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**LOCAL PUBLIC SECURITY IN MEXICO:  
BASES FOR ANALYSIS AND REFORM**

## *Prefacio*

Este documento\* pretende ampliar los campos de debate y discusión sobre el papel del nivel municipal en la seguridad pública en México. La novedad del tema implica que las reflexiones en el documento sean preliminares y sujetas a revisión a la luz de investigación adicional. Sin embargo, la utilidad del documento está en identificar y ordenar los elementos claves en el diseño de políticas locales más efectivas en la lucha contra la inseguridad pública. Por esta razón, se prevé su publicación en una revista académica que se enfoca en cuestiones de política pública y desarrollo en países del “tercer mundo”.

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### ***Resumen***

Durante los años noventa pareciera que la seguridad pública en México y otros países en desarrollo se ha deteriorado sin freno. No obstante, a pesar del acuerdo teórico acerca de que la seguridad pública es una tarea para los gobiernos locales, se ha prestado poca atención al papel de este nivel para enfrentar la criminalidad y la violencia en los países en desarrollo. Para empezar a llenar este vacío, este documento identifica y explora los problemas relacionados con la definición de seguridad pública local y la medida de efectividad en los programas de este sector, por medio de una descripción de dos estrategias distintas que se implementaron por sucesivas administraciones en un municipio mexicano. En base a estos estudios de caso, se especifican dos tipos principales de desafíos a la política de seguridad pública local en México: los que surgen de su naturaleza como un bien público relativamente "puro", y los que están impuestos por las limitaciones sobre las acciones del nivel municipal en sí.

### ***Abstract***

Public security in Mexico and other developing countries appears to have degenerated unchecked during the 1990s. Yet in spite of theoretical agreement that public security is a local task, little attention has been paid to the role of the local level in confronting crime and violence in developing countries. To begin to fill this gap, this paper identifies and explores problems related to the definition of local public security and the measurement of effectiveness in public security programs through the description of two distinct strategies of local public security which were implemented by successive local administrations in a Mexican municipality. Based on this case study, two main types of challenges to local public security policy in Mexico are identified: those which arise from its nature as a relatively "pure" public good, and those imposed by limits on the actions of the municipal level of government itself.

## *Dimensions of the problem*

In recent years Mexico has experienced an explosion in rates of robbery, kidnapping and other crimes against persons and property, especially in urban areas. In the face of this growing problem, spectacular reports of police corruption and ineptitude have also captured public attention. While Mexico is not the only country faced with these problems, it has become one of the most notorious in the Americas. Not surprisingly, Mexicans' perceptions of their personal safety has suffered at least as much as actual levels of crime have risen, adding to a sense of deterioration in the quality of life in Latin America cities. In addition, widespread crime—and fear of crime—is likely to have undesirable economic effects, including increased business costs related to private security efforts, as well as changes in the location decisions of firms and households.

The causes of Mexico's current crime wave are unclear. One common but little-elaborated view is that growing public insecurity is the result of macro-economic policies put into place in the majority of Latin American countries since the 1980s: the liberalization of trade, privatization of many functions previously performed by the State, and the unemployment and social instability related to these changes. Others contend that the rise in crime is an unfortunate but inevitable result of broader social changes underway in developing countries at the end of the twentieth century, such as modernization, urbanization, democratization, and the globalization of mass media. The only agreement between these perspectives appears to be on the need for new strategies to confront the problem.

This paper does not attempt to resolve the debates over causes of growing crime in Mexico or elsewhere. Indeed, in view of the scarcity of both reliable quantitative information and the theoretical bases to help understand this information, such an attempt would be premature and probably misleading. Nor does this paper consider many of the other topics related to public security which frequently appear in mass media and political discussions in Mexico, including the reform of the criminal justice system, a reduction in politically-motivated violence, or the fight against the traffic of narcotics. Instead, the focus is on the potential and problems of the local level (*municipio* or municipality) in carrying out the public security tasks which it is assigned under the Mexican Constitution. In this sense, this research is less about crime and criminology, and more closely related to questions of how to make local government work in developing countries.

Precisely because of information constraints, this paper is limited to a preliminary exploration and definition of the key issues in local approaches to public security in Mexico. It should be noted from the outset that a review of research on public security in developed countries indicated that much of this information is irrelevant for countries like Mexico. (Indeed, most Mexicans would welcome the day when the fine points of police organization and administration, for example, are

the most pressing items on the public security agenda.) The problems of public security in developing countries—and the paths to solutions—are made much more complex by the fact that local governments in these countries generally lack the efficacy, organizational capacity, and financial resources available to those of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. On the other hand, in part because the seriousness of the problem is so recent, there is extremely little research on this topic which treats Latin American or developing countries more specifically.

For these reasons, the primary goal of this paper is to review the issues of public security encountered in one Mexican municipality, Naucalpan de Juárez, in the central State of México, and to begin to develop a theoretical structure to explain the problems and challenges encountered there, with the assumption that these issues are common to many urban local governments in Mexico. It is hoped that this work may stimulate and contribute to discussions of the role of the municipal level of government in public security in developing countries by delineating more clearly the options and obstacles facing this level. This is especially important in Mexico because in spite of increasing attention to public security in general, current national public security programs tend to neglect the local level of government.

The paper begins with some general observations about the difficulties facing municipalities in defining public security in a useful way and then going about making progress toward their goals of improving it. The next section demonstrates some of these difficulties in practice by briefly reviewing the contrasting strategies of local public security carried out by two successive administrations of the municipality of Naucalpan. This review sets the stage for a discussion of two types of problems for municipal policy presented by public security in Mexico: first, those which arise from its nature as a local public good, and second, those which are related to the characteristics of the local level of government in Mexico. Taking these limitations into account, the fifth section of the paper proposes an approach to public security for local administrations which is in line with their true capacities and limitations. This section also delineates another set of actions in which the efforts of state and federal levels are needed to help municipalities improve their effectiveness in fighting crime. The paper concludes by returning to some of the difficulties of research in public security in Mexico uncovered in this study, with the aim of setting a research agenda for making progress in this area.

### ***Local public security: from theory to practice***

Much of the attention to public insecurity in Mexico, as well as a growing body of scholarly interest in the topic, focuses on themes like the increasing incidence of violence and criminality, police corruption, drug trafficking, and reform of the

criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that these are important topics related to the broader goal of public security. However, much less attention has been paid to the municipal level, in spite of the fact that the Mexican Constitution, as well as supporting state legislation, explicitly designates some public security tasks to the local level of government.

The national Constitution is in fact rather vague in its treatment of the division of specific components of public security among levels of government. In Article 115, municipalities are charged with public security along with a list of other common local public services, such as garbage collection and provision of street lights. State laws vary among one another, but in general are slightly more specific. In the case of the State of México, the location of the case studies carried out for this paper, the responsibility of municipalities is to guarantee the security and tranquility of people and their belongings within municipal territory, as well as preserving and keeping public order (Estado de México 1985, Article 14). The local government is to achieve this by enforcing local laws (the *bando municipal*); overseeing streets, parks and public events; controlling "propaganda" in public areas; combating delinquency<sup>2</sup>; and caring for municipal installations (Article 26). However, police research and intelligence, as well as prosecution of crimes are powers reserved for the State. The public security forces of local government may make arrests only in the case of crimes witnessed while in progress (Articles 21 to 25).

