
Violent Subcultures and crime in Mexico

Dr. Jerjes Izcoatl Aguirre Ochoa (corresponding author)

Professor at Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo.
Institute of Economics.
Morelia, Michoacán, México
Address: Brasilia # 234. Lomas de las Americas Norte. Zip Code 58254
Morelia, Michoacán, México
E-mail: jerjes_99@yahoo.com

Dra. Perla Barbosa Muñoz

Professor at Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo.
Universidad Michoacana School of Law
Morelia, Michoacán, México
Address: Brasilia # 234. Lomas de las Américas Norte. Zip Code 58254
Morelia, Michoacán, México
E-mail: perla_abm@hotmail.com

Abstract: *The paper analyzes, from a qualitative analysis, the existence of a subculture of violence in Mexico from the study of five municipalities located in one of the most violent areas of the country. It is observed that there is a complex process of social acceptance of crime as standard of behavior. The results of the investigation demonstrate the existence of a learning process about behaviors and negotiation around awful matters since childhood and youth of the people interviewed. With the passage of time, the law presents itself as a mere reference that does not imply its obligatory obeisance. This learning process of informal coexistence constitutes an element of the regional ethnic identity. This is an interesting aspect that could partially explain the situation of violence of many other zones in Mexico where violence is prevalent.*

Keywords: *Crime, Mexico, Violence Subcultures*

1. Introduction

During the last years Mexico has turned into a focus of international attention due to the wave of violence that the country is experiencing. Mexico's international image corresponds more to that of a stable nation and not with that of a violent state in an out-of-control situation. According to

the magazine Proceso (2013), since the federal government initiated its actions against crime in 2006, more than 70,000 deaths have occurred. This figure surpasses the figure of the United States military death toll in the Gulf War and the Iraq invasion. Mexico's violent situation has taken a dramatic turn towards daily images of deaths, beheadings, kidnapping and a novel use of social media as a form of communication to send diverse messages among different criminal groups. This situation has led the world to question the validity of the democratic path of the country (Malone, 2009).

The described results, in terms of the number of deaths and the continuing violence, demonstrate the need for a change in paradigm of attention paid to the problem of crime in Mexico as part of a wider understanding of the phenomena of crime. The violence in Mexico is the result of a complex mix of different factors that run from a situation of profound corruption at the local, state and federal government levels combined with the emergence of criminal groups that have disputed new routes for drug trafficking, a standstill economic situation, and a democratic change that has not achieved a better quality of life for the population. Into this cocktail add the profound weaknesses of the institutions of Mexican homeland security and the justice department. In general, the Mexican government's and the Homeland Security agents of the United States' responses have been centered on the strengthening of the Mexican police and security forces. Little has been done to strengthen the democratic institutions of the country, which has exacerbated a lack of legitimacy of the Mexican government and of its police forces. As a result, even less has been done to promote understanding about the acceptance of crime as an accepted social norm in Mexico.

The situation of violence in Mexico requires an adequate conceptualization that goes beyond academic discussions (Williams, 2010). A greater understanding would permit appropriate government proposals to develop which would in turn diminish the existing level of violence and would as a result, leave the economical and international relations with the US and Latin America free from violent backwash.

In this context, this article is based on other existing factors that have caused the rising crime rate in Mexico. One of these factors has been seldom studied nor recognized: the acceptance of criminal behavior as a social norm of coexistence. For years, in the face of the illegitimacy of the Mexican State and the police forces, Mexican society has tolerated minor crimes as long as these have not interfered nor threatened the state or police forces' integrity, thus constituting a socially-accepted norm (Kahan, 1997).

Petty theft, urban and traffic infractions, tolerance of small scams and acts of corruption of public service officials are commonly accepted in Mexico. Since infancy, Mexicans are culturally educated in a learning context of norms and behaviors that emphasize informal and personal relationships to avoid obeying the written norms, laws and rules. Lawful infractions, unofficial payments to authorities, and the use of personal contacts to jump over an imposed chain of authority, the obtaining of government jobs by means of friends, or the negotiation of any issue through informal means are normal situations in Mexico and their acceptance has been learned since childhood.

