



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



EXCELENCIA ACADÉMICA



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**TOWARDS A HUMAN SECURITY**  
**AGENDA FOR MEXICO:**  
FOR A SECURITY THAT DOES NOT REPRODUCE VIOLENCE



UK Research  
and Innovation

"Project approved by Fondo de Cooperación Internacional en Ciencia y Tecnología (FONCICYT)"

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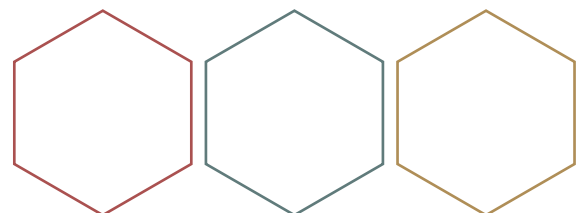
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# 1. *Who are we and what are our findings?*

We are a group of academics, community researchers and pracademics<sup>1</sup> from academic institutions in the UK and Mexico. We are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT)* to implement our participatory research methodology geared towards social action and transformation, which recognises that different social sectors can offer important contributions to the national debate on security.

The alarming increase in violence and insecurity levels is one of the most important challenges facing the new Mexican government led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. This document summarises the main ideas of our Human Security Agenda for Mexico, which seeks to contribute to the national debate on how to address this challenge. It draws from key findings and recommendations following a two-year research process (2016-2018) carried out in four Mexican cities with severe, albeit distinctive, levels of violence: Acapulco (Guerrero), Apatzingán (Michoacán), Guadalupe (Nuevo León) and Tijuana (Baja California).

Our objective is to open spaces so that people's voices take part in the debate about security in the country, thus contributing to promoting a notion of security as a public good that is effective, accessible and able to reduce multiple forms of violence. The aim of this research is to contribute to the conceptual and public policy debate about violence and insecurity in Mexico from the point of view of academia and the communities.

The most important finding in this research is that the violence that now sweeps across Mexico cannot be explained exclusively as a result of reorganisations in the criminal world and the race for the exploitation of illegal economies -especially drug-trafficking since 2007. **The issue is more complex, with multiple insecurities and types of violence interconnected in a context of growing criminal economies, corruption and impunity. This issue cannot be resolved with a unidimensional security policy. On the contrary, it requires recognising the threats, risks, anxieties and fears that affect personal and collective well-being and rights, and the capacity to exercise and defend such rights.**

The concept that better captures this interconnection is that of "human security", and we use it to draw attention to the multiple vulnerabilities behind violence and crime, which facilitate their reproduction and, in many cases, degeneration in more cruel and harmful ways.

<sup>1</sup>Pracademic researchers are those with academic experience and practical knowledge acquired through community work and/or with civil organisations

## *2. Context of our process of co-construction of human security from below*

Our research process analysed the problem and possible solutions “from below”, i.e. from the perspectives of those who experience violence and insecurity. In all four cities, we worked with women -young and old-, youths -within and outside academic environments-, adult men, and some members of civil and religious associations.<sup>2</sup> This allowed us to construct, together with the people, a diagnosis of the problems that affect their human security, and to identify ideas and proposals to address them, which were recorded in **Human Security Local Agendas**.<sup>3</sup>

Those Local Agendas note that responses to insecurity should recognise the complexities of each context and should be guided by a series of principles shared by all actors concerned. As a result of the co-production of these agendas, the following is a summary of ideas that can be useful to better understand and address the challenges faced by the country at a national level.

### **Essential principles for a public policy of human security in Mexico**

1. Protection that is efficient, egalitarian and respectful of human rights by state actors aimed at reducing violence.
2. Targeting state actions not against “enemies” or military objectives but to address the social roots of crime and the effects of the violent crisis on the population, as well as to interrupt the reproduction of violence.
3. Make confidence and consistency amongst all state institutions in charge of implementing security policies at a state, federal and municipal level a pivotal element of security policies.
4. Recover the democratic focus of public security policies so that it enables citizen participation in the transformation of conditions and factors that reproduce violence and crime and avoids fomenting expressions of “authoritarian citizenship”.

## *3. From violent insecurity to human security: diagnosing the problem from below*

### **3.1 Chronic violence in Mexico**

The analysis of the ways in which the residents of the neighbourhoods live and survive security issues, revealed that their lives are not only affected by new and changing forms of crime, but also by a phenomenon that we call chronic violence.

