

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Community Policing in Mexico The Framework of Resistance and Conditions of Possibility

Alejandro Fontecilla Pinto\* and María Eugenia Suárez de Garay†

The complex environment of insecurity, violence and crime that characterizes Mexico today renders traditional crime fighting, based exclusively on police reaction and an inquisitorial criminal system, ineffective. This was the only answer to all types of crimes for decades. For this reason, from 2011 INSYDE has been participating and exploring, in partnership with various government forces and determined voices, new ways of implementing community policing actions in Mexico and promoting reconciliation and police-community proximity. They have been encouraged by the firm conviction of the importance of our legitimate human right to safety and our desire for a more democratic, modern and citizen-focused police. This paper explores some of the findings and challenges that the community policing model presents in Mexico in order to find a place in preventive police forces.

*If we ask the police about the future, we should anticipate changes that will affect future society and think about how law enforcement should be organised.*

Albert Reiss

## Introduction

The complex environment of insecurity, violence and crime that characterises Mexico today renders traditional methods of fighting crime, based exclusively on police reaction and an inquisitorial criminal system, ineffective. These methods were used to address all

manner of crimes for decades and criminal persecution has long been the main focus of the police. However, for some time, experts in modern criminology have recognised the importance of environment in the development of crime. Thus, when the potential offender, the victim or linked target, and the environment converge, crime occurs (Felson and Clarke 1998).

Hence, police effectiveness in combating crime not only requires greater attention focused on the alleged offender, but also on the victims or potential targets, as well as on the environment (social or otherwise) in which crime may occur. Prevention becomes especially important in this context. In practice this implies profound changes in police institutions. It requires a cultural shift of those who make up the police, a change in the way of thinking about their mission and eventually, a profound collective reflection on what kind of police we, as Mexicans, want in a democracy.

\* Investigator of Area on Police, Public Safety and Criminal Justice for the *Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia* (INSYDE), A.C. de México [alejandro\\_fontecilla@insyde.org.mx](mailto:alejandro_fontecilla@insyde.org.mx)

† Investigator and Director of Applied Investigation Area on Police, Public Safety and Criminal Justice for the *Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia* (INSYDE), A.C. de México [maeugenia\\_suarez@insyde.org.mx](mailto:maeugenia_suarez@insyde.org.mx)

Society today requires that police provide concrete solutions to problems, not only to problems related to crime, but also to the various expressions of violence or incivility. However, the application of the law does not always provide mechanisms to address the plethora of diverse issues which face the police in their daily work. As a result, there is pressure on the police to focus their actions towards problem-solving in a professional and competent manner, which can only be achieved with the support of a professional, organisational, and institutional culture consistent with those demands.

However, contrary to what such a future vision assumes, the traditional and current *modus operandi* of police institutions in Mexico is based on a conception of public safety that confers managerial powers on the State and perceives its citizens to be in a mere 'policing-receptor' role, that is, receptive to police authority. The regulatory framework, outdated in regard to the socio-cultural complexity of the territories, presents a *public order* preservation plan that favours vertical, punitive and forceful interventions. Normative approaches are often unknown by police agents or forgotten at the time of action due to urgency. In addition to the existence of a cultural pillar that encourages *de facto* hierarchical systems, police reaction, the number of arrests and deterrent operations are prized over intelligence methods for the targeted monitoring of criminal practices, and actions encouraging social 'proximity', an indicator that reflects the cumulative trust between police and community. Moreover, limited and uneven distribution of the financial budget, material and training resources across different municipalities and regions continues to facilitate this form of institutional police performance in Mexico. This situation has resulted in a blurring of the line between legality and illegality, and a violation or ignorance of the framework of rights. The abuse and mistrust incurred by the police have caused a deep rift to form between the police and society.

The biggest challenge that faces our police force is the modernisation of their aims and objectives. This modernisation plays an important role in the creation of safer and more liveable environments with higher degrees of social cohesion. For the police, this means the design, management, implementation and evaluation of new institutional, organisational and cultural mechanisms that would allow the police force to act effectively and professionally in any situation. The promotion of *community policing* can help to guide law enforcement organisations along this path. On the one hand, community policing helps to promote deeper police-community reconciliation and rapprochement by enabling dialogue, citizen recognition and new forms of interaction. On the other hand, it promotes and requires the redesign and transformation of police operational methods, transcending mere control through territorial deployment, to considering unconventional ways of operating in the field.

In the case of Mexico, this new philosophical approach to public safety has not yet managed to position itself in normative, legal and political-institutional reforms. However, in several cities and certain municipalities, initiatives focussed on this paradigmatic approach have begun to be considered, especially in the context of police force modernisation and transformation processes. Police institutions are a cornerstone – but not the only one – in this transition towards public safety. The transition also requires an interagency convergence that includes institutions which promote social development, coexistence and equality.

Following this, it is vitally important that the Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia (Institute for Security and Democracy) (INSYDE) serve as a partner in these state and municipal efforts in Mexico. INSYDE can contribute its knowledge and experience to ensure that these institutional transition initiatives of police forces are consistent with the public momentum

for a democratic public safety model within a framework of law that is relevant for citizens. The goal of these initiatives is to cultivate appropriate institutional and regulatory environments in order to guarantee basic rights for both citizens and police.