In the presence of institutional decomposition and environment in which personal acceptance of minor crimes is tolerated, the magnitude of criminal acts has escalated to greater levels to include extortion and homicide. The current brutality and ferocity of the crimes committed in Mexico is the result of a gradual process of increase in levels of violence that have been socially tolerated from the level of less severe crimes. This social acceptance has derived from the conformity of a culture of criminal convenience that exists and has been seldom studied.

In this context, this article analyzes the culture of violence in Mexico, studying the specific case of the region of "Tierra Caliente" (Hot Land) in Michoacán, Mexico. Upon analyzing the existence of the complex culture of violence found in this region of Michoacán, tendencies in learned social behaviors come to the surface in the use of force and the lack of respect towards the law as well as the manner in which these tendencies have been transmitted to generate a situation of social acceptance of violence and a breach of law

and order as being socially acceptable ways of acting. This situation is being reproduced in other regions and zones of the country where high levels of violence and crime are on the rise.

The existence of a deep criminal culture makes it difficult for the government to 'fight crime' with the use of military or police force. Any analysis should take structural factors into account, such as poverty and inequality, and add them to the institutional weakness of the police enforcement and justice system along with cultural factors seldom studied as additional elements in order to get a more complete picture of crime in Mexico. Only taking everything into account can the situation of violence in this zone of Mexico be described more clearly and the grave insecurity be understood

2. Theoretical Framework

Different theoretical perspectives exist which can help to understand the situation of crime in Mexico. Firstly, crime can be understood from the perspective of economic deterrence. People act rationally to maximize their utility, and from this perspective the utility gained by committing small crimes is greater than the loss of utility that would be gained if the law were applied (Raymond, 2010). The majority of the justice systems worldwide are based on this perspective. In this respect, the Mexican state and the region of Tierra Caliente shows a clearly inefficient dissuasion to stop criminal activity operating on the function of punishing crime. According to the Rule of law index (2010), Mexico comes in 34th place regarding its effectiveness in its judicial system. Only one out of 100 crimes committed reach a convicting sentence. In Mexico, it is very possible to commit a crime and get away with it, and even more so in Tierra Caliente.

However, the inefficiency of the judicial sector in Mexico is not a recent phenomenon, and has been around for decades. Crime and corruption in the judicial system have been present since the colonial times in Mexico (Morris, 1991). That is why the explanation of a new wave of violence that scourges the country and Michoacán in particular has

no substantial foundation in blaming the lacks of the judicial system.

Another explanation has been offered that blames the institutional changes that Mexico has undergone since 2000 by having the hegemonial political party lose the presidency after 60 years and the changes in power that happened as a result of this shift to multi-party rule (Aguirre, 2013). In the last 20 years, Mexico has overcome a lack of democracy, characterized by the existence of a hegemonic party that held all the political power, the PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party); a president with constitutional and meta-constitutional powers, with authority over social, union and business organizations; and the legislative and judicial subordinated under his command.

With the political transition at the end of the 1990's, a new institutional arrangement was set in place based on free elections, citizen-run electoral institutions, and a great independence from the legislative and judicial powers. The police forces of Mexico, besides being diverse, make up the institution most repudiated by the Mexican people. For many citizens, the first contact they have with government institutions is when the police extorts them. The democratic change in Mexico has still not been transferred into the legitimacy that is needed for the state institutions to apply the law and reduce the levels of crime.

Another explanation of the crime in Tierra Caliente and in Mexico in general can be blamed on determining societal structures such as inequality, which is a common variable used to explain crime (Blau and Blau 1982; Pratt and Godsey 2003) or as poverty, which has formed a positive correlation with crime (Messner, 1987; Warner & Rountre, 1997). Nevertheless, poverty and inequality have always been present in the region known as Tierra Caliente and has even been decreasing in the last 10 years.

The theoretical points mentioned above can partially explain the situation of violence and crime in the region of Tierra Caliente in Michoacan. However, several factors characterize the types of crime in this region in Mexico. The

use of extreme violence such as beheadings, public beatings, and the use of printed messages on cadavers appear as criminal acts intimately tied to a culture of violence that has existed in the region and now has become more prevalent. The coexistence of local society with criminal groups and the establishment of tacit agreements of coexistence between criminal groups and society in general are characteristics which stand out in the case of Michoacan.