In reserving these functions of local public order for the municipal level, the Mexican system does not deviate (formally, at least) from most other federal systems, which attempt to distribute public tasks among the various levels of government according to the efficiency and effectiveness of each level in carrying these out. Thus, public security is generally considered a local task because 1) there is reason to believe that political proximity of citizens to those who make the decisions regarding public security is important (increased accountability); 2) there is little possibility to realize regional or national economies of scale or scope in the provision of public security, and 3) the benefit-cost spillout of public security is minimal; that is, local government faces no inappropriate incentive or disincentive to produce this public good because its effects are mostly contained within the local jurisdiction (Shah 1994).

Because the municipality is essentially the first line of defense against social chaos, each municipal administration must face the question of how to best organize the personnel and resources at its disposal to ensure (at least the perception) that levels of public security fall within some reasonable limits within its jurisdiction. However, the vague definitions of public security, both in Mexican law and in

<sup>1</sup> For example, these four themes dominated the articles on public security which were published by the newsweekly *Proceso* from July, 1997 to July, 1998. Of the 178 articles on public security issues, 78 had to do with crime and violence in general, 49 with drug-trafficking, 30 with police corruption, twelve with reform of the criminal justice system, and only four with local public security policy and practice.

<sup>2</sup> "Combatir la malvivencia."

theories of decentralization, would complicate this task for municipalities even under the best conditions. Indeed, to discuss public security involves a variety of definitional and measurement problems which have been alluded to above, and which I will now attempt to specify more completely.

*What is public security?*

As textbooks of public policy and planning point out, policy design is intimately linked to policy definition. In this case, any attempt by local governments to improve levels of public security involves an implicit or explicit definition of the problem. But the question, What exactly is the problem of public security in Mexico? is not easy to answer in practice.

In its broadest sense, public security has been defined by a prominent Mexican legal scholar as the conditions of social life under which individual and collective development can be realized (García Ramírez 1995: 276). But the task of assuring such conditions is so broad, and these conditions are so distant from current reality in Mexico that this definition is more likely to inspire despair than innovative policies among municipal administrators. From the point of view of local public policy, a conception of public security which concentrates on enforcing existing law and contributing to peaceful coexistence among residents would be more useful as a basis for designing and implementing policy.

But even within this more limited conception, definitional questions complicate policy design. For example, if we were to conclude that public security is a problem of rising crime rates, the logical goal of a local administration would be to slow or stop this rise. But what these crime rates really reflect—and therefore, how to go about lowering them—is not at all clear. For example, increases in the number of crimes reported may indicate not more crimes, but more public confidence that public officials will respond to reports of crime in a useful way. Similar logic applies to definitions of public security which suggest that more arrests or a greater number of police officers on the streets will contribute to solving the problem. In fact, increasing the number of arrests or putting more cops on the streets may make law-abiding citizens *more* fearful for their own security, not less.

For this reason, a more useful definition of public security takes into account a rather complex combination of efforts to cut the actual incidence of crime with efforts to make people feel less likely to become victims of crime.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as noted above, legal limitations on actions that local governments in Mexico can take to combat crime and people's feelings of insecurity may imply that maintaining public order is the most concrete objective for which municipalities can aim. Detective

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, research in other countries suggests that the correlation between actual crime rates and residents' perception of personal safety is not particularly high. Indeed, most people tend to overestimate the probability that they will be victims of a serious crime, while underestimating the probability that they will suffer accidents in automobiles or around the house.

work, sting operations, and other “pro-active” approaches to crime fall outside the local jurisdiction according to Mexican law. Of course, “public order” is another concept which requires clear definition, as pointed out by Skogan (1990). For the purposes of this discussion, however, we will use a working definition to broadly define public security as a combination of the actual incidence of crime with peoples’ perception of personal threats to their well-being.

*How to measure progress in public security?*

Definitional problems aside, municipal governments (as well as researchers) must confront the difficulty of measuring progress in public security to be able to evaluate related programs. However, in spite of the “public” nature of the problem of public insecurity, it is difficult in any context to gather statistics and evaluate impacts of specific anti-crime measures. Such difficulties are magnified in Mexico, where official statistics are often of dubious quality, when they are available at all. However, even reliable data on public security are subject to questions of interpretation, as well as confusion over causality, and delays between the adoption of a program and the appearance of effects, if any. The particular difficulties of analysis of public security compared to other common municipal tasks can be clarified by contrasting it with, for example, street paving.

To begin with, the interpretation of data in the case of street paving is rather simple: either a street (or a certain number of meters of a street) is paved, or it is not. This distinction is clear even for someone who is not an expert in pavement, and it unlikely to change from one day to another without direct intervention by the authorities charged with street paving. To argue that currency devaluations, unemployment rates, or a generalized disenchantment with government has a direct affect on meters paved is ridiculous. However, any of these, arguably, may contribute to crime rates.

In addition, if the goal of a municipal administration is to maximize the number of streets which are paved during its administration, it is easy to evaluate the results of these efforts with data from other years, other administrations, and other municipalities. A higher number of meters paved—perhaps adjusted by cost per meter—clearly indicates better performance. In contrast, how do we interpret data which tell us that the number of arrests or crimes reported has risen or fallen during a particular year? As noted previously, the relation between public security and the number of arrests is not at all clear. In fact, we can imagine that a smaller number of arrests indicates not *more* public security but *less*: it could be that the police are simply not fulfilling their functions (as many argue is the case in Mexico). In the same way, a falling number of reported crimes could indicate not fewer crimes, but rather the conviction on the part of victims that to report a crime is not worthwhile and is highly unlikely to result in an arrest. Indeed, there is much anecdotal evidence in Mexico that residents actually fear the repercussions of reporting crimes due to the high degree of police involvement in organized (and random) crime in Mexico.



Of course, it is rather absurd to imagine fearing revenge for reporting an unpaved street to the appropriate authorities.

Questions of causality are equally important. Returning to the example, if the number of paved streets in a municipality increases, we can normally trace quite easily who is responsible for these changes. But as suggested at the beginning of this paper, even if we could confidently measure the number of criminal acts in a certain area, a rise in crime could reflect not bad performance by the municipality, but rather, more generalized social problems. Indeed, a municipality which follows optimal policies—whatever these may be—may still experience increases in public insecurity.

The almost inevitable time lapse between the moment in which a public security program is adopted and the moment in which results become evident presents another vexing problem. Once again, the contrast with street paving is illuminating. We can assume that once a street is paved, the benefits of a paved street (more durability and safety, less dust) are realized immediately, and we can attribute these benefits directly to the pavement, rather than, for example, to changes in federal transportation policy. But security programs usually show a time-lag between the initial investment and the realization of benefits. For example, programs which attempt to train and “professionalize” police officers will require months or even years before benefits are evident. In the same way, even if the technical capacity to arrest criminals improves, an unknown period of time may elapse before the improved reputation of local police officers among potential delinquents begins to reflect and amplify this change, resulting in lower crime rates in a particular jurisdiction.

Finally, we must consider the role of the supposed beneficiaries in the performance of local police. In many cases, the role of citizens in police corruption is conspiratorial at least, but convincing citizens to refrain from bribing police officers, especially for “minor” infractions like traffic offenses, is probably a long-term effort. In addition, making citizens conscious of the need to care for the security of their own neighborhoods and winning their confidence so that they report suspicious activities to the police are changes which will not be immediately realized, especially without hard evidence that the quality of public security is improving.