For this reason, since 2011 INSYDE has been participating and exploring, in partnership with various government agencies and determined voices, new ways of implementing community policing actions in Mexico, promoting reconciliation and police-community proximity. We, researchers at INSYDE, have been encouraged by our firm conviction of the importance of our legitimate human right to safety and our desire for a more democratic, modern and citizen-focussed police.<sup>1</sup> Along the way, we have picked up perceptions, ideas and experiences which allowed us to affirm that dialogue between the police and the community enables the development, with theoretical, technical and human imagination and creativity, of a cornerstone of police reform in Mexico. Citizens have a key role in shaping democratic policing. Thus, the reflections presented here summarise some of the findings and challenges that the *Community Policing Model* presents in Mexico, in order to find a place in preventive police forces.

### **Community policing: a resource to open the way for reform**

In Mexico, a slow transition to a more integral police role can be observed; a police officer is no longer seen only as an agent concerned with public order, but also as a potential peacemaker, a mediation figure and as an instrument of social integration. In fact, community policing initiatives in various regions of the world arise in response to this need to redirect available resources, in addition to prosecuting crimes and attacking risk factors that can lead to crimes being committed. The model proposed by INSYDE is also the result of an alternative strategy to counter a historical rift between the police institution and the citizenry, which regards

the police as a remote figure, disconnected from its needs and expectations.

The philosophical foundation of INSYDE's community policing model entails the conceptual evolution of public safety. It is a gradual transition from a traditional police strategy that reacts to crime, to one that includes the direct participation of society, with the understanding that public safety is not limited to the physical protection of the individual, but includes the promotion and creation of environments that enable peaceful coexistence between people. This model recognises the importance of actions taken under a traditional, reactive approach, because it is aware of how crucial it is to preserve the chain of command that clarifies responsibilities as well as the standardised operating procedures in times of crisis or emergency. Therefore, the model lays out a balanced coexistence between the reactive approach and the preventive approach. The total disappearance of the traditional, reactive approach would be erroneous, given the diverse realities in the field of conflict that exists in the different municipalities and localities of Mexico.

Based on the experience of INSYDE, there are at least five preconditions that should be encouraged (INSYDE/PCC/USAID 2013) by the municipal institution and of course, by the municipal police force itself, with a view to the successful implementation of a community policing model. These are:

#### ***Will of the local government institutions and the police force***

The head official of the public safety agency and the leader of the legislative body of the municipality (the mayor), should not only support and promote this model, but they should also clearly articulate that institutional reform involves a new performance, organisation, decision-making, decentralisation and accountability culture, in addition to capacity building (training, social proximity schemes, management of information and police intelligence, operations, etc.).

### ***Openness to institutional decentralisation***

Municipal government leadership must be open to implementing decentralisation procedures and be willing to carry this out so that it is reflected in the level of conduct, organisation and co-production of public safety most appropriate for the local sphere. This process involves not only a redefinition of hierarchical channels for decision-making routes, but also a greater promotion of civic participation and co-responsibility.

### ***Sustainability of vision in policies***

The municipal government and, specifically, the public safety institution should take steps to ensure the continuation of the initiatives undertaken. The proposed policy, in this case public safety with a community policing focus, should be regarded as a process of institutional strengthening that endures past the incumbent administration.

### ***Willingness and efficient management of resources***

The municipal public safety agency must have the minimum resources necessary to begin the process of institutional reform towards the community policing model, and must display transparent management of said model. To achieve this, bureaucratic administrative procedures must not become an obstacle to decision-making processes or decentralised resource management (this includes both local government administration and community administration: living spaces, suburb infrastructure, personal time, material and community goods).

### ***Institutional will for promoting citizen participation and accountability***

The municipal government leadership must realise that the implementation of the community policing model, as an initiative of public policy, will mean that many of the strategic intervention decisions, the subsequent actions, as well as resources utilised, will be agreed upon in collaboration with citizens.

The denomination 'community policing philosophy' makes sense once the transition from a societally remote and authoritarian public safety management scheme to modern institutional spaces for the co-production of public safety with citizens is laid out. Its most visible impact hinges on a more preventive, transparent, intelligent and participatory police culture that:

- Adopts cooperation and citizen advocacy as institutional practice
- Recognises, uses and strengthens community social networks
- Designs solutions together with citizens
- Strengthens intelligence mechanisms and optimal management of information
- Develops intervention programs in line with territorial and population characteristics

The impact of this philosophy on the actions we take in the police and public safety institutions will be seen in the narrowing gap between communities and public safety institutions. This reconciliation will come about as a result of new cooperation, responsibility and mutual trust that links the creation of police with the creation of citizens. A new legitimacy and dignity of the public police figure will take form.

Therefore, the philosophy of community policing cannot be understood or analysed without considering the paradigm shift towards public safety. In the INSYDE model, the police officer becomes an autonomous and responsible agent. In addition, the officers acquire an important role in identifying and prioritising the problems of the area in which they operate, in the diagnosis of immediate symptoms and in the definition of preventive intervention strategies, which can be monitored by local community supervisors and representatives. On the citizenry side, social participation, neighbourhood groups, cultural entities, leisure entities, youth organisations and women gain importance.