This kind of violence is reproduced in time and space and includes lethal violence (homicides and disappearances) and non-lethal violence (robbery, extortion, kidnapping, forced displacement, domestic violence, police abuse, sexual violence, amongst others). Chronic violence deeply affects the way people relate to each other and to state institutions, the spaces they inhabit and their prospects.

Together with crime, chronic violence has individual and collective traumatic implications not only for citizens but also for democracy and citizen participation. The despair and suspicion they raise facilitate authoritarian expressions of citizenship that undermine confidence in the state or favour the establishment of a repressive state, whilst reproducing violence in the name of “security”.



<sup>2</sup> In the case study in Acapulco, we spoke to Afro descendant women and indigenous men and women, but the degradation of security conditions due to increasing violence rates in the city, and in the neighbourhood in particular, prevented us from carrying out planned activities.

<sup>3</sup> We constructed these agendas in Tijuana, Apaztzingán and Guadalupe.

Our research revealed that in some of the most vulnerable areas in Mexico, the experience of people facing violence and crime cannot be separated from the deprivation they face as a result of precarious access to public services such as education and infrastructure, low salaries and long working hours. These multiple insecurities cause frustration and distressing experiences in people's daily lives and generate conditions conducive to chronic violence.

Together with the communities, we identified the following measures to interrupt the reproduction of violence:

- The analysis of the social, economic, institutional, political and community context of each city as well as **the victims' perspectives widens and refines the identification of the problem and can help determine how to address chronic violence.**
- It is essential to involve young people in developing strategies to respond to violence. **Young people are key actors who can help construct diagnoses and identify and implement solutions.** New generations can contribute to efficiently break the cycles of violence in the medium and long-term.
- Demystifying those narratives which justify violence or minimise its severity by accepting that lethal violence is selective or differentiated. **All violence must be socially unacceptable,** no matter where it comes from or who the victim is.
- Recognising, evaluating and addressing the effects of prolonged exposure to high levels of violence and insecurity on people and communities. **Long-term exposure to violence causes individual and collective traumas** that are passed on to the next generations, intensifying and contributing to new forms of violence.

## 3.2 Crime and violence

Our research suggests that one of the most important priority tasks in Mexico is interrupting social dynamics that generate a vicious relationship between exclusion, violence and crime.

Working with communities confirmed the need to identify the social and political dynamics that favour the reproduction of violence and to understand when and how crime and violence combine.

## 3.3 About the state's response

The Mexican state, in its different levels and through various governmental units, has implemented a variety of responses to the rise in violence and insecurity, from the use of lethal force by the Armed Forces to crime prevention programs. However, these efforts face serious limitations as they focus on the most visible symptoms of violence and insecurity or solely on the risk factors that could lead someone to committing crime.

Social acceptance of a heavy-handed approach and the sacrifice of human rights in the name of security are partly the result of narratives and practices that justify violence to restrain it but end up reproducing it. Along with this, we confirmed the existence of a **significant gap between interventions designed at federal level and implementations at local level,** which considerably impacts the efficacy and legitimacy of security provision policies.

### 3.3.1 The state and the co-construction of security

The responsibility to provide public security and to address the problem of chronic violence lies primarily with the Mexican state. However, it should be willing to design responses that better adapt to local realities through the participation and contribution of community actors.

To this end, the state needs to mobilise different actors and sectors of society around new strategies against chronic violence and human insecurity, based on the recognition of the victims and the rejection of violence as the main tool of a security policy. In other words, the Mexican state needs to **humanise public policies of security provision**, thus we propose:

- **Focussing on factors that enable the reproduction of violence** in social relations, at home, in the community and in institutions and even political processes. Violence and insecurity are not only measurable by homicide rates and cannot only be apportioned to criminal actors.
- **Investing** economic and technical resources to re-engineer cities **to bridge the gaps of inequality**.
- **Recognising the victims and involving them in the design of public security policies**. This allows for the **visibility of human trauma** caused by losing a loved one or surviving an act of violence and finding better strategies to address violence. **It also minimises the risk posed by seeking personal revenge** in a context of very high levels of impunity.
- **Bridging the gap between interventions designed in the highest echelons of government and their local implementation**. This means the inclusion of local public officials, members of civil organisations and citizens groups in the process of design, implementation and assessment of interventions to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.
- Encouraging **security strategies that include** -as one of their main objectives- **strengthening local capacities to counteract violence and reduce its impact**. For this to happen, it is necessary to work with the communities in an inclusive and sustained manner. At the same time, such strategies should be made viable according to the different local contexts. **Therefore, we suggest a constant dialogue around proposals at federal, state and municipal levels**.
- Reducing the perception that the local police is involved or participates in criminal dynamics. That requires the **implementation of comprehensive anticorruption policies and multifaceted training for police forces**. If this issue is ignored, the feeling of helplessness of the population and its mistrust of institutions in charge of security provision will be amplified.