### ***Public security in Naucalpan: Two local strategies***

As the previous section makes clear, local public security is neither simple to define nor straightforward to measure. And yet, given the rising outcry over public insecurity in Mexico, municipal administrations must take some sort of action, ignoring reservations stemming from imperfect information and partially-developed theories. Given the lack of solid evidence about policy effectiveness in local public security, the two most recent municipal administration in the municipality of Naucalpan de Juárez are notable for their contrasting approaches to public security.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the two types of strategies followed by these administrations can be understood as variants of the most widely-known approaches to fighting crime in urban areas of more developed countries: community policing and police professionalization. In this section, I briefly review the public security programs introduced by the municipal administrations of Enrique Jacob Rocha (1994-1997) and José Luis Durán Reveles (1997-2000). This review serves to orient the more theoretical discussion which follows, as well as to suggest some of the potential and problems of public security confronted by urban municipalities in Mexico. But first, it is useful to set the context of these programs by introducing the municipality of Naucalpan, and to summarize the methodology employed in this research.

### *Introduction to the municipality of Naucalpan*

The municipality of Naucalpan de Juárez is located in the central State of Mexico on the northwest border of the Federal District (the capital of Mexico, known as the DF). In the past fifty years, it has been transformed from a rural agricultural area into one of the most populous municipalities in the country, from fewer than 30,000 residents in 1950 to nearly 850,000 in 1995. On the way, it has become a dynamic commercial and industrial center in its own right. Today, the municipality is a mix of luxury residential neighborhoods and squatter settlements, of high-tech international firms and small, traditional, often informal businesses. Almost all of the population of Naucalpan (98%) lives in the east side of the municipality, a highly urbanized zone which covers less than half of the total municipal area (150 square kilometers), while the remaining population is dispersed among the hills and cliffs of the western side of the locality in thirty-seven rural communities whose sizes range from 13 to 4,400 residents.

The principal challenges for Naucalpan's municipal government arise from coping with rapid and extensive urbanization and industrialization within the limits imposed by its location within the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone (MCMZ). Both population and economic dynamics in the municipality depend in large part on the patterns of the MCMZ as a whole, and for this reason Naucalpan suffers many of the problems that plague the entire metropolitan area. However, the municipality—like the seventeen other “conurbated” municipalities of the State of Mexico, which together are home to half of the total metropolitan population—has only a small percentage of the resources of the DF to apply to the manifestations of these big-city problems within its jurisdiction. Ironically, Naucalpan is recognized all over the country as an economic powerhouse, but the municipal government itself receives little benefit in the way of revenues from this economic dynamism. In Mexico, corporate income tax and value-added taxes are gathered by the federal level, and little of this total sum finds its way back to the municipal level (Rowland 1997).

In addition, while it often appears that the DF has forgotten about the existence of Naucalpan and its neighbors, these municipalities have always had to

confront the results of policies formulated by and for the DF. The highway and Metro (mass transit) systems, for example, have traditionally been designed by the center, and give priority to the needs of residents of the DF rather than residents of the conurbated municipalities. The responses to metropolitan-level problems like air pollution and water supply also tend to be imposed on the surrounding municipalities by DF and central government officials (Iracheta 1997, Rowland and Gordon 1996). Metropolitan strategies to fight public insecurity have been no different, leaving the conurbated municipalities to adjust to public policies (and a public problem) which do not take administrative boundaries into account.<sup>4</sup>

### *Research methods*

Research on the public security programs of Naucalpan's past two administrations was conducted through a series of personal interviews with current and former municipal officials, as well as other participants in these programs. Those policy documents which were made available by these actors were also reviewed. Researchers familiar with Mexico will recognize the shortcomings of such methods: interviews can only be conducted with persons willing to talk, and it is often difficult to find such people among politicians currently in office. In addition, municipal documents are often incomplete, of questionable trustworthiness, and at times, nearly incoherent. However, although the research itself leaves something to be desired in formal terms, the general results seem consistent with anecdotal reports of public security efforts in other municipalities and states, and with the little that has been published on the topic.

In fact, the municipality of Naucalpan was selected as a research site primarily because of the interest of several former municipal officials to subject their programs to outside evaluation. Thus, while cooperation was limited, it was more than could be expected in many other municipal administrations around the country. An additional advantage of Naucalpan as a research site is that it is now under the second of two administrations which have developed fairly concrete strategies for

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the government of the State of México—the only potential counterweight to the DF and federal government in the metropolitan area—has shown little willingness to defend the interests of its municipalities against these other levels, a position most likely calculated to avoid partisan infighting within the ruling party (PRI). However, the opposition PRD's electoral victory for the government of the DF in 1997 and the resultant separation of its policies from those of the central, PRI-dominated government, combined with the increasing number of metropolitan municipal administrations in the State of México which are governed by the PAN or PRD, suggests that there is much potential for change in these intergovernmental relationships. For the time being, though, partisan maneuvering has made such cooperation unlikely. Gubernatorial elections will be held in the State of México in July, 1999, and the municipal president of Naucalpan (in the second of the administrations studied here), José Luis Durán Reveles, is candidate for his party, the PAN. While party candidates for the national presidential election of 2000 have not yet been chosen, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the current head of government of the DF, is considered a strong contender for his party, the PRD.

public security. Other municipalities of similar size even in the same state, such as Nezahualcoyotl, are only just beginning to put together a coordinated set of policies related to public security (Rivera 1998).

Finally, it should be noted that, as in many other aspects of municipal administration and policy, there is reason to believe that the precise problems and possibilities for action in public security in Naucalpan are distinct from those which exist in many other Mexican municipalities. For one thing, the kinds of crime which plague the municipality—particularly kidnappings for ransom, muggings, bank robberies, and crimes against property—are urban crimes usually undertaken for immediate financial gain. In contrast, concerns with public security in rural municipalities in Mexico tend to be more related to political and electoral violence, including acts by government forces at all three levels, as well as shadowy paramilitary groups and a number of rebel organizations. Most urban municipalities, including Naucalpan, have had little trouble of the latter sort in the most recent crime wave.

Nor does Naucalpan appear to fall within any of several notorious corridors of drug trafficking which have developed in recent years, unlike large cities such as Guadalajara and Ciudad Juárez, which must deal with this kind of violence in addition to more pedestrian sorts (Ramírez Sáiz 1998, Regalado 1998, Gutiérrez and Ortiz 1997). While urban crime, political violence and drug-related incidents all contribute to an atmosphere of public insecurity, it is only in the first type that we can expect municipal authorities to be able to develop policy approaches, since their jurisdiction is limited to maintaining public order.

Another group of cities which may face significantly different challenges than Naucalpan are state capitals, since the job of public security in some of these is delegated to state governors by order of their constitutions. The actual number of capitals affected by this type of rule is unknown, however, since state constitutions vary from one another, and some of those which provide for state-organized policing of the capital city—for example, Jalisco—have nonetheless arranged for the municipal level to provide this service (Ramírez Sáiz 1998).