For the model proposed by INSYDE to be adopted and achieve stability in a vulnerable

political and administrative environment such as Mexico, it is necessary to work on six factors (INSYDE/PCC/USAID 2013) that will help to implement and strengthen this new institutional philosophy:

#### ***Municipal plans and public policies***

Every three years local governments design the public policies and development plans for their management period. These policies and plans impact the organisation and strategies of the police when determining actions, goals, projects and indicators that will help to achieve their planned objectives. The implementation of community policing requires that both theory and operation are understood and reflected in municipal planning and programming. From the start, a model must be considered in which dialogue spaces between equals are established. The police institution and its representatives must act by promoting cooperation and trust with citizens. As a result, better conditions in the co-production of security, from the institutional and community levels, will be cultivated.

It should also be recognised that community work does not replace 'traditional' policing. The police of the new model, besides cultivating its relationship with the community through dialogue and information analysis capabilities, will also respond to emergency calls and make arrests in certain situations. In practice, traditional and community models will complement each other. This situation brings with it a major challenge for the institution, in the manner in which it presents the new model and identifies those areas of interaction and coexistence with the traditional. It is also a challenge for police in that through their actions, they assimilate their proximity role as the foundation and their reactive role as a complement, so that they control the behavioural approaches taken in both perspectives.

#### ***Municipal normative framework in force***

In the implementation of a community policing model it is indispensable to adapt the existing municipal normative framework,

mainly through regulations that establish forms of internal organisation and area functions. The adaptation process should reflect that the community policing model can co-exist with other models established by local, state and federal agencies. It should also encourage the proposed organisational structure to consider the proximity role as the foundation and the reactive role as complementary. Finally, the decentralisation of functions should be considered to implement the community policing model and enable closer links between citizens and police.

#### ***Intra- and inter-institutional collaboration at municipal and other government levels***

The community policing model promoted by INSYDE is intended to galvanize interagency collaboration and to dispel the institutional inertia that accompanies the diverse agencies whose objectives are to root out the generating conditions of violence and criminal behaviour. As the model progresses, collaborative citizen-police strategies for the prevention and awareness of issues of public safety will demonstrate the need for intervention by other municipal departments (for example, on issues of domestic violence, youth care, social development, culture, sports, etc.). The model must have the capacity to propel a convergent policy, not only at the municipal level to enhance response actions to issues of community safety, but at the level of federal funds, programs and policies that can strengthen local processes.

#### ***Continuing education and training based on the model***

This point is related to the development of social proximity capabilities, problem-solving and conflict management methods, police intelligence and prevention management. These are based on the design and implementation of a training program that includes several areas where community police must develop social skills in addition to those related to the use of force and containment.

In the INSYDE model, capacity development for professionalization and continuing

education forms from the realization that only through the installation of comprehensive and replicable training schemes can sustainability be guaranteed.

### ***Information for the creation of preventive intelligence***

Preventive police intelligence provides a set of systematised, scientific and technical knowledge with practical application for the strengthening of an intelligence platform that can be a useful tool in solving public safety problems effectively and efficiently (with minimal human and material costs). In INSYDE's community policing model it is important to analyse suburb information, including systematised information about local problems, in order to generate appropriate strategies. Thus, the police intelligence methodology is performed simultaneously with the police-community proximity methodology.

Besides being an important factor of the training program, the development of police intelligence leads to the adoption of institutional practices for the systematisation and analysis of information. It also leads to the identification of strategies and lines of intelligence research using specialised software technology platforms that allow for crossing variables and geo-referencing.

### ***Role decentralisation***

This is an important factor because in Mexico the police institutions work with a centralised organisational operation: most decisions – for example, about shifts, number of assigned staff, patrolling methods, patrols assigned to answer emergency calls, changes in assignments or services, etc. – are made by the senior command. The basis for the community police model is the immediate decentralisation of operational roles so that each quadrant or cell operates as a 'sub-agency', that is, as an entity that is still connected to a central coordinating body but which retains sufficient autonomy to function properly within a system. This intermediate autonomy allows the leadership of that zone to make

use of human and material resources as it sees fit, according to the characteristics of the area in which it operates.

### **Putting it into practice**

The preconditions mentioned earlier and the factors necessary to implement and strengthen a model of community policing as promoted by INSYDE can be compared with the intervention experiences that have taken place in different police agencies throughout the country. The findings, opportunities, strengths and preconditions are recorded on the basis of our perceptions in the field and direct contact with police operators.

### ***Limited concept***

The possibility of successfully adopting community policing actions in Mexico that will lead the way for a greater institutional-scale implementation has been affected by the perception that the police agencies have of this policing model. It is commonly believed that the model involves police who behave courteously to gain public confidence so that citizens will provide information about the problems that plague them. The police agencies do not realize that instead, the model is a set of macro-reforms affecting the whole institution which advocates the adoption of a new operational philosophy and ideology.

