – in lessons learned from the virtuous cycles of the public policy process. In other regions and continents, such as Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, it is exceedingly difficult to cultivate sustained iterations of learning and positive change, increasing the chance of success for meaningful social and institutional change. Numerous factors account for this asymmetry, but one aspect stands out: the huge disparity of available resources when it comes to structuring and formalizing the learning process. At the very least, in the case of Mexico the investment can be qualified as paltry, though this is also the case in much of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. The old maxim applies here: those who do not learn from their mistakes are doomed to failure.

Our initiative, the Citizen Security Dialogues, seeks to counteract this structural liability by means of informed discussion, a systematization of processes and the dissemination of specially designed studies in settings where insecurity and violence

have been the most extreme. The challenge is to identify innovative and creative areas of opportunity, as well as successes, in the midst of the most complex of institutional and social challenges.

Mexico is providing two inputs to the Security Dialogues: first, a report outlining the findings, reflections, and recommendations derived from our November 6-7, 2014 meeting, which brought together fifty experts in Mexico City; and second, the series of four articles included here, which classify the efforts for institutional and social reform into low and high-conflict environments.

Two of these contributions discuss examples of democratic police reform, still in early stages of maturity. Fontecilla and Suárez address the topic of collaborative interventions among civil society, municipal governments, and police institutions, providing policy recommendations which encourage transformations from reactive police forces to instruments of community service and citizen-police cooperation. Guzmán and Espriu discuss the context, history, and implementation of the first effort at Mexican institutional reform involving external oversight of the police and based on the international principal of police accountability. Aguilar focuses on the important area of communication channels, as well as the linkages between citizen security and penal reform. She provides a succinct and clear analysis of pre-trial services in Mexico and in the region – specifically, technical instruments which measure risk and

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substitute policies of pre-trial detention with professionally-managed pre-trial supervision and monitoring. Aguilar presents irrefutable evidence of success, demonstrating high compliance in these types of interventions, with adequate controls imposed and without resorting to detention. Less incarceration, in turn, yields multiple positive outcomes, strengthening the rule of law and improving access to justice and security.

Monárrez writes with poignancy on the themes of tragedy and hope. She takes a penetrating look at the 'irreparable and ongoing damage in terms of the loss of human life, life work, cultural heritage and the local and international displacements of thousands of citizens,' in Juarez City within the context of 'the war on drugs.' She then weaves a tapestry of hope using the transformational

personal experiences of civil society organizations, whose interventions to combat child poverty, rape and sexual violence against women, and disappeared populations, help recover 'the right to one's body, the right to public space and the right to be a political subject.'

These articles provide a snapshot of an unknown number of official and independent initiatives growing in number throughout the country and having an impact in areas profoundly affected by insecurity and violence. Unfortunately, few have yet to be incorporated as inputs in a formal learning process geared toward producing public policies informed by the citizen security paradigm. We hope that these examples may serve to be a small, yet significant, contribution in this effort.

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