



POLICE EFFICIENCY AND MANAGEMENT:  
CITIZEN CONFIDENCE AND SATISFACTION\*

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the main issues concerning public security in Mexico is people's lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. Citizen confidence is directly related to police performance and is a fundamental factor in understanding people's perception of public security and police work. However, it has often been overlooked by police institutions when designing reform strategies.

Crime fighting is typically perceived to be an exclusively technical task where shortcomings can be resolved by spending additional funds and increasing police capacity. According to this approach, people's opinion and participation are not taken into account since citizens only play the role of

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victims.<sup>1</sup> For several years, this point of view allowed the police to deal with crime as their own exclusive problem, using only police criteria. However, in recent years, political pressure has been exerted to have this rigid model of public security reformed and relaxed.<sup>2</sup> Two main factors explain this phenomenon: exponential growth in crime rates and a tenfold increase in the public security budget as a percentage of GDP.<sup>3</sup>

These factors have generated slow but steady interaction with societal organizations and citizen groups. Nevertheless, no systematic studies on citizens' perception of and confidence in the police have been carried out. Police institutions apparently have not fully understood the importance citizen confidence plays in their daily activities. Furthermore, they still believe that problems like insecurity, crime and criminality are not associated with citizen confidence.

This note focuses on analyzing both citizens' fluctuating rates of confidence and satisfaction with police services and the levels of perception of insecurity in Mexico. I will also explore possible explanations for the levels of trust and satisfaction insofar as they are directly linked to problems in police management, and not only to the presence or absence of crime as these statistics are usually interpreted by the Mexican police.

## II. SOURCES

- a) Graphs 1 to 7 present citizen confidence and satisfaction indicators of different aspects of the criminal justice system, including the performance of public prosecutors (MPs in Spanish) and the police, as well as emergency call response. I also present information on the time it takes to report a crime, taken from the *Metropolitan Survey of Victimization and Police Efficiency*.<sup>4</sup> This poll was taken in January and July 2005 and 2006 in the State of Mexico and Mexico City. The door-to-door survey was applied to 1,750 people (750 from Mexico City and 1,000

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<sup>1</sup> This idea has been also accepted by some politicians, mostly for those who showed some reluctance about this issue during the *priista* regime. MARCELO SAIN, LA SEGURIDAD PÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA EN AMÉRICA LATINA. BUENOS AIRES: REPORTE PARA EL PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL DESARROLLO (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Arturo Alvarado, *La inseguridad pública y la gobernabilidad en México. Diagnóstico y propuesta de reforma*, México: Reporte para el Banco Mundial, November 2005 (unpublished manuscript on file with author).

<sup>3</sup> MARCELO BERGMAN, SEGURIDAD PÚBLICA Y ESTADO EN MÉXICO (Fontamara, 2007).

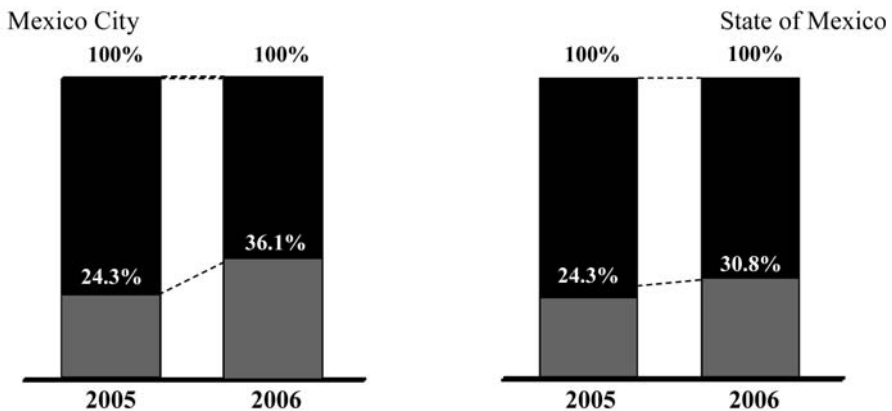
<sup>4</sup> MARCELO BERGMAN *et al.*, ENCUESTA METROPOLITANA DE VICTIMIZACIÓN Y EFICACIA INSTITUCIONAL (2006-2007) (CIDE, 2008), available at: <http://www.seguridadpublicacide.org.mx/CIDE/Portal/cfpages/category.cfm?nodeId=27&showpage=category&open=8>.

from the State of Mexico) and included information on age, gender, sociodemographic profiles and attitudes and perceptions on victimization, exposure to crime and the performance of the authorities. The overall sampling error is  $\pm 3$ .