This misunderstanding is due in part because efforts to promote this model concentrated on the expedited training of small groups of officers with the goal of improving their relationships with citizens and projecting a better image of the institution to counter the negative perception that citizens have of police. However, this training has failed to provide the necessary skills that police need in order to influence the formation of alliances and associative relationships with communities, so as to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the public safety issues affecting these communities.

The most common result that emerges from these training programs is an engagement with neighbourhood organisations, associations or schools, which usually meet

regularly to 'register' and provide preventive recommendations on issues affecting the community. However, the creation of these small policing groups oriented towards citizen contact, causes a rift in the operational responsibilities of the police who constitute these small groups from the rest of the police responsible for reactive patrolling and street operations. This situation strengthens the paradox of the police who 'practice' proximity with supposedly minimal ability to impact the resolution of problems. They are institutionally discriminated against by the rest of the police personnel dedicated to chasing criminals, at the expense of active and coordinated participation to improve quality of life and solve community problems. This speaks clearly of a police culture that favours reaction over prevention and reinforces the validity of a 'highly challenging environment' which negatively impacts any effort, attitude or manner of policing that privileges mediation, engagement and partnerships with the community (Suárez de Garay 2006). These differences eventually contribute to an imaginary division in policing methods. It is assumed that these difference between police offers are understood by society, even though the differences are produced from that inner police world which profoundly undermines the possibility of police effectiveness. While not all police forces have the same deterrent, preventive and proximity capabilities necessary for a mission, they must be above all else, agents and promoters of peace. The testimony of a senior officer in a preventive municipal police force in the centre of the country demonstrates that this difference is necessary, although it again points to the misunderstanding caused by the reactive logic (misunderstood as preventive), and that each event that involves the police widens the unbridgeable gap between police and citizens:

People cannot distinguish between community police and preventive police. All the shirts say *social proximity* but this is not true, not all of them

are community police. Community police officers have more dialogue, they talk, convince, converse with people, participate in sporting events and they can also say suddenly that they require support. We are not divided, but we should distinguish ourselves with another type of uniform so that people can identify the community or preventive police.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we find scattered throughout the country, national-level efforts that imitate this type of work: barely planned, with no goals and objectives, no long-term sustainability, and with ill-conceived programs that are significantly affected by each change of government. For example, in early 2011, the Municipal Preventive Police of Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, Jalisco, changed its name to the Proximity Police. The grant for the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat (SUBSEMUN)<sup>3</sup> establishes a set of obligations for the allocation of resources to municipalities, among which is the adoption of this type of police.

Hence, the municipal authority considered that renaming its police force was a necessary first step. The Proximity Police model was launched with 180 officers and fifteen units distributed in different areas of the municipality. Their task was to bridge the divide between the police and society which included preventing crime and combatting high levels of societal distrust towards the police (*El Informador* 2011). A report published in the *Revista Replicante* in February 2013 stated, after the name change, 'all police are proximity police' (Aguiar-Aguilar 2013). There it was reported that 'the rules have not changed (the Regulations of the Preventive Police are still used) and the organisational structure of the Directorate has not been updated, in addition to which the proximity police hardly works in practice' (Aguiar-Aguilar 2013). This was supported by testimonies of the police themselves:

There is a police officer per established area and there are two who

patrol each area. But given the large number of casualties that these people have caused us [the police authorities] we are obligated to have one police officer; when we have one police officer, he is sent to the cell, but the rest of the force is dedicated to patrolling. We are more interested in having the whole force supervising and on patrol rather than having a cell where the officer is going to be sleeping, unaware, or the officer will be messing around: his wife already visited, his girlfriend already visited, the wife stays until he finishes eating and helps to do the cleaning. These are situations that have no place in a police unit. That's why we have chosen to devote ourselves entirely to surveillance and patrol. [Interview 1, 07/2012] (Aguilar-Aguilar 2013).

#### ***Scarce information for prevention***

Meanwhile, police institutions in Mexico, especially municipal police, present important limitations in their information systems. These limitations range from weaknesses in the gathering, analysis and use of information for crime prevention to an ineffective strategic socialisation of the same information among police personnel working in the field. As a result, police are unable to effectively analyse criminal behaviour, and unable to anticipate or prevent acts of crime and the various expressions of violence through early intervention against the factors that cause them.

The origin of this institutional technical weakness is closely linked to past development efforts. In the past, efforts were concentrated on the development of impact indicators (such as punitive and reactive indicators). However, there was virtually no development of performance indicators (for example, percentage of residents actively involved in public safety councils) or organization activity (such as the number of meetings held in the last six months) (Mohor 2007). For

many years, the preventive police have based their operation and performance evaluation information on three main sources:

- Reports of criminal offences that citizens present to the Office of Public Prosecutions with the aim of investigating the facts
- Records of response rates to emergency calls
- Daily reports of police activity on the street

The operational strategies are generated from these sources and focus primarily on the increased police presence in the identified areas where the largest number of incidents occur, and on the improvement of response times to reach the scene of a crime. Given the complex local environment in Mexico, informative techniques have become the principal source for decision-making, especially useful for the superior command. Mobile phones, radios and computers have been the core of the reactive police, as they have allowed rapid mobilisation of police and the centralisation of monitoring the response of the police patrol. However, the growth of information technology has brought enormous implications that alter traditional police monitoring and management (Reiss 1997). One of the biggest challenges faced by police forces is maximising the use of policing information, especially in the methods used to collect and process information with the goal of creating a more active force and preventing violence and crime. Much depends on the efforts of community policing and problem-solving.