To what group of municipalities, then, might the experiences of Naucalpan be generalizable? I would argue that this case demonstrates the kinds of problems in the design and implementation of public security programs that most urban municipalities around the country must face.<sup>5</sup> Those cities which are also plagued by drug-related violence (such as those along the northern border) or serious political conflicts (such as the cities of Chiapas), most likely face issues of urban violence which are similar to those of Naucalpan, in addition to their other problems.

<sup>5</sup> In 1990, this included over 400 municipalities with more than 15,000 residents, a group whose total population exceeded 46.5 million, without including the DF (computed by author from Conapo 1994).

*The neighborhood policing strategy (1994 to 1997)*

During the campaign for municipal president (*presidente municipal*, essentially, mayor) in 1994, through a series of meeting with residents of the municipality, Candidate Enrique Jacob Rocha became aware of the growing public demand to slow the deterioration of public security in Naucalpan (Ayuntamiento de Naucalpan 1994c). For this reason, one of the stated priorities of his administration was to develop a new approach to the problem by concentrating on programs which would restructure the relationship between municipal police officers and local citizens, bringing them together to work on problems of public security. Other municipal public security programs were also developed during this administration, but there is no doubt that a version of “community policing” was the primary policy emphasis in the Jacob administration.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the efforts of this administration coincide with the current fashions in local public security programs in the U.S. and Western Europe.

This group of policy efforts was proposed and managed by a team of municipal officials close to the municipal president. Their first task was to form a council of key groups within their jurisdiction, including municipal, state, and federal police officers, business associations (CANACO, CANIRAC), representatives of the tightly-knit local Jewish community, various neighborhood organizations, and officials from the *Campo Militar No. 1*, a military base within the municipal borders. This Municipal Public Security Council was charged with organizing meetings to evaluate the performance of police in each neighborhood on a monthly basis. In these meetings, Citizen Supervisors (*Supervisores Ciudadanos*), residents who were elected in each neighborhood as part of this program, would present the principal concerns and complaints within their jurisdiction to the municipal president and the chief of police.

The underlying logic of the programs of the Jacob Administration was that in a situation of scarce resources and entrenched corruption, public security—or public perceptions of it—would most rapidly improve if citizens became involved in their own protection. There were numerous programs associated with this general strategy, and their application varied according to the particular characteristics of the neighborhood involved.

<sup>6</sup> Other changes reported in municipal documents included the creation of an Investment and Administrative Trust (*fideicomiso*) for the Modernization of Public Security Services; improvement of the emergency telephone line (08, similar to 911 in the US, but by subscription only); rehabilitation or purchase of patrol cars and neighborhood police stations (*tecallis*); increases in salaries of police officers; implementation of special “social development” programs for police officers and their families (adult education, recreation); shortening of work days; restructuring of study plans in the police academy; establishment of anti-drug policies; increases in the number of police personnel; and the creation of a legal defense department for officers.

The most elaborate aspect of the Jacob administration's public security strategies was the *Código Condor* program, under which the municipality assigned each officer and patrol car on the police force to a particular neighborhood. The department of public security painted patrol cars in colors that corresponded to their assigned neighborhoods, and formally organized the rounds that each patrol car was to complete. To ensure compliance, at various points in each round police officers were required to sign a list that was retained by a neighborhood resident on a rotating basis. The idea was to achieve more strict control of the whereabouts and activities of officers by informing citizens about assignments and allowing them to contact their Citizen Supervisor when they spotted anomalies. The municipality made these efforts known to the population through neighborhood meetings and simple pamphlets. Unfortunately, no systematic evaluation of these efforts was made before the administration's term of office ended.

*The police professionalization strategy (1997 to 2000)*

In contrast with the programs undertaken by the Jacob Administration, the strategy of José Luis Durán Reveles, who succeeded Jacob as municipal president of Naucalpan, has concentrated on the professionalization of the police corps. The incoming Director of Public Security, Agustín Torres, stated in an interview that not only was this the more urgent priority for improving local public security, but that the previous administration's focus on "community policing" had actually retarded progress in this area. He also argued that many of the claims of improvement by the Jacob administration—especially in equipment, squad cars, and the police academy—were nowhere to be found when the incoming Durán administration took control of the police force.

Observers of Mexico's political scene will not be surprised by these contradictions; they clearly point up some of the difficulties of research and public policy design in a politically polarized environment. Each administration belonged to a different political party, and Durán headed the first opposition (PAN) administration in the municipality's history. Unfortunately, there is little that researchers after the fact can do to confirm or deny the claims of either of the two administrations. What can be seen clearly in the Durán Administration is a distinct approach to fighting public insecurity.<sup>7</sup> In fact, this administration closed all of the instances of citizen participation in public security established by the Jacob Administration in favor of a concentrated effort to improve the police officers and organizations themselves.

<sup>7</sup> Although Ramírez Sáiz (1998) finds commonalities in the strategies of the PAN municipal governments in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Zone, I found no evidence of specific PAN or PRI approaches to local public security in Naucalpan.

The stated strategy of the Durán Administration was to improve public security by improving the police organizations and officers themselves. Implicit in this approach is the idea that public security is a job for professionals, not housewives and retirees. While such an approach has fallen out of favor in many other countries, it is worth noting that police officers in Mexico are indeed poorly trained, poorly organized, poorly equipped and poorly treated by their supervisors in comparison with their counterparts in the U.S., Canada and Western Europe, and that their corruption begins the moment that aspirants to the police force attempt to enter the police academy (Arteaga and López 1998). The scope for professionalization, then, is much wider in Mexico than that which remains in wealthier countries.

The concrete strategy of the Durán administration for professionalization focussed on changes in the way that police officers are trained and how they behave on the job. These efforts included the repair, remodeling, and expansion of the Municipal Police Academy, as well as changes in its curriculum to focus on the creation of modern, professional police officers. In addition, administrative processes of the police department were computerized, new radios and patrol cars were acquired, new uniforms were designed and purchased for officers, and a team of psychologists was hired to take care of the personal well-being of police officers. Many of these changes were apparent on tours of the installations and in conversations with those involved, but once again, concrete results of these programs could not be verified. Those who had participated in Jacob's community policing efforts complained of the renewed distance of police officers and activities from citizens.

### *Assessment*

This look at the public security policies of two successive municipal administrations would be incomplete without some consideration of the available data on crime within the jurisdiction. However, these data are presented with the assumption that their limitations, as discussed in the previous section, are clearly understood. In addition, the amount that the available data can tell us about the effectiveness of the policies of the Jacob and Durán administrations is limited by the time period involved: Durán had just taken office at the end of 1997, the latest date for which statistics were provided by the Office of the Attorney General of the State of México (*Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de México*).

Still, the available data suggest that the Jacob Administration's policies, implemented from 1994 to 1997, may have been somewhat successful (Figure 1). The number of total crimes reported fell from 1996 to 1997, and the number of vehicle thefts began to fall one year earlier, and continued to fall at a more dramatic rate from 1996 to 1997.

*Figure 1*  
Crimes reported in Naucalpan and the State of México

		1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
TOTAL	Naucalpan	14,927	18,538	22,457	23,028	17,011
CRIMES	State	128,879	137,126	167,317	184,650	168,123
REPORTED						
REPORTED	Naucalpan	2,450	2,814	3,833	3,656	2,183
VEHICLE	State	10,493	13,111	17,561	21,687	19,675
THEFT						

Source: Procuraduría General de Justicia, Estado de México 1998.