Taylor (1871) was one of the first authors to define culture. According to Taylor, culture refers to a whole complex of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and whatever skills and habits that are acquired by man as a member of society. The theory of subculture is a set of theories that sustains that certain groups or subcultures in society have morals and attitudes that encourage crime and violence (Fischer, 1995; Miller, 1958). The theory of subculture emerged from the work of the School of Chicago on street gangs and developed through the School of Symbolic interaction as a set of theories that maintain that certain groups or subcultures of society have morals and attitudes that encourage crime and violence.

According to Douglas (1982), some of the subcultures' characteristics are that they are identifiable parts of society in general; and as part of society they are the object of at least some its norms and laws. As groups with identifiable differences from society in general, they have their own code of conduct for members, and these function as units with some abilities to be able to act in certain ways that separate them from society in general.

Cohen (1955) showed that children and workers of lower classes place more value on the success achieved by the dominant culture. However, owing to a lack of education and only jobs with low pay within their reach, the lower classes have few possibilities of achieving what they view as success. This gives place to a situation of frustration upon being in the inferior part of the social structure with few means of obtaining a higher social status. Cohen put forth the idea that therefore, these people reject the norms and values imposed by society and substitute them with the norms and

values of a delinquent subcultural. In this subculture children can obtain success because the social group has different norms and values than the rest of society and these are easily attainable.

Ferracuti and Wolfgang (1967) examined the themes of violence of a group of young people in the city of Philadelphia, and concluded that this group's violence was a culturally learned adaptation to confront the negative circumstances of life and that the lesson to be learned from these new imposed norms produced in the environment an increased amount of violence among other features.

The existence of an order of learning social behaviors that are different than the social norms established by law is a given. There is an elaborate learning process involved in learning violence, as shown by the classic study of gangs in the US, in which related behaviors such as corruption become a necessary skill to learn in order to subsist on a daily basis. In the case of Mexico, it is not the learning of the limits of physical violence as in the classic studies of subculture theory, but the learning of a whole set of informal norms that regulate social relations and which derive from the tacit acceptance of criminal activity as a regulatory means of establishing coexistence.

In the case of Mexico and especially of Michoacán, a large cultural and historical tradition has existed based on the regulation of social relationships, social circumstances, and informal relations, which are not governed by law but by custom. Thus, members of society learn the value of extortion, the value of having protection from organized groups, and the value of having personal contacts to help solve personal, economical, social or political disputes. Society members learn the value and usefulness of the use of force in its different applications. Generation after generation has learned the value of corruption and informal practices over following the established rules, laws and regulations as a theoretical regulator which exists but few times gets put into practice.

In isolated zones in Mexico like Tierra Caliente, where there has always been a historical lack of social relations by law, the interactions in social learning processes develop through mechanisms which are distinct from those imposed by law in order to preserve a daily code of conduct for survival.

Theories of Social Learning can be understood in general terms as a social focus, showing behavior which emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between the determined cognition, conducts and environments of human behavior (Bandura, 1977). This perspective affirms that people learn in social contexts. As social beings, humans, and especially children, learn from their environment and seek the acceptance of society by learning through role models. This vision affirms that social behavior (whatever type of behavior that is demonstrated is social) is learned principally through observation and imitation of the actions of others. Social behavior is also influenced through being rewarded or punished through these actions.

The learning theory of social modeling is a general theory of delinquency and crime and has been used in investigations to explain a wide range of criminal behaviors.

According to Ackers (1988):

“The probability that persons will engage in criminal and deviant behaviour is increased and the probability of their conforming to the norm is decreased when they differentially associate with others who commit criminal behavior and espouse definitions favorable to it, are relatively more exposed in-person or symbolically to salient criminal/deviant models, define it as desirable or justified in a situation discriminative for the behavior, and have received in the past and anticipate in the current or future situation relatively greater reward than punishment for the behavior (50).”

Two cultural facets are presented in this article: civic culture and intolerance towards crime. Civic culture deals with structural changes that accompany modernization, such as education and wealth, which in turn cause greater

social change that could facilitate democratic stability. Criminologists and sociologists have suggested that civic culture, through confidence and commitment, could be a strong factor to explain the reduction in violence. Rosenfeld, Messner, and Baumer (2010) argue that individuals with social capital are more prone to cooperate than to obtain collective goods. According to Putnam (1993), civic culture is composed of four categories: 1) civic participation; 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, confidence and tolerance, and 4) the social structures of cooperation.