- b) The next two graphs, 8 and 9, show information on recovered stolen goods, arrest rates and police capacity for criminal investigation and processing. Statistics for these graphs were taken from official records, specifically from a report entitled *Performance Indicators on Police Response to Emergency Calls and Public Prosecutor Activities*.<sup>5</sup>

### III. CONFIDENCE AND SATISFACTION WITH THE POLICE AND PUBLIC PROSECUTORS<sup>6</sup>

*Graph 1. Percentage of Respondents Expressing Confidence in Public Prosecutors, 2005-2006*



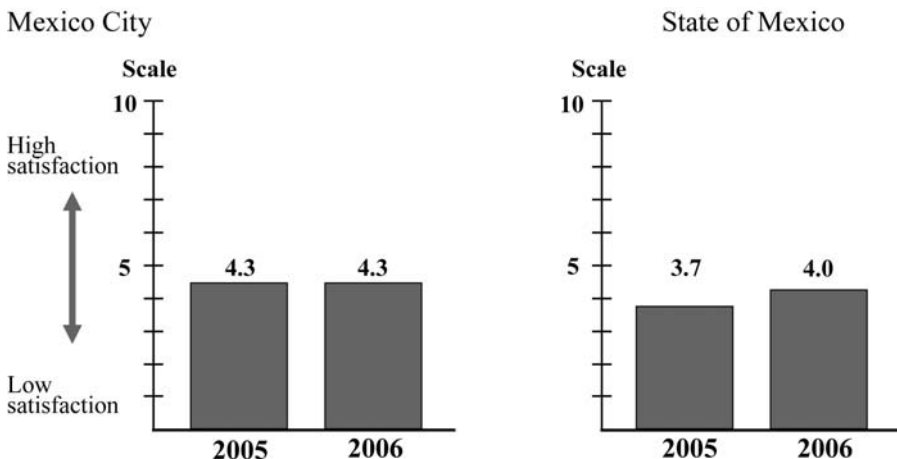
Graph 1 shows citizen's low level of confidence in public prosecutors. This has a direct impact on different issues, such as the number of crimes reported, higher or lower crime rates and peoples' perception of insecurity. Official criminal investigations are difficult to carry out when people do not trust the authorities; and without this confidence police work is limited to

<sup>5</sup> ÍNDICES DE DESEMPEÑO DEL SISTEMA DE SEGURIDAD PÚBLICA Y DE JUSTICIA PENAL (Mexico: Seguridad Ciudadana-CIDE, 2008), available at: [http://www.seguridadpublicacide.org.mx/CIDE/Portal/Docs/pdfs/INDICADORES\\_MP\\_2007.pdf](http://www.seguridadpublicacide.org.mx/CIDE/Portal/Docs/pdfs/INDICADORES_MP_2007.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> The information in this section is taken from: ÍNDICES CIUDADANOS. CONFIANZA Y CALIDAD DEL SERVICIO PERCIBIDA POR LOS CIUDADANOS SOBRE POLICÍAS, MINISTERIOS PÚBLICOS Y JUECES DEL DF Y ESTADO DE MÉXICO (CIDE-Seguridad Ciudadana, 2007), available at: <http://www.seguridadpublicacide.org.mx/CIDE/Portal/cfpages/category.cfm?nodeId=54&showpage=category>.

processing the criminals who have been caught red-handed. In fact, official statistics show that 93% of prison inmates were arrested at the scene of the crime.<sup>7</sup> Finally, citizen distrust is directly linked to a low level of satisfaction with police in general. Citizens' failure to report crimes also affect police efficiency since crime reports help identify crime patterns.

Graph 2. Citizen Satisfaction Index with the Police, 2005-2006



The above survey covers four basic aspects of police services: protection, police presence, estimated response time and treatment. The following graph reveals that response time and treatment presented the lowest levels in citizens' perception of the quality of police service.

