

**Two steps forward:
Explaining an unusual success story in Mexican police reform**

Daniel M. Sabet

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Introduction¹

As Guillermo Zepeda notes in his chapter, the urgent need to professionalize the Mexican police has been recognized since the early 1990's. And in fact, numerous elected officials and police chiefs have come to office promoting new policies and pledging to end the scourge of illegality and lack of professionalism that has plagued Mexican police departments. However, at least in the arena of public perception, it appears that few gains have been made in actually improving police integrity and professionalism. Recent research finds that both perceptions of corruption and self-reported corruption may even be on the rise.² This presents something of a paradox: on the one hand, police misconduct has gained national prominence, earned a major place on the political agenda, been the impetuses for new legislation and policies, and yet on the other hand, there have only been limited successes in professionalizing police agencies.

The underdevelopment of Mexican police forces also produces a second paradox. Benjamin Reames estimates that Mexico has around 3,000 police departments divided among federal, state, and municipal governments and further divided into preventive, transit, and investigative police.³ One of the commonly theorized benefits of federalism is that state and local government can serve as laboratories of democracy. Best practices can emerge in one jurisdiction and be replicated throughout others. And yet, despite this theory and despite so many departments, at the present time there are very few Mexican police agencies that can be held up as models. Throughout the country, police lack proper

¹ I would like to thank Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, Lazaro Gaytán Aguirre, Luís Eduardo Manzanera Jiménez, Tonatiuh Nájera Ruíz, and other study participants for their support of this research.

² Paras, Pablo. 2006. *The Political Culture of Democracy in Mexico*. Mexico City: DATA Opinión Pública y Mercados. And Carrasco Araizaga, Jorge. 2003. Ningún avance in la policía mexicana. *Proceso* (Mexico). October 12.

³ Benjamin Reames. 2003. Police Forces in Mexico: A Profile. *Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. Project on Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico*. <http://repositories.cdlib.org/usmex/prajm/reames>

equipment, training, pay, incentives, oversight and accountability, and even basic police procedures.

This chapter offers a case study of one of a handful of success stories in Mexican policing: the Municipal Department of Public Security (Dirección de Seguridad Pública Municipal - DSPM) of Chihuahua City, Chihuahua. In this chapter, I highlight the department's success in implementing and institutionalizing policies that have increased the professionalism of the agency. It would be tempting to conclude that the department is distinct simply because it has selected such policies; however, there is general consensus about what kinds of measures are necessary to improve the honesty and professionalism of the police. Professionalization efforts do not necessarily require innovative policies, but simply the implementation of basic measures such as the creation of procedural manuals and regular in-service training. Where other departments have failed is not in policy selection, per se, but in their inability to successfully implement and institutionalize such policies. Social science does not need to simply explain what approaches are effective in professionalizing the police, but how such policy reform comes about and the conditions that allow for reform?

Results from this case study suggest that such professionalization is rare because of a lack of continuity between governing administrations - both an institutional and cultural phenomenon. While it is not the only distinguishing factor, the primary difference between Chihuahua and other Mexican police departments is that the former has obtained a degree of continuity between its three year long municipal administrations. As a result, numerous professionalization efforts have had a cumulative effect over the years. Rather than taking two steps forward and one step backwards, or simply standing still, continuity in Chihuahua has allowed it to slowly and consistently make real gains in police professionalism. This is not to suggest that the Chihuahua police force does not have several challenges ahead of

it, and, in fact, this chapter also explores some of the limitations of the DSPM's reform efforts.

The data on Chihuahua's municipal police used in this paper come from a variety of sources. They include interviews with the DSPM's leadership, operational and administrative staff, eleven patrol officers from various ranks, and members of Chihuahua's civil society active in the area of public security, including members of business associations, academics, and journalists. Additional methods include observation of police performance during a "ride-along" and analysis of municipal and DSPM documentation. The research also benefits from summary statistics from two surveys conducted in 2006 by researchers at the Chihuahua campus of the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey.⁴ These include a survey of 2,002 Chihuahua residents and a survey of 250 police. It should be mentioned that this chapter is part of a larger study by the author on police professionalization in Mexico, and therefore, includes to references data obtained in other research sites.