On the other hand, intolerance of criminal behavior is defined in terms of individual variations in the beliefs about or rejection of violent behaviors. Anderson (1999) and Suttles (1968) show that the structural characteristics of determined zones delineate cultural orientation in the face of violence in these zones instead of suggesting cultural values that might come independently from the structure.

3. Referential Framework

Michoacan is located in the western part of the Mexican Republic and lies between the Lerma and the Balsas Rivers, and Chapala Lake and the Pacific Ocean. The state forms part of the Neovolcanic Axis and the Sierra Madre del Sur Mountain Range. The total territorial surface of the state is 59,928 square kilometers, which represents 3% of all of Mexico and the population is approximately 3,985,667 inhabitants. The state's geography is very similar to the Columbian orographic system, which facilitates the production of drugs (marihuana and synthetic drugs). Furthermore, the state is located almost in the geographical center of the country and has quick access to the two principal cities of the country, Mexico City and Guadalajara, as well as access to an industrial port city, Lázaro Cardenas, on the Pacific Ocean.

According to the United Nations Program of Development (PNUD, 2007), Michoacán is categorized as a state with a medium human development (IDH) with a level similar to Paraguay, San Vicente and the Grenadines. According to the

same report, there is plenty of inequality on a regional basis, which can be observed by comparing the different regions: the state capital and its outlying areas present the higher levels of lifestyle and the southern regions of the state, broken up by isolating mountain ranges, presents the lowest indices. The state population basically occupies the tertiary sector, which employs 37% of the population.

The region of the Tierra Caliente in Michoacan is comprised of the municipal seats of Nuevo Urecho, Paracuaro, Apatzingan, Mugica (Nueva Italia), La Huacana, Buenavista Tomatlan, Tepalcatepec, and Aguililla. The name Tierra Caliente comes from the hot climate and isolating mountains of the region. During years the region has suffered from geographical isolation, the extreme temperatures of the region and the lack of authority and interest of each government in turn. Thus, like other zones in the state of Michoacán, the phenomenon of outlaws developed, as shown by the criminal actions that have taken place for many years with the support of the local citizenry.

The principal criminal group in Michoacán originated in 2006. This group, which suffered a divisional split in 2010 causing it to become the most important organization in Michoacán, can be distinguished from other criminal groups in the country because it has an important social base and an interest in conserving its presence in society through its local social networks. This organization operates through separate cells that respond to a regional leader and are made up of members of the same community. This type of organization implicates a dynamic of social ties and intricate weaving among the economical, political, social and religious aspects of the community. Thus, the presence of these groups is tied up (to a certain point) with the conditions of coexistence and tolerance of community life in its many facets. This criminal group follows a written code of conduct that governs its internal behavioral code and its relation with society. In appearances with the news organizations, the leaders of these groups have manifested their interest in protecting their communities from other criminal organizations for the benefit of the community. They have made emphasis in their interwoven identity and belonging to

their local communities in Michoacán. This group is involved in social labors and auto-regulation of the community activities, and has even tried to create rites and ceremonies to initiate its members in the group's activities by emulating values and symbolisms of distinct religious groups tied to Christianity.

Drug trafficking is not this group's fundamental activity. These criminal group cells control commercial functions, mete out justice, and organize social activities that should be run by the state and local governmental institutions. The regulation of prices of agricultural products, the establishment of the harvest periods, mercantile payments, the payment of debts and local taxes, arbitration for misunderstandings and feuds, punishment for wife-beating husbands, punishment of thieves, and even social permits for festivals and religious events, work permits for tree-cutting and forest exploitation, and business and commercial dues are just some of the activities that these groups carry out.

In general, a common denominator of these activities is that they all fill in a breach that governmental institutions have left empty and which should be regulated by the Mexican State. With the lack of confidence and formality of governmental and public institutions, a multitude of extra-formal regulatory measures have been put into place to help regulate the coexistence of society. The Knights Templar group is an example of other groups that have stepped in to take the place of inefficient governing bodies. The institutionalization of payments to functionaries, the discretionary application of the law, the importance of political contacts and the family as a mediator of social coexistence are processes that Mexicans learn from an early age. In this sense, the emergence of social groups organized like the Knights Templar has found great acceptance among the communities that have had a long tradition of accepting outlaws among their midst (Vanderwood, 1984).