The police in Mexico continue to operate from a hierarchical and vertical structure at all levels and are forced to work with poor technology for data collection. Above all, many receive limited training from those responsible for the collection, organisation and analysis of data. This restricts, in practice, the proper use of information that could be strategically exploited so as to gain



citizen cooperation and achieve higher levels of police effectiveness.

These limitations can also be explained by a strong resistance to sharing information amongst the police. The police – mainly senior officers and those responsible for generating information – have a tendency to consider the information as if it were their private domain. There is an unwritten but clear policy to control access to information. What does this mean? As already mentioned, the police culture that advocates secrecy makes information inaccessible for those who must face conflicts and incivilities in the public space on a day-to-day basis. A police force that boasts of being 'close or communitarian' must ensure access to information for all agents. In this way greater analytical skills can be developed in order to understand the causes and factors that provoke public safety problems and police will then be able to design joint strategies with the public to prevent and eradicate them. The line police, who occupy the lowest rank in the police hierarchy, are compelling when they speak of this institutional weakness:

I have not seen the boss meet with the three shift managers to look at the problems in our sector. Yes, we identify the problem, but we do not know how to fix it. The information always remains with the command, but does not reach those who are working in the streets and with the citizens.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, police institutions are still governed and seek legitimacy by improving the number of arrests, traffic violations, response times to emergency calls and the number of services provided to citizens, rather than by reducing perceptions of insecurity, improving the quality of police services, reducing the rate of victimisation or working for an actual decrease of the public safety problems in each area. One has only to observe the effort that has been made, through SUBSEMUN, to create specialised information analysis units

in each of the participating municipalities. These units have little to do with decreasing public safety problems in each area and instead dedicate most of their time to recording data of infringing persons and doing background checks on detainees. There is no effort made to actually analyse local violence and crime phenomena to make operational decisions. In a group interview a few street police officers demonstrated their understanding that these indicators should be different but that there is resistance from middle management to change:

The good police officer is not the one who arrests the most criminals, but the one who ensures that nothing happens in his area. However, the bosses are confused, for example, in regards to transit they tell us they want ten tickets *per element (police officer)* or the Municipal Guard will ask for more arrests. On weekends we know where to make arrests and we go in with backup. The contradiction in our orders comes from the shift manager who tells you that you aren't working if you don't bring in violations.<sup>5</sup>

The traditional approach that has been used to fulfil police objectives, as demonstrated in this testimony, has meant that the police are able to meet the objectives that their superiors demand. In this situation, the superior command retains decision-making powers, but his decisions are at odds with the viewpoint of street agents. Street agents are still considered to be the last link in the hierarchical structure, with the sole function of obeying orders. They are not encouraged to think about what they are doing or propose solutions (Goldstein 1997: 46). This way of operating, which has focused on solving macro problems rather than the micro level issues that shape those problems, has also strengthened the traditional reactive logic through which work is completed. By not analysing or generating

quality information about what happens in the streets based on police observations, police work is relegated to collecting individual incidents rather than working to achieve prevention and formulate correct procedures when such incidents have already occurred (Goldstein 1997: 47).

This is also the reason why lower-ranking police officers are rarely effective, not only because they watch how from their desks 'the bosses' mandate with little knowledge of the facts (Suárez de Garay 2006: 271), but also because they perceive themselves to be mere tools, rather than professionals capable of influencing the police objective entrusted to them. The old Mexican custom of using the nickname *element* to refer to the police officer is not so strange since it speaks clearly of the degree of objectification and invisibility of the police officer as an individual. There is no face, no name and a gap that will have to be filled with the contents of a culture that reproduces the performance parameters based on the conception of the criminal enemy, of the highly challenging environment, but especially of the inculcation of autonomy as a guiding principle for action.

### **Limited decentralization**

As mentioned in the previous section, police decentralisation processes are key to the community policing model in order to achieve a better relationship with the public, to understand local safety issues and to work hand in hand with the community on comprehensive solutions. In Mexico, these processes have been promoted in two ways. First, through what has been called *zoning*, which is simply the geographic division of the municipality so that the operation is conducted in a disaggregated manner. Second, through the creation of *decentralised decision-making roles* so that the heads of each small geographic area can operate somewhat independently in terms of allocations, schedules, shifts and services of police personnel in their charge, adopting a system of results-oriented management.

With respect to the first point, progress has continued, independent of the adoption of a community policing model. A recent common practice of police institutions in the country is to divide their territories into small areas popularly called 'quadrants' or 'cells' to which they allocate law enforcement and deterrent patrols. However, this operational redistribution has little to do with seeking a more constant and ongoing community outreach, or with efforts to identify and resolve public safety issues.