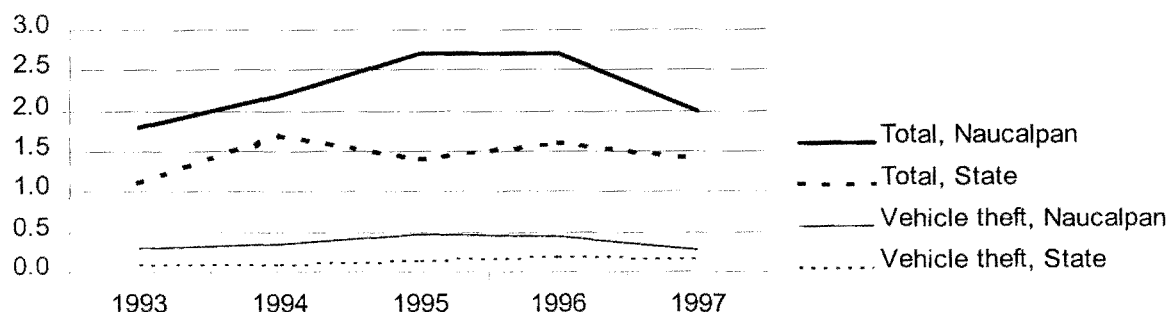
However, it is worth considering these figures in a statewide context: somewhat surprisingly, given the growing concern about crime, the number of reported crimes also fell for the State of México as a whole from 1996 to 1997, after steady growth through the 1990s. How to interpret this drop, then, is debatable: as argued previously, it might reflect a decreased incidence of crime, or it might well reflect a sense of disillusionment by crime victims with the ability of public officials to respond to crime in a useful way. The presentation of data on automobile theft is an attempt to get around the problem of non-reporting since the incentives for reporting stolen autos are increased by the fear that a stolen vehicle may be involved in a crime, and the need for a police report in order to collect reimbursement for cars which are covered by insurance.

When we consider the same data in per capita terms, Naucalpan's progress from 1995 to 1997 in slowing, and then reversing, the number of crimes reported (auto theft in particular) is even more dramatic (Figure 2). The number of vehicle thefts per capita in Naucalpan actually fell below the 1993 figure for the municipality, while that of the State of México as a whole nearly doubled from 1993 to 1997.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> As an urban municipality, it is not surprising that Naucalpan reports a much higher incidence per capita of crime than the State of México as a whole, since large portions of the latter are rural. Unfortunately, comparable data for the other urban municipalities in the State of México, or for the DF, were unavailable.



**Figure 2: Crimes reported per 100 residents, Naucalpan and the State of México\***



\* Based on 1995 populations.

Source: derived from Procuraduría General de Justicia, 1998.

However, caution is once again in order. We cannot be sure of the extent to which credit for falling rates of auto theft can be assigned to the Jacob Administration's public security programs. It may also be that car owners in Naucalpan became more protective of their property as the number of thefts spiraled, and those with the financial capacity to do so began to secure them with alarms, and in garages or guarded parking lots. Car thieves could easily move on to other areas in the State of México (and the DF) once Naucalpan's residents began to take these measures.

In sum, an effort to draw firm conclusions based on these data—or the case studies reported above—risks being seriously misleading because of questions of interpretation and explanation, especially when complicated by the severely limited amount of reliable information and the highly politicized environment in which these policies have been implemented. The point of this section is instead to describe two common “packets” of public security strategies at the municipal level, those which focus on citizen involvement and those which concentrate on a professionalization of police officers and institutions, and to reflect on the possibilities that these might improve municipal performance in public security.

Of course, it is not necessary to “choose” between the two strategies, at least in theory. There is no logical reason that community policing and police professionalization programs cannot complement one another. However, it is important not to lose sight of the very real scarcity of resources at the municipal level in Mexico, and the multiple pressing demands for their use.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, it makes some sense that the administrations in this study each concentrated on only one strategy in order to reach concrete results for which they could take credit. To

<sup>9</sup>By way of rough comparison, according to the latest available data, Naucalpan's 1996 budget provided for spending equivalent to about US\$75 per capita while city and county governments in the United States spent an average of US\$2,732 per capita in 1992-93 (Rowland 1997).

better understand this point, and to begin to identify the obstacles and options for municipal public security policy more generally, this paper now turns to the discussion of several key aspects of the nature of public security, particularly within Mexico's current municipal reality.

### ***Challenges to local public security policies***

It would be easy to find fault with the strategies for public security implemented by the Jacob and the Durán Administrations, even without reference to solid data on crime rates or residents' fear of crime. However, criticisms of these programs seem less useful than does a careful look at the specific obstacles facing this Mexican municipality in designing and implementing effective public security policies. This section of the paper considers challenges to local public security programs arising from the nature of public security as a relatively "pure" public good, as well as those challenges which are related to the particular limitations on Mexican municipal governments imposed by law and by political practice. This, I argue, is a useful exercise because it helps more clearly define what sort of actions are needed to improve public security, as well as which public actors are best-suited for carrying them out.

### ***Public goods problems in local public security***

Some of the problems encountered in the efforts to improve public security in Naucalpan are almost inevitable results of the nature of this public good. Basically, public security provision—like other public goods—is complicated by three kinds of inherent problems: those of non-exclusion ("free-riders"), those related to financing these services, and those of spatial externalities, whether positive or negative (sometimes referred to as cost/benefit spillover).

#### **Non-exclusion**

Problems related to the non-exclusive nature of public security can be seen especially clearly in public security programs based on neighborhood policing or neighborhood watches, like those of the Jacob administration. The problem is essentially that there is no way to exclude the benefits of these programs from individual households, even if they do not participate in sharing the costs. The non-divisible aspect of public security means that each residence (or firm) faces a disincentive to spend its own personal or financial resources in these programs. The solution to "free-riding" problems, according to public economics theory, is for government to take charge of provision, thereby ensuring that the efficient level of

this service is produced—but of course, such a strategy contradicts the very idea of citizen involvement in public security.

So it is not surprising that many of the people interviewed about the neighborhood policing strategies of the Jacob administration agreed that a major problem encountered in these efforts was precisely the difficulty in “enforcing” participation by neighborhood residents. Indeed, the mayor himself admitted that in practice, the transfer of part of the responsibility for public security to neighborhood groups presented special difficulties in low-income neighborhoods, where free time and organizational capacity to dedicate to such efforts is at a premium.

In other words, the attempts at “community policing” by the Jacob Administration ran headlong into some of the very problems we might expect in the provision of a public good. Because these programs were dismantled soon after they were implemented, we have no way of knowing whether their kinks eventually would have been worked out. However, the identification of two important constraints on community policing efforts—reluctance by neighborhood residents to commit to such programs, and simple incapacity to organize neighborhood groups in many low-income communities—suggests that such strategies will require extensive and well-trained support from public officials if they are to succeed.

Here, of course, the assumption that the local government is capable of assuming these tasks is problematic, and it is precisely on this question that the Durán Administration based its approach to Naucalpan’s public security problems. Rather than attacking the real problem of public security, according to this logic, Jacob’s community policing policies avoided the more difficult task of improving government.

### Financing public goods

The non-exclusive nature of urban public security also has implications for local public finance. In contrast to some other local services, like water provision or garbage collection, in which user fees may cover the costs of provision, public security inevitably depends on a subsidy from the general budget. Unfortunately, an analysis of the financing of public security in the two municipal administrations considered in this study was impossible: neither made budgets available for research purposes.