Mexican policing and strategies to improve police integrity

It is worth reiterating that law enforcement in Mexico is divided by both geographical jurisdiction and function. Geographically, the police are divided into municipal, state, and federal police departments, each of which has different responsibilities. For example, the transport and sale of drugs and guns are considered federal crimes; and therefore, are under the jurisdiction of the federal police. Robbery, homicide, and assault, however, fall to the states and municipalities. Functionally, the police are divided into investigative, transit, and preventive departments. Investigative police, known as the ministerial police, are

⁴ Nájera Ruíz, Tonatuih, coordinator. 2006. Diagnóstico Ciudadano de Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública. Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey. And Nájera Ruíz, Tonatuih, coordinator. 2006. Diagnóstico Interno de Cultura Laboral. Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey y el Comité Ciudadano de Seguridad Pública Municipal.

organized under the auspice of the public ministry at the state and federal level. They are responsible for investigating crimes and making arrests for violations of state law (*fuero común*) and federal law (*fuero federal*) respectively.⁵ Transit police are responsible for enforcing traffic laws and are at times combined with preventive police forces. Preventive police make up the vast majority of Mexican police (both in terms of numbers of police officers and the number of departments). Preventive departments operate at all three levels of government and are typically organized under the auspices of a secretary or department of public security. Their primary job is to prevent crime, conduct patrols, maintain public order, and be the first responders to crime. At the municipal level they are also responsible for enforcing municipal ordinances (generally referred to in Spanish as the *Bando de Policía y Buen Gobierno*). Chihuahua's DSPM is a municipal preventive police force serving a city of 760,000 residents with a police force of approximately 950 officers.

It should go without saying that police play a fundamental role in a democratic society. When the police fail to enforce the laws, protect individual rights, or act above the law, they undermine democracy and the rule of law. When citizens do not feel protected by the law or believe that police operate above it, a variety of normatively undesirable results can occur: citizens can ignore the laws; they can take the law into their own hands; or they can demand more draconian laws harmful to individual rights. Unfortunately, a casual review of Mexican newspapers would suggest that all of these are on the rise.

As recognized in the other chapters of this volume, citizen distrust of the police is widely recognized both inside and outside of Mexican police departments. Studies of self-reported bribe payment consistently find that the police are the most common recipients of

⁵ See Lopez Portillo, Ernesto. 2002. The Police in Mexico: Political Functions and Needed Reforms. in *Transnational Crime and Public Security: Challenges to Mexico and the United States*, edited by John Bailey and Jorge Chabat. La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. or Reames, Benjamin. Police Forces in Mexico: A Profile.

bribe money in Mexico. Transparencia Mexicana's (Mexican Transparency) biannual National Corruption and Good Government Index has found consistently that for a wide range of governmental processes, payments to transit police to avoid a towing or traffic fine yields the most incidences of reported bribe paying.⁶ Perhaps as a result, the public consistently gives the police poor marks in surveys. They not only express a lack of confidence in the police but have less confidence in the police than other governmental and societal institutions. In the federal government conducted National Survey on Political Culture and Citizen Practices (Encuesta Nacional sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas) respondents rated the police on average a 5.55 on a scale from 1-10, below every other group besides political parties (5.3).⁷ In the annual national survey of urban areas conducted by the Citizen Institute for Studies on Insecurity (Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad A.C.), respondents ranked local preventive police forces a 5.3 on a scale of 1-10, on par with other police agencies and slightly above political parties.⁸ Respondents to the academic Latin American Public Opinion Project survey rated the police dead last at a 3.3 on a scale of 1-7 (or the equivalent of 4.7 on a scale of 1-10).

Given these negative statistics, it is worth considering some of the policies commonly posited to produce a more professional police force and in so doing illustrate the absence of such characteristics among many Mexican departments. The first point of concern is who becomes a police officer? In professional departments throughout the world, candidate selection is the initial point of intervention to ensure an honest and

⁶ Transparencia Mexicana. 2006. Índice Nacional de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno: Resultados 2001, 2003, 2005. http://www.transparenciamexicana.org.mx/documentos/ENCBG/2005/Folleto_INCBG_2005.pdf

⁷ Conociendo a los Ciudadanos Mexicanos: Principales Resultados: Tercera Encuesta Nacional sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanos de la SEGOB. 2005. Secretaría de Gobernación. http://www.gobernacion.gob.mx/encup/terceraENCUP/Encarte_2005.pdf

⁸ Cuarta encuesta nacional sobre inseguridad/urbana. 2006. Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad A.C.) http://www.icesi.org.mx/documentos/encuestas/encuestasNacionales/ensi4_urbana.pdf

qualified force. Drug tests, lie detector tests, psychological tests, background checks, asset verification, interviews with references, minimum age requirements, and minimum education requirements are all important screening mechanisms.