As to the second point, those in charge of each small geographic area have recorded virtually no progress regarding the decentralisation of responsibility and accountability. Several limitations exist that explain the lack of progress in decentralisation. On the one hand, as has already been noted, the middle command has achieved real power, and are therefore the main opponents of delegating new duties to subordinates. On the other hand, the limited police personnel who may be assigned to a quadrant or cell as the responsible agents hardly have the skills and abilities needed to connect with citizens, make decisions, work strategically, analyse information and manage performance. Additionally, the failure to decentralise is related to the temporary assignment of the cell leader due to the lack of trust that the superior command has in the officers under their command. This means that there is a constant rotation of staff to avoid corruption or illegal agreements made in their relevant areas or in their relationships with citizens. In this regard, a municipal police command stated in an interview:

We have to rotate the staff in charge of the quadrants every six months so that they do not make illegal agreements with business owners, as they are used to requesting fees to provide security and perform constant patrols.<sup>6</sup>

It appears that the idea still prevails that the police, due to their poor training in professional police conduct, are impressionable

subjects. This is at the origin of police actions associated with corruption. Besides this, the myth prevails that traditional police work is essential and therefore programming and planning can only achieve marginal outcomes. As such, routines seem meaningless, and the ephemeral mark left by personal leadership styles actually weakens the police-citizen relationship and its potential.

### ***Emerging citizen and inter-institutional links***

It is important to note that many of the efforts to implement community policing activities in Mexico have been carried out in highly marginalised localities with high poverty rates and deficient public services. They are communities neglected by governments where civic organisation has historically been unreliable, but that now shows more stability. The poor become a potential target of police activity when social injustice and social danger converge. There has been a long history of conflict between police and poor citizens, founded on mutual distrust and a deep-seated feeling of the police's illegitimacy. This antagonistic history has been the cause of continuous threats against the citizens and it is a key factor in the creation of an anti-police culture. The police realize that they are at a disadvantage in attempting to strengthen the relationship between themselves and citizens because police belief in the effectiveness of a heavy hand continues and prevents even imagining other possibilities of police proximity. As the following police testimony illustrates:

The police attend to communities who have felt the neglect of other sectors or agencies. For example, lapses in education or public services. They have attacked the inefficiency of other agencies. Therefore, we cannot do, but only react to the consequences.<sup>7</sup>

Given the situation, it is very difficult to develop competence and skills for a strategic, joint, effective and continuous effort with

citizens. In INSYDE's experience, there are groups that make up the community whose formation cannot be understood outside the system and outside the political processes, and which are ignored by liberal schemes of 'limited statehood' (Agudo 2014). These groups are relevant stakeholders, in whose daily battles the meaning of the state, the community and participation takes on other definitions. The priorities in their agenda are redefined in light of the political groups to which they must belong in order to obtain basic rights and services. Success appears either as the result of struggle and confrontation, or in the form of gifts and favours dispensed in exchange for votes and support. In many cases, these groups are composed mainly of middle-aged women who have managed to connect with programs and projects that the government provides. However, when they do not see tangible benefits they eventually withdraw their participation.

These kinds of patronage ties have been present in many of the communities where INSYDE has worked, especially in those that experienced invasions and in irregular settlements that have emerged on the margin of Mexican politics. In many cases certain popular leaders, linked to political parties in local and regional elections, promoted the settlement of land and subsequently the residents became strongly loyal to said parties (Agudo 2013). The mobilisation and local organisation processes resulting from these circumstances could, in theory, contribute to the emergence of a strong sense of belonging that would make community building more easily attainable. However, as the population grew and the settlement process and regularisation of land tenure was consolidated, neighbours lost interest in participation, and partnership between them was eroded. Hence it is not so simple to promote and attain co-responsibility and co-production of public safety.

Therefore, normally when we, researchers at INSYDE, commence a new initiative, we seek a connection with other agencies, so that we are able to provide appropriate

answers to the questions regarding the diverse range of issues present in these communities. We believe that community policing requires that comprehensive responses are developed and implemented in partnership with the community, civil society organisations and other local and state agencies. However, it has been continually noted that the police are particularly disconnected from other municipal departments. These other agencies do not seek communication channels that would allow a first-order alliance with the police force, even though it is clear that they need one another. Quite the contrary, each navigates their own rhythms and agendas, unaware that the other is an integral part of the community public safety system. Obviously each agency has to stick to the issues within its jurisdiction, but a strong attitude of close collaboration that searches for common alternatives and solutions can enable a rational approach to an objective such as the resolution of a social problem and/or public safety.