From the beginning, the communities of Tierra Caliente almost seemed to welcome the emergence of these groups from within their own community to establish norms and

order in the absence of the government. However, the intensification of quotas has begun to generate ill feelings among the communities and combined with the arrival of rival criminal groups, have given cause to form community guard corps that take on police work to protect members of the community from excessive payments and quotas. This reaction demonstrates another facet of the culture of violence in the form of self-defense of the communities in front of the lack of formal authority of governmental institutions to impose a state of human rights.

4. Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used in this investigation. The data came from 120 interviews in depth and observations that took place in the Tierra Caliente region during February 2012. Interviewing in depth is a qualitative instrument that permits the investigator to obtain information from the people interviewed that include a wide range of viewpoints. This in turn helps with the identification of details of study objectives that might not be identified using other methods of collection. These interviews are face-to-face meetings between the investigator and the informants and allow for the acceptance of different viewpoints regarding a determined event.

Three groups emerged from the people who were interviewed: those who were between the ages of 15 and 35, those between the ages of 36 and 55, and those who were 56 years of age and older. The stratification according to age permitted the investigation to reveal different characteristics according to age.

The selection of the people for interviewing was determined by the snowball effect. Providing for the safety of the interviewer, this stage of data collection was carried out with extreme precaution and care. Interviews with the inhabitants of the population of the region from Tierra Caliente took place in Morelia when they came on business to the state capital, as well as those interviews that took place in the municipal seats of the region. In general, the first round of interviews gave way to a second round of

interviews and so successively other interviews took place, with the investigator taking care to interview people of different ages with the objective of understanding how the culture of crime might vary with the passage of time.

The interviews lasted between one to four hours, and took place where people felt comfortable, such as people's homes or a small café or family style restaurant. They were recorded and a professional transcriber, AtlasTi, was used for analysis of content, thus permitting the adaptation of certain categories of codification from important parts of the transcripts and the comparison of similar portions of texts coded through the interviews. The phases of compilation and analysis were performed simultaneously in this project. The data from the interviews were mixed with observations that were made during the time the investigator lived in each municipal seat.

Furthermore, during the investigation, a focusing phenomenon developed by Creswell (1998) was applied to include the experiences of the author who had the opportunity to analyze the phenomena of insecurity in Michoacán by living it himself, through interactions with young people from different parts of the state, and by following the life events and occurrences of different actors involved in the investigation and in daily life, such as local political leaders, government functionaries, academicians and members of governmental offices tied to the judicial system in the state.

5. Results

The first basic category that was targeted in the investigation was to discover how much the interviewees knew about criminal behavior. In that respect, the majority of the people interviewed showed that law and order from the authorities had never existed in their regions. Many recurring comments and phrases appeared in the transcripts regarding corruption in municipal presidencies, municipal police forces, state forces and overall with anything to do with Mexican state authorities. The people interviewed did not have a single memory among them in which a legitimate

authority figure commanded confidence and acceptance by the community. In this context, the majority of the people showed that they had learned how to survive in the face of the absence of state laws and authorities, using informal mechanisms such as corruption and extortion payments to diverse functionaries.

The people interviewed demonstrated that they had learned how to act outside the law since their childhood. Different references abounded in the transcripts referring to the corruption among the teachers in primary and secondary school and the low level of academic education obtained. Moreover, the interviewees reported that it was common to see episodes of scholastic violence especially in the primary grade levels of basic education. Many people interviewed admitted having watched their parents pay extortion fees or express that the law did not exist in their communities and that the existence of the informal mechanisms of diverse types to solve problems or disputes was very common. One occurrence that was frequently mentioned was the importance of counting and depending on friends, social acquaintances and contacts in important places for giving a hand in obtaining permits, or getting bureaucratic work done which would otherwise take too long or even be denied to citizens without the aid of friends in high places. The value of these 'friends' is substantial and their 'friendship' is considered to be more important than the written laws or norms.