Some observations based on broader aspects of municipal finance in Mexico, however, are pertinent. The reforms to Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution in 1983 were designed in part to make available enough financial resources for the municipal level of government to offer effective public security, among other local services. Unfortunately, for reasons of legal, political, and administrative nature, these Constitutional reforms have not achieved their goals. Even when municipalities have successfully taken over the provision of local services, the constant struggle for the financial resources needed to attend to the variety of urgent local public service demands—as well as the effort necessary to find and train

capable local administrators—has limited the achievements of municipal governments (Cabrero 1996, Guillén 1996, Rowland 1997, Ziccardi 1995).

One of the ways often recommended to get around the severe limits of local public finances in developing countries is sub-contracting or privatization. This makes sense for some local services, although it should be noted that Mexican municipalities have had mixed results with such efforts (Cabrero and García del Castillo 1994; Conde 1996; García del Castillo 1996; Hernández Torres 1994). On the other hand, in the provision of public security there are few aspects for which user fees can be charged, so it is difficult to imagine how these services might be privatized or otherwise carried out at the municipal level by agents more efficient than local government.

It should be noted, however, that many neighborhoods in Naucalpan and elsewhere in Mexico have taken matters into their own hands, contracting private security forces to restrict traffic through local streets and keep an eye out for unusual behavior. How these neighborhood groups avoid free-rider problems is not clear; one possibility is that some neighborhood organizations enjoy much higher credibility than does local government, and thus residents are more willing to invest in them.

Still, the private financing—and high cost—of these efforts is betrayed by the fact that they exist only in relatively wealthy neighborhoods. In addition, while such arrangements may be effective at improving public security in small areas (and just how effective is still unknown), the feasibility of their application at the level of an entire municipality is questionable, only partly because such “privatization” of public security is forbidden by law in the State of México (Estado de México 1985 and 1993). In more theoretical terms, the element of coercion implicit in public security is generally agreed to be appropriate only for the state. For this reason, the large and growing number of private security forces which have sprung up in Mexico in the past few years to offer protection to banks, businesses and individuals, have not been used for broader tasks of public order or public security.

### Spatial elements of public security

The problem of spatial externalities (or cost/benefit spillouts) in public goods can be defined as those benefits (or costs) of a particular policy which are not “captured” or “confined” to the jurisdiction which selected this policy. In this context, public security is usually not considered a public good with much potential for spatial externalities (Shah 1994). However, a municipality within an urban area is arguably a different case: if it manages to lower the incidence of crimes against property, for example, this would also tend to affect the crime rates of neighboring municipalities, although whether these effects would be positive or negative is open to debate. The answer depends on whether effective municipal policies manage to truly lower crime rates across a larger region (a metropolitan area, for example) or whether they simply displace a constant number of crimes to neighboring jurisdictions.

To answer this question, we would need to confront some sticky issues of measurement and of multi-collinearity, some of which were discussed in the section on methodology, and which are unlikely to yield satisfying conclusions for Naucalpan's case with the available data. However, the opposite effect—that the proliferation of crimes in a spatial area (municipality or neighborhood) contributes to a rise the rates of crime in neighboring areas as well—certainly seems credible. This is, essentially, the “broken window effect,” a phrase which refers to the phenomenon of a building which has no problems until one of its windows is broken. If this window is not quickly repaired, it is likely that the other windows will soon be broken as well.

As similar rationale underlies theories which suggest that disorder in a neighborhood (whether “physical,” like abandoned buildings and accumulated garbage, or “social,” like prostitution, public drinking, and graffiti) leads to a spiral of decline which includes increasing crime rates (Skogan 1990). This theory is especially interesting in the Mexican context, given that on the one hand, the scope of municipal policing is limited precisely to the maintenance of public order, but that on the other hand, the majority of Mexico's urban areas are undeniably disorderly. However, it is worth noting that neither of the two municipal administration in Naucalpan sought to follow a rigorous program of control of neighborhood disorder. This is most likely because of powerful political interests behind such disorder, particularly ambulant vendors and public transit operators. In addition, Mexican society has shown little tolerance for municipal governments which attempt to sanction certain types of public behavior, as several PAN municipal governments in the northern part of the country have discovered in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

Public economics theory suggests that the solution to problems of spatial externalities, such as the urban public security problems described here, is to “internalize” costs or benefits by charging a higher level of government with the task. This should ensure the matching of costs with benefits so that the efficient level of service is provided. In some sense, this appears to be happening both in the State of Mexico and in other states (see for example Regalado 1998). So strong has public and media outcry about public insecurity become in the past few years that states have felt compelled to take action under their Constitutional mandate of providing for the integrity and rights of persons and businesses within their jurisdictions. Since José Luis Durán took office in Naucalpan, the police forces of the State of México have become more active within the municipality, especially along busy thoroughfares. In addition, a program for community policing sponsored by the state has been promoted within the municipality.

Unfortunately, these state actions have been completely uncoordinated with the municipal administration. This points up one of the problems in Mexico with

<sup>10</sup> In 1995 and 1996, several efforts to criminalize “objectionable” dress and physical contact in public, as well as to ban billboards advertising WonderBra, met with widespread derision in the national press, and prompted the party's central organization to announce that these were not official policies.

assigning what are ostensibly local tasks to higher authorities. Although in many countries the establishment of mechanisms of cooperation between the security forces of local and state jurisdictions are feasible, the lack of both institutionalized relationships and extra-institutional confidence, combined with constant, highly polarized partisan battles among these levels, continues to complicate matters in this country. This suggests, once again, that standard prescriptions for battling public good problems are not sufficient in Mexico's current political atmosphere.

### *Constraints on Mexican municipalities*

The review of the programs of the Jacob and Durán Administrations also helps identify a number of problems which go beyond the public goods complications posed by local public security itself, and stem instead from the practice of municipal government in Mexico.

First, although budgets for public security efforts could not be analyzed in detail, it is likely that the lack of local resources which could be dedicated to public security has limited the extent to which either the community policing or the police professionalization strategies could be undertaken. Of course, the director of any program will insist that more money would resolve any shortcomings, but in the case of public security in Mexico, low-paid, uninsured police officers are expected to combat criminals who are much better armed, informed, organized and probably remunerated. In addition, public security must compete with such basic local tasks as water provision and garbage collection for a share of local budgets, so the tiny amounts of money available certainly contribute to the problem. Indeed, so grave is the problem of local resources for public security that a special fund was set up during the Jacob Administration to receive private contributions for bullets, squad cars, and other basic necessities, as well as for life insurance policies for officers (Ayuntamiento de Naucalpan 1994b).

A second administrative problem in local public security is closely related to the first. Lack of attention in the past, as well as lack of funds currently, has led to serious deficiencies in expertise among administrative officials about possible strategies to combat public insecurity. Whatever knowledge is generated by a particular administration is generally not shared with officials of other municipalities or subsequent administrations, and institutional learning in public security and policing is continually stunted.

It is also important to take into account the degree to which corruption and impunity reign within police organizations, in part for the reasons noted above. A harrowing study by two sociologists, one of whom entered and attended the municipal police academy of Naucalpan *incognito* during the Jacob administration, documents the extent to which aspiring police officers are co-opted into a system which is corrupt from the top down, and over which civilian control is nominal (Arteaga and López Rivera 1998). Until this culture of corruption can be overcome, hopes for improved public security are slim.