However, heads of other regions are unaware of the work and the organisational structure of the police and regularly demand a greater police presence in areas where the most complex problems are located. In turn, the police themselves do not know or feel completely distant from the preventive policy emanating from the plans of SUBSEMUN or the National Crime Prevention Program.<sup>8</sup> Senior police officers are unaware of the range of municipal projects, and are even unaware of prevention efforts made by their own leaders', municipal bodies or by the State. This translates into everyday constraints on the police when serving and supporting public needs. In the best case scenario, officers get creative and solve problems using their own resources. As the testimony of one line officer expresses:

What my partner and I did was listen to a radio program to get the phone numbers of various municipal agencies to pass on the information directly

to citizens. People would ask us and we would give them an answer.<sup>9</sup>

As can be seen, public linkage is key to the community policing model, but it has potential only when the police force itself and other government agencies work closely together. Since the concept of providing more comprehensive services is still emerging in Mexico, work with the community is reduced in many circumstances to the mere receipt of citizen reports and complaints regarding the need for greater police presence in communities. This is the experience of many citizens who remain passive recipients of a service rather than active agents in the co-production of public safety. The next scene retold by a policeman speaks clearly of the urgent need to create greater scope for more effective citizen participation:

Neighbourhood associations are created with the director and commander of certain areas and they discuss needs, one of which is always the need for more police units. Citizens are accustomed to call the police for everything; most requests are for patrols and police presence, thinking that this will reduce crime-related problems. There are always more complaints than solutions.<sup>10</sup>

In the best case scenario, as already mentioned, there are special integrated groups in the police force that approach communities to deliver a set of preventive measures on different topics that seek to address the problems of the area. This solution, however, is still distant from the goal of working together to analyse and solve public safety problems with comprehensive responses involving police, the community and other government agencies. The problem is further aggravated by the constant rotation of police officers assigned to a zone and unstable citizen participation in organised groups. This is a recurring experience, according to a director of the preventive municipal police force:

Once formed, neighbourhood committees, having organized four sessions and established working arrangements, make follow-up visits. Often, however, people do not return for the following visits; you begin with twenty, then ten, then five and then no one comes. Most committees end up that way.<sup>11</sup>

It is understandable, from the experience related here how many community members, given their position as social actors, prioritize public safety. However, 'safety' in this context, rather than being treated as a right and as a condition of access to other rights, is instead strongly linked to a constant police presence. Paradoxically, safety is also associated with the importance of reversing the historical distrust towards the police institution in the hope that it may offer a better protective service. In this vision of public safety, an authoritarian relationship with the police presence is privileged in times considered 'borderline' or 'transgressive', while this relationship is also associated with regular abandonment at moments considered of assistance or emergency. Accordingly, some communities find it difficult to imagine the police force as a relevant player in conflict resolution and as an agent of peace, and therefore as someone who seeks public safety.

### **One final note**

Today police have a leading role in the democratic governance of all nations. In Mexico's case, there has been an expansion of the military's role in public safety which has resulted in an increasing displacement of police commands by the military. Despite this, there is a greater government dependence on the police, which is still the main institution responsible for public protection. However, the militarisation process of public safety has delayed the necessary evolution of the role of the police, from a traditional role based on the alleged battle-like destruction and annihilation of the enemy-offender and as the maintainer of order, to another in

which the primary role is that of a public service responsible for public safety, in partnership with society and communities.

In this article we have tried to provide input from the community policing model proposed by INSYDE and of the processes related to its implementation in various municipalities. Past experience shows us that it is essential to make radical changes within police institutions that reflect greater professionalism, efficiency and accountability in police performance. It is therefore a priority to talk about this pending agenda, that is, democratic police reform. This reform delineates the following central principles: protection of the citizen, the rule of law, respect for human rights and accountable and transparent actions. It is crucial to modernise the aims of police institutions in order to reconcile the freedom of citizens and the relations between police institutions and the community.

However, these changes are not easy in Mexico, where police have long been associated with repression, the superficial maintenance of order and political control. Certainly, the police will always be responsible for public safety in a democratic context that respects human rights. The prosecution of crime will always be part of its role and most especially, there will always be a fight against organised crime. These traditional functions, however, must incorporate a proactive dimension, linked to their role as a public service that operates in association with the community to prevent local and targeted violence, crime and insecurity problems.

Two important clarifications help to understand the significance of this change. This change means recognising public safety not only as a right but also as a collectively co-produced public good. That is, all social actors contribute to the production of public safety in order to guarantee the rights and freedoms of all citizens. However, it is also important to recognize that the police cannot take control of society nor can they use violence to safeguard the ideals of civility or decency. Crime, violence and fear in urban areas are major

challenges for the development of safe, just, united and democratic cities.

If we want to make an effective and long-lasting impact on the reduction and prevention of crime and insecurity, the basic principles of good governance should be applied primarily to the field of public safety. For more than a decade governments all over the world, and of all levels, including municipal governments, have been applying new approaches and measures to reduce and eliminate violence and crime in cities. One such measure consists of enhancing personal safety and reducing fear. This combines the improvement and reestablishment of police organisations while holding them accountable for their actions in the community with which they work.

To advance from political legitimacy to social legitimacy, the modernisation of the aims of law enforcement agencies involves a return to the principles enunciated by Sir Robert Peel upon creating the London Metropolitan Police in the nineteenth century. That is, the main role of the police is to reconcile the maintenance of law and order, freedom of citizens and close relations between law enforcement and the community. However, these changes are difficult in many countries, such as Mexico, where the police have long been associated with political repression and control. But today we must affirm that these changes are possible and we must commit ourselves to promoting them, now more than ever.

A clear statement of this new vision in the police objectives is an essential first step in any major reform of operations, priorities and work methods of police services. It is therefore an approach that seeks to reconcile and balance the traditional reactive aspects of law enforcement, comprehensive prevention and solidarity in the management of public safety in the context of democratic norms and ethical codes.