Graph 3. Breakdown of Citizen Satisfaction Index with the Police, 2005-2006

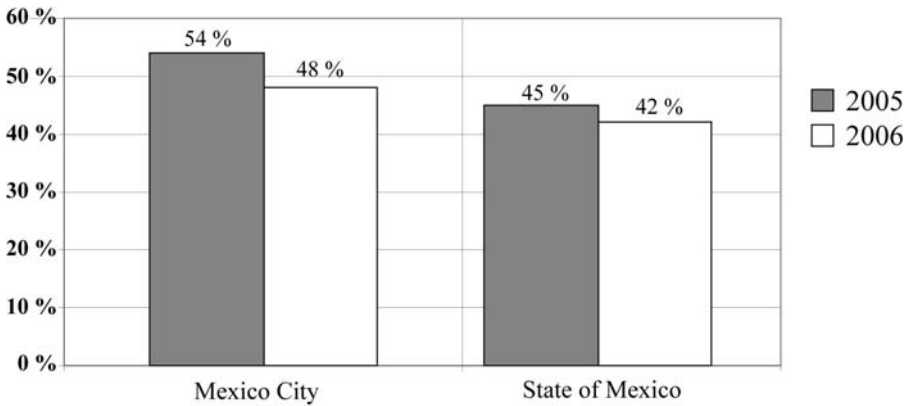
MEXICO CITY

Index		Indicator	2005	2006
2005	2006	Satisfaction with police protection	3.7	3.8
		Satisfaction with police presence	4.3	4.3
		Satisfaction with response time	3.7	3.7
		Satisfaction with received treatment	5.5	5.4
4.3	4.3			

<sup>7</sup> ÍNDICES DE DESEMPEÑO DEL SISTEMA DE SEGURIDAD PÚBLICA Y DE JUSTICIA PENAL, *supra* note 5.

## STATE OF MEXICO

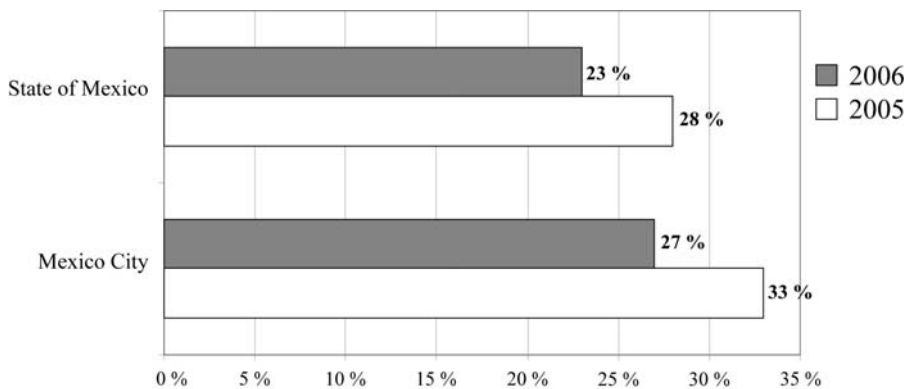
<i>Index</i>		<i>Indicator</i>	2005	2006
			2005	2006
3.7	4.0	Satisfaction with police protection	3.3	3.8
		Satisfaction with police presence	3.6	3.9
		Satisfaction with response time	3.4	3.6
		Satisfaction with received treatment	4.8	4.9

*Graph 4. Unattended Emergency Calls*

In Mexico City and the State of Mexico, almost half of the emergency calls go unattended, and do not result in any police action. Emergency calls are significant because they have an important influence on two fundamental issues: citizens' satisfaction and confidence in the police. Logically, the perception of insecurity grows when the police do not address citizens' emergencies.

If a citizen needs help and the police do not respond, he loses confidence in that institution. The government cannot demand citizen trust in an institution that disregards emergencies.

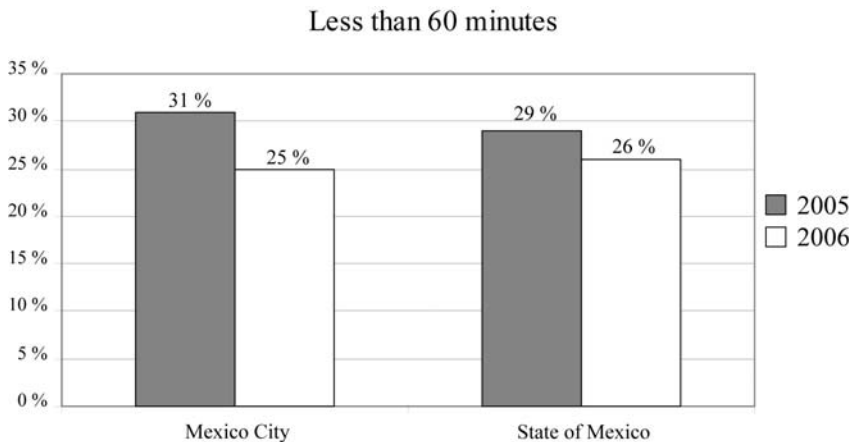
Graph 5. Emergency Calls responded to in less than Thirty Minutes



As a form of direct communication, emergency calls are a fundamental aspect of police-citizen relations. Overall, statistics on police response to emergency calls are not very encouraging. The above graph shows that in Mexico City only 33 of 100 emergency calls are responded to in less than 30 minutes, while the average in the State of Mexico is 5% lower. This means that only three out of every 10 emergencies are responded to under 30 minutes.