A final constraint on the local level in its fight public insecurity is related to the institutional design of municipalities. The lack of continuity in municipal programs has a long history as an element of Mexican government, and is present even where political control is maintained by the same political party over several administrations. Essentially, all established programs and most municipal personnel, including the chief of police, are replaced with every triennial change of municipal administration. Indeed, the incentive system at the municipal level in Mexico encourages a municipal president to develop new programs rather than continuing or improving existing ones, particularly because the terms of municipal office are a brief three years, and re-election is prohibited (Fagen and Tuohy 1972, Guillén 1996). In this context, there is an inherent difficulty in the development and implementation of programs which require long periods of time to bring results.

This problem is accentuated by the current character of political competition in Mexico. When local administrations are turned over from one party to another, as happened in Naucalpan during the administrations studied, there is no political benefit for the incoming municipal president to continue programs begun under the previous administration, even if these programs seem appropriate. Current levels of partisan polarization make it more politically fruitful for a municipal president to attempt to differentiate all of his or her policy strategies from those undertaken under the previous administration.

Such short-term perspective is especially problematic in public security because many aspects of this service are necessarily long-term, whether the strategy chosen is professionalization or community policing. It will be years, for example, before results from changes in the training of police officers will become apparent, since incoming officers represent only a small portion of the total force. Similarly, the “culture” of neighborhood watch—as well as an end to citizen complicity in police corruption—is likely to develop over a span of many years, not within a single three-year municipal administration. But constant changes in personnel and policy make any results of effective policy difficult to perceive, let alone evaluate and fine-tune.

### ***The scope for improvement in local public security***

As the discussion above illustrates, the intrinsic difficulties in the provision of public security—its non-exclusive nature, the need for public subsidies to finance it, and the potential for spatial externalities—are sticky enough to befuddle even a relatively sophisticated local administration. To make matters worse, the possibility of municipal administrations in Mexico and many other developing countries to implement effective policies to address these problems is limited by other factors as well, factors which are essentially beyond municipal control. Indeed, the most obvious external factor in public security is that most public security problems neither begin with, nor are limited to, the local level of government. As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, many observers suggest that the blame for

the wave of crime sweeping Mexico and other Latin America countries lies in the profound changes in the economy, in political systems, and in social structures.

If this is the case, we should recognize that municipalities are destined to be able to make only marginal changes in the improvement of public security, or in allowing it to degenerate (a similar argument is made by Guillén 1996). Beyond arguing for changes in national-level economic, political and social policies—and here, of course, there is much dispute about what would be the “correct” policies to abate crime, let alone to address other social problems—there is little an individual municipality can do to dramatically improve public security in its jurisdiction.

Still, as I have argued throughout this paper, there is some scope for improvement at the municipal level, and a political necessity for municipal administrations to take action in the face of widespread concern about public insecurity. The recommendations presented here for improving local programs can be usefully divided into two categories: the short-term strategies which a municipal administration could implement on its own, and the longer-term systemic changes which require the intervention of higher levels of government. In other words, the argument here is that local public security is not simply a municipal affair. Rather, effective municipal policy in public security necessarily involves action at all three levels of government.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Municipal strategies for public security: local public security plans*

To summarize, the key problems with local policies for public security in Mexico which have been identified in this paper include those related to its nature as a public good, as well as severely limited municipal resources, lack of administrative expertise in public security issues, entrenched corruption, lack of policy continuity, and highly partisan strategies for municipal administration. What might municipal administrations do to begin to confront this rather intimidating list of problems? I suggest that their efforts must begin with public security plans.<sup>12</sup>

A plan will not solve all the problems that municipal administrations face in public security, but it will establish the bases from which to begin to combat many of these problems in direct and indirect ways. The most useful aspects of a municipal public security plan would arise from its potential effects on the

<sup>11</sup> The *Programa Nacional de Seguridad Pública 1995-2000* (National Public Security Program) is essentially in agreement with this assessment, but its proposals are oriented toward actions at the federal level, rather than possible municipal strategies for public security.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that in Mexico most plans (for national development, municipal development, urban areas, local environmental protection, etc. ) are formal exercises which are ordered by law and usually turn out to be of little use in day-to-day decision-making (Azuela 1994, Aguilar 1987, Iracheta 1997). I am not suggesting that public security plans be added to this list of legal requisites. Rather, these plans could be carried out on the initiative of local leaders as a strictly local exercise, which would help ensure their relevance to local policy processes.



continuity of policy across administrations and the ability to undertake long-term projects, fine-tuning their results over time. For this to come about, the plan must arise from a discussion and consensus on a package of local public security programs among those who remain in the municipality for the longer term: local residents and local businesses.

The idea behind this strategy of local public security, then, is not so much to support a particular program, but rather to encourage residents and local businesses to take an active interest in the long-term project of municipal public security, choosing the programs which seem appropriate for their locality. A public security plan could also help overcome the problem of partisan polarization of municipal policy, since once a public constituency is built for a plan, it will no longer be part of the partisan political game. An additional benefit of a multi-year plan for local public security is to avoid the need for each new municipal administration to essentially start from zero in its policy approach.

The ultimate success of a planning process, of course, depends on whether citizens participate in the development of priorities and strategies, and are sufficiently committed to the plan to make sure that municipal administrations stick to it. Given the non-exclusive nature of public security and the general distrust of government initiatives, as discussed above, how do we know that citizens would take part in this process?

It is clear that Mexicans have become increasingly active in political life in the past decade. We have some evidence of this in Naucalpan from the Jacob Administration, which achieved a degree of citizen participation with its neighborhood watch program. The enthusiasm and willingness to continue efforts at community policing under the State government after the Durán administration ended these programs suggests that these types of efforts to involve local residents present a promising option for local administrators. Of course, the total number of citizens in Naucalpan who were ever involved with these programs is a very small percentage of municipal population, and without doubt many residents (especially in low-income neighborhoods) knew nothing of its existence. In addition, the support of Naucalpan's powerful business sector was not more than lukewarm under Jacob's administration.

However, the advantage of a municipal plan for public security over neighborhood programs like those attempted under Jacob's Administration in terms of non-exclusion is that the effects of non-participation by a small number of households or firms is lessened. The percentage of residents who participate in the municipal-wide planning process can be much lower without severely affecting the incentives of participants. In addition, participation in municipal public security planning can be as simple as making a phone call or signing a petition. It does not necessarily present as high a personal cost as a sustained program of community policing, nor does it require the same capacity for neighborhood organization.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Nor, it is important to concede, do we expect the same kinds of benefits from municipal public security planning as from community policing: the goals are simply different.

Still, it should be emphasized that public security planning remains a theoretical proposal which would need to be tested in practice. Particular attention should be paid to whether public security is somehow different from other types of local public services in terms of peoples' willingness to get involved in policy design and implementation.

The precise content of these local public security plans, of course, would vary according to local conditions and the priorities of local residents. However, two standard elements should be encouraged: generation of financial support for public security efforts, and a strategy for improving working conditions of police officers. The options for increasing financial support for public security are limited both by the public goods nature of the task and by the small budgets of municipal governments in Mexico, as has been described throughout this paper. Planning, however, opens financial possibilities by ensuring that the money which is dedicated to public security will be used in a coherent and systematic way. The waste associated, for example, with the painting and re-painting of patrol cars with each change of municipal administration, will be eliminated. In addition, the identification of priorities and the methods to reach these goals may open possibilities for joint financing with state and federal levels of government of aspects of local public security programs, as suggested in the National Public Security Program, 1995-2000.