The real challenge is to articulate and realise this contractual relationship (that is, an association bound by contract, with clearly

defined responsibilities) between police and civil society, in particular between the police and local authorities, through consultation and cooperation in facing everyday problems. This kind of relationship often occurs only between police authorities and certain elites in Mexico. The police and local governments should promote diverse approaches, with the aim of establishing closer relations with the population, adapting their work methods and mobilising social and economic actors regarding public safety and comprehensive prevention management. This means precisely defining the processes and mechanisms that can consolidate the partnership between the local police and territory collectives in the long term. At the same time, the principles on which this association is based should be settled in the appropriate legislative and regulatory framework in order to ensure transparency and accountability of police actions.

In the promotion of public safety as a common good and the role of the police as a public service, it is essential to seek solutions that are adapted to the local and national reality. It is also necessary for local authorities to establish an open dialogue with police directives on the major concerns of public safety, particularly with regards to providing sustainable solutions for problems of crime, violence and insecurity. The aim is not to have local political representatives interfere in the operations of the police force. Instead, one of the most important aspects of urban development is that they assume leadership responsibilities that correspond to their duties. Police forces can use these mechanisms to share their vision of strategic issues related to public safety and can acquire the support of civil authorities and the population with regard to their actions.

We are convinced that the transformation and reengineering of police institutions involves the construction of a new ethical discourse that can be put into practice. This discourse, founded on principles relevant to the situation in Mexico, enables a conception

of otherness, recognising similarities rather than differences. That is, it is important to allow those actors involved to find 'others' using the police-citizen linkage processes, and who are willing to reconsider human and social relationships in order to community build for the sake of a better world. Proximity, engagement and reciprocity are the principles for a new police institution. These principles must be the cornerstones of a new societal relationship in which police forces are guarantors of a commitment that generates participatory democracy.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> From September 2011 to December 2012, INSYDE collaborated with the Ministry of Social Development of the Federal Government, under the Habitat Agenda, on the actions that were carried out in coordination with the Inter-American Development Bank, relating to comprehensive and preventive interventions in cities with emerging indices of social insecurity; these actions took place in the cities of San Luis Potosi, SLP; Nogales, Sonora; Solidaridad, Quintana Roo; and Tijuana, Baja California. They supported in these four cities a 'Technical Assistance Consultancy on Security and Good Governance' whose overall objective was conflict management. From June 2012 to December 2013, INSYDE worked with the Citizen Co-existence Program (PCC) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), providing technical assistance for the design and implementation of 'Actions for the Promotion of Community Police' in Tijuana, Baja California; Monterrey, Nuevo Leon; and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. They aimed to promote the identification of police and community resources to create a police-community connection and various reconciliation exercises where they sought to establish a guidance procedure and definition of community policing initiatives. Derived from this important immersion

in the police and the PCC intervention communities, INSYDE and PCC published the book *Policía Comunitaria. Conceptos, Métodos y Escenarios de Aplicación*, USAID-PCC-INSYDE, México, 2003. In 2013 a technical assistance project (still ongoing) was also launched by the Municipal Government of Queretaro called 'Strengthening of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Querétaro, Querétaro'. This project is developing a police model aimed at social-community connections in order to contribute to the successful implementation of comprehensive preventive policies which would then lead to a decline in violence and crime and strengthen municipal cohesion and coexistence.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with the command of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Aguascalientes, May 2013.

<sup>3</sup> SUBSEMUN is a federal program that was designed and emerged in 2008 to provide direct and exclusive support for the strengthening of municipalities on this topic and the performance of public safety so that 'it administers to municipalities and demarcations of the Federal District who benefit through an eligibility formula, and that the purpose of these resources is to be allocated in accordance with the provisions of the Expenditure Budget of the Federation for professionalization, equipping of municipal and Federal District demarcation police forces, improving infrastructure of corporations and public policy development for social crime prevention.'

<sup>4</sup> Group interview with the police of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Queretaro, September 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Group interview with the police of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Queretaro, September 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with the command of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Nogales, June 2012.

- <sup>7</sup> Interview with the command of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Nogales, June 2012.
- <sup>8</sup> The National Programme for Social Prevention of Violence and Crime (PRONAPRED) was created by the Federal Government in 2013, with a fund of \$2,000,500,000,000 pesos to assist 57 'priority districts.' This program depends on the Interior Ministry applying strategic actions in municipalities across the state to programs, training and campaigns. It aims to address the precursor factors and the enabling conditions or triggers of crime and violence, such as the disintegration of the family, addictions, lack of access to education and other basic and essential public services.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with the police of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Aguascalientes, May 2013.
- <sup>10</sup> Group interview with the police of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Queretaro, September 2013.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with the Director of Crime Prevention of the Municipal Public Safety Secretariat of Guadalajara, February 2014.

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**How to cite this article:** Fontecilla Pinto, A and Suárez de Garay, M E 2014 Community Policing in Mexico The Framework of Resistance and Conditions of Possibility. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 3(1): 43, pp.1-17, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.ep>

**Published:** 12 December 2014

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 *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press

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