Regarding the police, the interviewees demonstrated that they were not only a bother and an annoyance for the citizenry, but they were also members of criminal groups. None of the people interviewed manifested having received support or aid from police forces when confronting a dangerous situation. On the contrary, the interviewees reported being threatened or blackmailed by the police. Many references appeared in the transcripts about the police force members being part of the same community and that they were not more distinguished or better behaved than other members of their communities, but that the opposite was true, that the most negative members of communities formed the local police forces.

In this point alone, the existing concordance stands out as mentioned by the interviewees when referring to quota payments to criminal groups, blackmail charges and bribes to diverse functionaries in order to get some type of benefit. It appears that extortion and bribery to authority figures has constituted a common learned social behavior and is repeated now with the new criminal groups. In some ways, it seems that bribery and extortion has gained certain legitimacy after being practiced for so many years officially in Mexico. According to the opinions expressed in the interviews, there did not seem to be much difference between paying a criminal group or paying the government.

The interviews of people from some municipal centers showed that criminal activities constituted a norm and way of life. For many, working in illicit activities is something normal that does not seem to cause consternation; working in one or another phase in the production of drugs, for instance, is simply just another job. There does not exist, especially among the younger people, any type of reflection about the social harm that could cause working in the traffic of drugs or some other illegal activity.

Other results that stand out from the interviews relates to the inefficiency of the State to provide basic services to its citizens. During many years, the local government, that of the municipalities, which are the closest to the people, demonstrated inefficiency to provide the constitutional obligations as described in Article 15 of the Mexican Constitution (potable water, drainage and sewers, water treatment and disposal of residual waters, public lighting, trash collections, transport and treatment, public markets and storage, public cemeteries, parks and gardens and public safety, to name a few). The obligation to provide public safety to citizens has been one of the gravest lacks in the majority of the municipalities of Mexico. The interviews show that municipal authorities have not provided public safety through the municipal police, and that this police force spends its time blackmailing the people through diverse manners. Therefore, since in the majority of cases the members of the municipal police force come from the same

community, the majority were not respected by the citizens nor by the local government.

An interesting fact demonstrates that during the first few years of the twenty-first century criminal groups emerged as a response to the need for public safety for citizens from the common crimes such as theft, robbery, and even rustling. At first, the communities accepted this emergence and imposition by the criminal groups, and accepted them as a group from the same community that set up some sort of public safety that the local government should have in place. In the municipalities selected for the interviews, the people interviewed manifested that armed groups had provided more public safety and clear rules to the communities than the corroded and corrupted tangled web of governmental jurisdiction of the Mexican State. The people interviewed showed that it was easier to recur to the 'bad guys' to complain about conjugal violence or to arrange for the payment of a debt than to recur to the government tribunal. Furthermore, the people showed that the presence of armed groups outside of the margin of the law had the effect of decreasing certain crimes such as kidnapping, rape, and even robberies and kidnapping from their houses of children.

Another important element is the opinion about the cruelty reached by criminal groups in their actions in the form of public demonstration of beheadings, hanging cadavers on bridges, and the exhibition of posters with messages to rivals. In this regard, the people interviewed coincided that the 'bad guys' or outlaws need to promote terror among the people, and that these actions were necessary to maintain their prestige to support their actions. These affirmations appear to coincide with what Dur (2011) showed: that criminal behavior is motivated by preoccupation with social status. In particular, Dur supposed that individuals in criminal subcultures worry about gaining a status of being strong and tough. Although some individuals differ about innate toughness, the reflection arose about the differences in physical condition and sensitivity to guilt.

In respect to civic culture and intolerance to crime, it was observed that the interviewees demonstrated a complete lack of confidence toward civic participation and social cooperation. Upon questioning about these concepts, it was observed that within the institution of the family certain cooperation existed, especially in the nucleus of the family where more solidarity was observed. In general, many of the older people interviewed remember a long period of lack of free democratic elections in Mexico. They recall that the municipal presidents, the deputies, senators and governors and even the president of the country were 'elected' upon the postulation of the ruling party PRI, which was the only party that governed Mexico during more than 60 years.