### 3.4 The role of businesspeople

Businesspeople are key actors in the construction of public security policies due to their capacity and resources to demand efficient responses from the state. However, we did not see any comprehensive responses or sense of urgency amongst businesses in any of the four cities of our research. Their views on violence are rather eclectic and partial.

What we did see in the four cities of our research is that communities feel abandoned and unprotected whilst there is a perception that businesspeople have access to higher levels of security based on private resources.

**The state of the local economy in turn has an impact on violence and crime.** Without local employment, young people are exposed to other offers and the working culture is lost, something many older people complained about in the cities where we worked. In cities where there is employment, like Tijuana, long working hours and low salaries have a negative effect on family relationships and make young people think twice about the possibility of factory work.

### 3.5 Resilience and local capacities in the face of violence and insecurity

The research process revealed the deep impact **long-term exposure to different types of violence** has had on communities: today they are divided, weakened and fearful. The four neighbourhoods under review are areas where possibilities for peaceful gatherings and interactions have been lost, and where children and young people are constantly forced to stay home as a form of protection. Mistrust and fear end up breeding hopelessness, apathy and stigmatisation.

This is exacerbated when residents of communities who have been exposed to high levels of violence internalise certain violent practices and, in some cases, use them to solve conflicts and problems in the community. In doing so, they end up reproducing different expressions of violence.

We also identified **that the capacity for resilience in the communities has decreased not only due to violence but also to clientelism** and the way political parties and different government officials capitalise on their transactional relationship with the residents of the communities. In doing so, they have contributed to division and community conflict; they have limited participation and activism from the community to solve the problems that affect them, linking up only with those community leaders willing to work exclusively with them.

Due to the negative impact caused by the lack of resilience and local capacities, it is essential to:

- Create safe independent opportunities and spaces to gather and connect within the communities. **Public action and participation are still dangerous for many.** People fear mentioning the biggest problems and sometimes there are banned topics, which means that building resilience and the capacity for action requires a lot of professional support.
- Countering clientelism from political parties. **When they buy votes in exchange of services that the state is obliged to offer, the population enters a vicious cycle that perpetuates their feeling of powerlessness.** The population has a right to those services and especially to security, a public good par excellence.
- Integrating women and young people in the design and implementation of responses to violence. In every context we worked, **women and young people showed the capacity and potential to play a pivotal role as agents of social transformation in their communities.** Nevertheless, that potential is limited by unequal and violent gender relations or by stigmatisation and distrust towards young people. Integrating the vision and proposals of those groups to improve security and well-being for all members of the community is an urgent priority.

## *4. Towards security and protection strategies that do not reproduce violence*

This summary of our National Agenda of Human Security co-constructed from the community towards the state includes ideas and proposals from the Local Agendas constructed in three of the cities we worked in. Our agendas seek **to resignify security as a tool to reduce multiple types of violence and insecurities and enable democratic citizen participation.**

Although the responsibility to provide public security and to address the problem of chronic violence lies primarily with the Mexican state, this is a task that cannot and should not be done alone. Security should be seen as the result of the collective construction of capabilities to counteract the reproduction of violence. The state needs to mobilise different actors and sectors of society around new strategies against chronic violence and human insecurity, based on the recognition of the victims, local realities and the rejection of violence as a tool.

It is an arduous journey. **In our efforts towards co-construction, we also found a lot of silence.** People do not always want to share their opinion or make it public or talk about topics like violence and security. In our experience we found that men are often more reluctant to speak than women, although the latter face many obstacles to actively participating as members of the community. We discovered the process of co-construction requires patience, presence and the capacity to listen without judgement. **It is necessary to take into account all the experiences of violence that affect subjects and their participation.**

We hope that this document contributes to the national debate and to the confluence of different actors around **the principles** we have mentioned as a guide for a security strategy that does not reproduce violence. Led by the State and with the participation of various economic and social sectors, members of civil society, residents of the most affected communities, academia and the international community, we propose **co-constructing a realistic agreement which resignifies and humanises Mexican security policy.**