Finally, it is unlikely that much progress in public security can be made without attention to police officers and their working conditions; steps toward this goal should be delineated in local public security plans. Even though it is easy, and somewhat correct, to characterize Mexican police officers as corrupt and inept, the real danger and difficulty of their work conditions needs to be considered. Efforts to improve the performance of officers may be as simple as the provision of life insurance policies and uniforms (rather than forcing officers to spend their own money on these), protection from corrupt supervisors or threats of legal action from citizens (through the creation of an ombudsman and a legal team), and the training of officers in more effective interactions with citizens (through improvements in local police academies). To the extent that these steps can contribute to the construction of a sense of professional service among the police corps, municipal resources for public security will be better spent.

#### *Reforms at state and federal levels*

It is unrealistic to expect that some of the systemic changes which would most contribute to the ability of municipalities to improve public security will come about any time soon. This is true, for example, of Constitutional changes which would lengthen municipal terms of office or allow for re-election. Nor is the highly partisan approach to politics and public policy at all levels of government in Mexico likely to diminish in the short run. Until such changes do come about, there are a number of

other steps which concerned state and federal administrations could undertake to contribute to municipal efforts at public security.

The most obvious action by higher levels of government to help municipalities would be to provide more money to municipalities for this purpose. This, in turn, would require more explicit recognition of the role of municipalities in this task, a clear contrast to the National Public Security Program 1995-2000, which focuses more on federal and state strategies to attack crime than the potential for municipal action in public security. Indeed, in late 1998, another federal initiative—the creation of a federal preventative police force—has underlined the unwillingness of higher authorities to make over 400,000 existing preventative police at the municipal level more effective.

However, the change in the distribution of federal funds in 1998 has made some additional resources available directly to municipal governments through a new budget item, *Ramo 33*. While it is too early for a comprehensive study of the use to which municipalities have put these resources, many indeed appear to be dedicating these funds to police equipment, particularly new patrol vehicles.<sup>14</sup> Of course, there is some question over whether municipalities are capable of using these resources in efficient ways, a concern that effective planning processes—as outlined above—might help alleviate.

Apart from the provision of additional resources, state and federal administrations could also help municipalities overcome some of their limitations by promoting intergovernmental cooperation in the provision of public security. Constitutional reforms to Article 21 in 1994 specifically mandated joint efforts in public security, but in practice, as noted in the case of Naucalpan, these efforts have been limited, and tend to focus on the needs and potential of the states rather than the municipalities. Currently, the duplication and lack of coordination among state and municipal police forces represents an inexcusable waste of public resources, especially since crime rates continue to surge. Experiences with metropolitan-level policing in Mexico have not been particularly favorable, and Ramírez Sáiz (1998) points out that such joint police forces were disbanded in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Zone after unsuccessful experiences in the 1980s. Most noteworthy for the purposes of this paper among the problems encountered in Guadalajara's inter-municipal police force are reports that the central city received far more attention from this force than did the other adjoining municipalities. This bodes ill for any potential gain for municipalities like Naucalpan if such a scheme were attempted in the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone.

Still, without actually integrating police forces, states and the federal government can develop programs which take advantage of police corps at the various levels and with various specializations. State governments, in particular, should take responsibility for the task of encouraging cooperation with and among

<sup>14</sup> For example, the number of brand new full-sized pick-up trucks used for public security which have appeared in rural areas in the past year presents an impressive contrast to the general deterioration of public facilities in these regions.

municipalities within their jurisdictions by means of financial incentives and strategies which reward long-term perspectives. However, while public security at all levels remains subordinated to partisan political battles, we cannot expect much progress.

Finally, municipal efforts to de-politicize public security and provide more continuity in local policies would be aided by changing the job of chief of municipal public security from a political appointment to a civil service, professional post, at least in the urban municipalities where crime problems are most serious. This change would follow the practice of many large cities in other countries, but most likely would need to be undertaken by state governments, at the urging of the federal level in Mexico. While the country has almost no tradition of career civil service, especially at the municipal level, the urgency of the situation of public security may make a transition in this direction more feasible. Of course, the common control mechanisms over these police chiefs—such as citizen review panels which have the power to dismiss the chief—would be crucial to avoiding the danger of corruption in these posts, and special attention should be paid to the problems of making such mechanisms effective in Mexico in particular.

At the very least, efforts should be made to de-link the naming of police chiefs from the triennial political battles for municipal president. The idea is that instead of police chiefs being named by each municipal president as a member of his or her cabinet, the post would be more permanent, with a professional contract approved by the municipal president and the municipal council (*cabildo*) for a limited period which does not coincide with local elections.<sup>15</sup> This would allow the community to come to know the head of local public security as a public official unassociated with party politics, while allowing this official to get to know local problems and particularities in a more profound way. It would also open a space of time in which public security plans and programs could truly be developed, implemented, evaluated and fine-tuned.

### *A research agenda*

As this paper makes clear, what we know about local public security policy in Mexico (and by extension, other developing countries) is dwarfed by the growing scale of the problem. To conclude this paper, I present a brief agenda for additional research on the topic, emphasizing the key “unknowns” encountered in this preliminary effort.

Part of the reason that research in local public security remains tentative in Mexico is the very real lack of reliable data on the issue. In other words, a first step

<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the problem with police chiefs, at least in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Zone, is not that they remain in their posts too long, but that their rotation (because of promotion or dismissal) is too frequent. Ramírez Sáiz (1998) reports that three of the four municipalities in this metropolitan zone had three police chiefs from 1995 to 1996.

in improving public security research (and proposals for policy change) is to focus on the generation of information, especially basic indicators on public insecurity. While this is most likely a job for public officials, steady pressure by researchers may help speed the generation of more and better data.

Second, researchers can have a direct effect in the generation and diffusion of information of a more qualitative type. For example, Which policies have worked (or not) in Mexican municipalities, and in other countries? How have these policies overcome the problems discussed in this paper? How much do the alternative approaches cost? Is it necessary to follow the path of the US and Western Europe in first concentrating on police professionalization, and then moving on to community policing, or can these be developed at the same time? These are questions which local authorities and citizens alike must consider as they go about designing local approaches to public security, but local governments in Mexico and elsewhere have very few ways to gather such information. Here, researchers can play a much more active and useful role in evaluating the various municipal programs and making their findings known.

Additional themes for research include the limits and potential of private security forces in Mexico, the scope for intergovernmental cooperation, willingness of citizens to participate in public security efforts, and the feasibility of civil police chiefs. More theoretical topics include the extent of spatial externalities of public security in urban areas, as well as an evaluation of the potential for a municipal approach to public security which is based on controlling levels of public disorder, as laid out by Skogan (1990).

Finally, the potential for public security measures, especially policing, to be used as tools of political repression are inevitable and need to be addressed in a systematic way. Researchers have an obligation to consider ways to avoid a situation in which public concern about crime ends up providing a pretext for slowing the progress toward democracy and civil rights in Mexico and other parts of the developing world.

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