There have been numerous efforts to improve selection criteria in Mexico, and psychological and drug tests are now standard. A few agencies also require a high school degree and some have convened citizen committees to assist in and oversee selection. The federal government has created a National Public Security Personnel Registry (Registro Nacional de Personal de Seguridad Pública) to ensure that incoming officers to any police force do not have a criminal record and have not been previously let go from a different agency. Nevertheless, even where selection criteria have improved, exceptions appear to be common. Due to a variety of factors including a negative reputation, high risks, and low pay, Mexican police agencies report considerable difficulties in attracting a sufficient number of applicants to be highly selective. In many cases, new selection criteria (e.g. threshold scores on psychological tests, minimum education requirements) have to be relaxed in order to ensure a sufficient number of incoming cadets. The challenge of recruitment has been most visible at the federal level, where the Federal Preventive Police had considerable trouble attracting college graduates to fill an announced 8,000 positions in its intelligence units.⁹ As a partial result of its recruiting challenges, the Federal Preventive Police has filled more than half of its ranks with 16,000 transferred military personnel.¹⁰ The problem is reproduced at the state and municipal levels without the ability to fall back on the military, however. A worst case scenario can be found in Tijuana, where the expansion of the police force from just over 1,500 to almost 2,400 during the three year administration of

⁹ Gandaría, Manrique. 2007. Reduce SSP a 3 meses el tiempo de capacitación para policías. *El Sol de México*. May 23.

¹⁰ Gandaría, Manrique. 2007. Se han integrado 16 mil soldados del Ejército a la PFP. *El Sol de México*. May 22.

Jorge Hank Rhon (2004-2007) allowed for the infiltration of organized crime elements into the force.

Additional factors important to building a professional department include a reasonable salary and financial benefits, reasonable work hours, the possibility to rise up through the ranks, sufficient training and opportunities for educational advancement, police equipment of sufficient quantity and quality to fulfill one's functions, and established police procedures. Mexican state and municipal policing generally does not score well on any of these criteria. Even in Northern Mexico, where the police are generally paid better, there are departments where police agents work 24 hour shifts (with only 24 hours off) for a salary of roughly US\$550 (\$5,500 pesos) a month. Select departments have witnessed some improvements in these areas. A handful of municipalities and states in Northern Mexico switched to 8 hour shifts and pay around \$850 (\$8,500 pesos) a month. In Tijuana, one of the country's most conflictive municipalities, line-level police earn \$1,495 (\$14,949 pesos) a month. Nonetheless, these departments remain the exception rather than the norm.

Furthermore, in most departments, advancement is based primarily on personal connections, and top and middle management can be replaced following the arrival of new police chiefs. Even in departments that have made considerable advances in professionalization, leadership positions remain important patronage resources. In one Northern Mexican municipality, seven mid-level commanders participating in a focus group all reported that they had at one time held a higher position in the force and they estimated that all of the approximately 120 current commanders had cycled in and out of the department's leadership. Officials rationalize their failure to develop a meritocratic promotions process by arguing that it is essential that police commanders have the flexibility to appoint people that they trust. However, such a lack of continuity has several negative

side effects including removing the incentive for a police officer to excel in his or her work with the hope of rising up through the ranks.

As Suárez and Moloeznik discuss in this volume, insufficient training is a major obstacle to professionalization. While the quality of academy training is improving with policies such as the national academy's certification of instructors in key areas (e.g. handgun training, tactics, radio communications), pressure to get more police on the street has resulted in a reduction of training times. More fundamentally, in-service training and refresher courses are still relatively rare. As one interviewee stated, "policing involves perishable skills that you lose if they are not reinforced." Nonetheless, in most departments police that do not have leadership positions might go years without receiving a course of any kind. It is not that courses are not offered; however, they are given on an ad-hoc basis and tend to be more oriented to the leadership than the rank and file. Instructors responsible for testing rank and file police in seven areas of policing as part of a federal program privately reported in interviews that many police fail to demonstrate proficiency in basic aspects of policing.