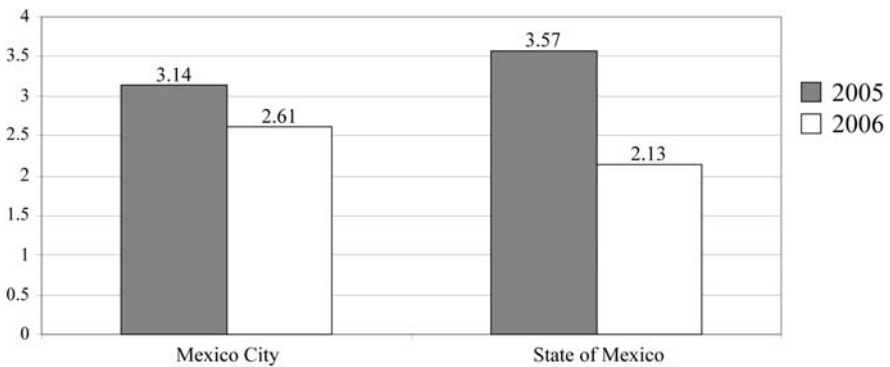
While this scenario is disconcerting, statistics on other aspects of public security do not show much better results. When a citizen is a victim of a crime and decides to report it, filing a report with a public prosecutor also takes a lot of time: only 2 out of 10 citizens are able to process their crime in under 60 minutes.

Graph 6. Time Needed to Report a Crime



Although efforts have been made to improve this situation, statistics reveal that the average time for reporting crimes exceeds 120 minutes in Mexico City.<sup>8</sup> This clearly discourages citizen participation and it also hinders police measures to reduce crime because public prosecutors do not have complete information on the crime.

*Graph 7. Average Time Required to Report a Crime (in hours)*



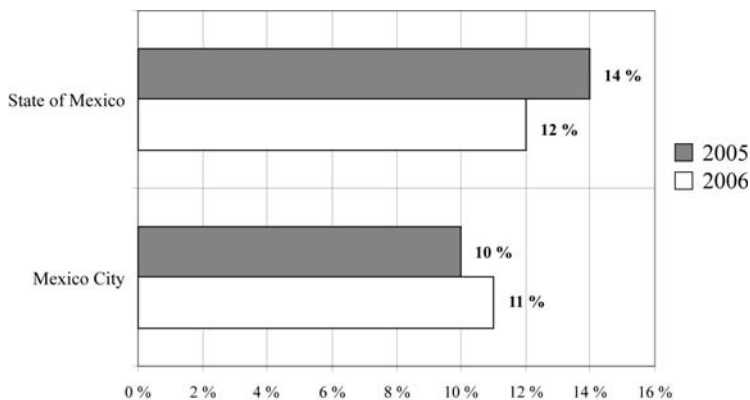
Apparently only citizens who feel they have been victims of a serious crime or need an official record (*i.e.* for insurance purposes) are willing to take the time to report the crime. Again, this phenomenon is directly related to citizens' lack of participation and negative opinion of the public security system, but on the other hand, public prosecutors cannot do their work if crimes are not reported on time.<sup>9</sup>

Citizens' perception (confidence and satisfaction) is largely based on certain aspects of police management, mainly in terms of responding to emergency calls and receiving and processing citizens' complaints. However, certain objective aspects of police efficiency also contribute to this perception. For instance, criminal arrests (graph 8), an element that plays a critical role in gauging citizens' perception of both security and levels of impunity, are crucial.

<sup>8</sup> ÍNDICES CIUDADANOS. CONFIANZA Y CALIDAD DEL SERVICIO PERCIBIDA POR LOS CIUDADANOS SOBRE POLICÍAS, MINISTERIOS PÚBLICOS Y JUECES DEL DF Y ESTADO DE MÉXICO, *supra* note 6.

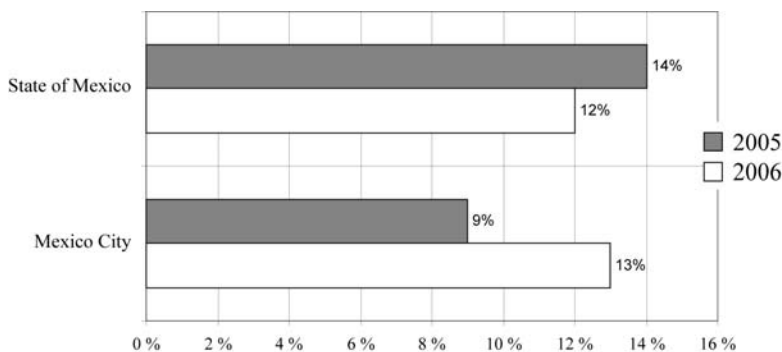
<sup>9</sup> This hypothesis follows the acknowledged model of proactive mobilization developed by Donald Black. DONALD BLACK, *THE MOBILIZATION OF LAW, THE INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY ESSAYS IN LAW AND LEGAL THEORY: LAW AND SOCIETY* (Roger Cotterrell ed., Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1995).