Therefore, utilizing the categories that Putnam put forth, neither civic participation nor political equality exist simply by the fact that these concepts do not exist within the political culture of Mexico, which is based on a vertical authoritarian system that does not allow the existence of social structures of cooperation. Those interviewed in the youngest age group also demonstrated a great lack of confidence towards the political system, free elections and the work done by elected politicians. In this respect, it is necessary to remember that Mexico just started experimenting with a multi-party system in 2000. The deputies, senators, mayors and even the President cannot be reelected, which makes it impossible that they represent the people in the context that a system and mechanisms of checks and balances does not exist that could control the power of elected officials. The people interviewed claimed that elected officials dedicated their efforts toward robbing and violating the rights of the people while they were in office.

Referring to the intolerance towards crime, the people interviewed demonstrated that the region has always been known for its high propensity of violence. The interviewees showed that it is common and socially acceptable that parents reprimand their children with the use of violence. For many children, this is their first contact with violence. Afterwards, it was pointed out that in the secondary school years, school fights are frequent. Another significant fact was

the amount of people who possessed firearms and considered its possession indispensable for safety and for social prestige.

Finally, regarding the existing of feelings towards a subgroup in the classic definitions of criminal subcultures, no evidence was found which support this premise; the people interviewed demonstrated behaviors that are far different from the patterns which society shows in general towards the criminal groups that are classically studied. Almost every person interviewed demonstrated these behaviors. The feeling of belonging was not a driving factor to a particular sector of society, and one group did not think radically different than another. On the contrary, almost every person interviewed shared the feeling of belonging. . What was shown is a feeling of differentiation from people from other regions of the state and from the country. To be from "Tierra Caliente" is an identity with which everyone identified with. Inside of this identity is courage, bravery and not able to be led on or put out. For the people interviewed, it is important to respect informal codes of conduct that are outside the law.

6. Conclusion

The results of the investigation demonstrate the existence of a learning process about behaviors and negotiation around awful matters since childhood and youth of the people interviewed. With the passage of time, the law presents itself as a mere reference that does not imply its obligatory obeisance. This learning process of informal coexistence constitutes an element of the regional ethnic identity. This is an interesting aspect that could partially explain the situation of violence of many other zones in Mexico where violence is prevalent, such as Durango, Sinaloa, and Chihuahua.

On the other hand, as the security forces of the state, the police are perceived almost unanimously as corrupt and representative of the worst side of society. The police forces especially appear to be stigmatized as representatives of a corrupt State in which they are profoundly inefficient.

The local authorities lack legitimacy and authority in their communities. This is particularly grave if we consider that the municipal police, those which are the closest to the civilian population, depend on local authorities. It is no casual fact that the majority of scandals of corruption and criminal collusion take place among local police and criminal groups.

In this context, the greater part of these actions that the Mexican government chooses to enact to diminish the violence and control criminal groups are condemned to limited forays that do not take into consideration the existence of the subculture of crime which is solidly rooted in the learning processes of society and which in turn procreates the concepts currently held by the population in relation to the formal rules of the law as mechanisms for the code of social conduct. This calls for the need for profound structural changes in the judicial system that should be accompanied by political reforms to increase legitimacy and the capacity for the Mexican government to impose its authority. Especially important is the strengthening of the work of local governments.

The interviewees learn that there is no formal law or order that establishes codes of social conduct in Mexico. They learn that the value of informal contacts, a diverse gamut of corruption practiced in many layers of society in order to obtain the resources they need to survive. Considering the limits of the investigation of the case of Tierra Caliente in Michoacán, Mexico could perhaps extrapolate the rest of the regions of Mexico with the same characteristics: that obtaining positive results from informal behaviors motivate the continuation of these behaviors based on informal channels and does not respect the law.

On the other hand, the results demonstrate that the strategy of combating drugs, and the problem of lack of safety and security in Mexico should not be left to the use of force, which in some way, responds to a classical explanation to a fight against crime. More police and more military personnel will make it more costly for Mexicans to

commit crimes with the greater possibility of being caught and punished. Mexico lacks police, military personnel and institutional resources to continue carrying out this job. In this context, the social learning of crime should be avoided from early on, at school age, through proper education and overall, through a general change in attitude in all members of Mexican society who emphasize respect towards law and order and social norms as an essential mechanism of regulation of social coexistence.

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