Graph 8. Percentage of Suspects Detained



The data on stolen goods is very similar to the information on arrests (graph 9). The index of recovery of stolen goods is very low, around 12-13%.

Graph 9. Percentage of Stolen Goods Recovered



This data demonstrate that police efficiency is far from ideal. This finding has an immediate impact on two significant elements: impunity and perceptions of insecurity. Two distinct factors discourage citizen collaboration with the penal system: (1) citizens need a lot of time to report a crime; and (2) even if the crime is reported no one can guarantee a conviction or that the goods will be recovered. Practically 90% of all crimes go unpunished.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> ÍNDICES DE DESEMPEÑO DEL SISTEMA DE SEGURIDAD PÚBLICA Y DE JUSTICIA PENAL, *supra* note 5.



## IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As seen above, there are two main issues surrounding citizens' low satisfaction and confidence in the police. One is linked to police *efficiency* in fighting crime (the recovery of stolen goods and criminal arrests). The other is related to police *management*. Intuitively, there is an obvious connection between low satisfaction, lack of confidence and inefficiency, but out of the indicators presented (satisfaction with the police, administrative management, police treatment and response time), only one was directly linked to crime fighting efficiency. The other three have more to do with police management.

Beyond the problem of crime fighting strategies, there is also a serious problem with the attention given to police service "users", or victims of crimes. Regardless of whether poll respondents know the statistics, there is a clear problem of management. Although other issues might also have an effect, the indicators shown have a clear influence on citizens' confidence and satisfaction with the police. These indicators also have an impact on the general perception of insecurity.

In Mexico, citizens' opinions of public security have traditionally been ignored since they are not "objective". As a result, they are not examined or included in the fight against crime. Citizens can only play the role of victims or reluctant users of inadequate police services. In short, public security is exclusively handled by those with the know-how. Throughout the *priista*<sup>11</sup> regime and even now, the established public security procedure has always been treated as exclusively a police issue. In other words, insecurity is a problem that always requires more attention, more personnel, more technology, more skills, more infrastructure, more communication, and so on. Though it may be realistic and productive in the everyday fight against crime, this approach has not produced the desired results.

Confidence is a crucial factor in social development. In Mexico, one of the most important obstacles for developing social norms and networks which allow collective action is the absence of trust.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, one of the most important causes of this lack of confidence is precisely the high level of public insecurity.<sup>13</sup>

Trust is an important issue in four areas concerning public security:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Editor's Note: *Priista* refers to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

<sup>12</sup> Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), "Encuesta de Capital Social en el Medio Urbano 2006" (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo), available at: <http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/index/index.php?sec=10060202&len=1> (last visited: October 23, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> PERFORMANCE INDEXES OF PUBLIC SECURITY AND PENAL JUSTICE ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM, 13 (México, CIDE-Seguridad Ciudadana, 2007), available at: <http://>

- Criminal Intelligence and Investigation. Police investigations require a constant flow of reliable, quality information, which is often provided by citizens or requires the cooperation of potential witnesses. Overall, the main source of information for police and prosecutors comes from citizens.
- Crime Rates. This aspect also involves gathering information to obtain reliable statistics. Low levels of trust and satisfaction lead to a lack of citizen participation, making it impossible to know the actual number of crimes.
- Impunity. If prosecutors and the police have no information on the crimes committed, they have no chance to prosecute those crimes.
- Perceptions of Insecurity. A lack of trust influences perceptions of insecurity because people feel that the police do not protect them.

In recent years, the government has spent more money on public security and yet crime rates have not decreased. This traditional view of public security—as to be exclusively handled by the police and those with the expertise—has made it difficult to establish a more comprehensive one: that public security is a multidimensional—social, political, economic, etc.—issue that should be dealt with the same way as other public issues like health, education and others. This deep-rooted approach poses the risk of doing away with possible citizen participation in the fight against crime. It also contributes to increased public perception of insecurity, low confidence and lack of satisfaction with police activities, including one of its most important aspects, criminal investigation.