A constant complaint among police discussed in the Azaola chapter is the lack of equipment to do effective police work. In interviews, police regularly quip that the criminals are better armed than they are. In response to this traditional failure, in recent years, governmental authorities have ramped up investment in equipment. For 2008, the federal government initiated an unprecedented subsidy program called SUBSEMUN (Subsidy for Municipal Public Security or Subsidio para la Seguridad Pública Municipal). Under the SUBSEMUN program, 150 municipalities are receiving large cash infusions that might double their annual budgets. While there is close to universal praise for the long needed investment, critics worry that a one-time subsidy will not facilitate long term planning or

solutions. In fact, there is a long tradition of major investments at the beginning of an administration followed by neglect.

Finally and perhaps most surprisingly, many departments still operate without clearly laid out police procedures and procedural manuals. Instead, as one interviewed police leader contended, police action follows the discretion and style of individual commanders. When supervisors are changed, so does the method of addressing security challenges. The product is inconsistent law enforcement, inefficiency, and errors that can violate individual rights.

A final major factor affecting police integrity are accountability mechanisms. Professional departments throughout the world have some means “to police the police.” These generally take two forms: an internal affairs unit that is within the department or an oversight agency that is outside of the police. This is unquestionably the area where the least progress has been made in Mexico.¹¹ Despite the widespread perception of corruption, there is little day to day investigation and removal of corrupt officers. Departments frequently have some variation of an Honor and Justice Council (Consejo de Honor y Justicia) made up of the department’s high level leadership and tasked with ensuring police accountability. In practice, such councils lack staff, meet infrequently, and are burdened with a number of additional responsibilities. These factors ensure that investigating alleged police corruption is not a priority. Rather, anti-corruption efforts are limited to a few departments who undertake non-transparent, large-scale, one-time purges in response to major scandals and political pressure. Examples include purges of state and municipal police in Nuevo Leon in 2007, the Nuevo Laredo municipal police in 2005, the

¹¹ Varenik, Robert O. 2005. *Accountability: Sistema policial de rendición de cuentas*. Mexico: Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia and Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas.

Tijuana municipal police in 2008, and the Federal Investigations Agency (AFI) in 2007.¹²

Ironically, professionals working in internal affairs units complain that in many such cases fired police have successfully challenged their removal in court and been reinstated on the force with back pay.

This brief overview suggests that despite widespread knowledge of policy tools to increase professionalism such measures are often not implemented or not implemented effectively in Mexican police forces. There appear to be a variety of reasons for this reality. At the most basic level, law enforcement officials are granted significant authority; they have considerable discretion to use that authority; and they are difficult to monitor. As a result, police can easily supplement their income by stealing from a crime scene, shaking down citizens, or accepting bribes from criminals. If one considers that police work in Mexico is generally poorly paid, highly stigmatized, offers little opportunity for advancement, and has limited oversight, then misconduct appears very likely.

There also appears to be collective action problems in reforming Mexican police. This is most evident in the inability to create a meritocratic promotion process. As Barbara Geddes has found in a different context, politicians who reject patronage lose a key resource to shoring up political support.¹³ Moreover, they obtain no counterbalancing benefit of good government because everyone else continues to play by the rules of patronage. The same basic argument can be applied to police forces where political and police leadership refuses to give up the right to appoint their friends and trusted associates to key positions. Given their own limited ability to combat pervasive police misconduct

¹² For example, after a string of assassinations and executions in Nuevo Leon, state and federal authorities placed over 150 municipal and state officers into custody. Thirty-six were eventually indicted on corruption charges. From: *El Universal*. 2007. 36 police officers jailed in N. León. May 16.

¹³ Geddes, Barbara. 1996. *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

problems single-handedly, officials have little to gain from surrendering such personal privileges.

Some authors, such as Ernesto López Portillo, have pointed to historical factors, arguing that the police in Mexico have traditionally been exploited for the benefit of political leaders.¹⁴ A complementary historical view provided by interview respondents, points out that until the last couple of decades Mexico simply did not have the crime problems that it has today. Absent major trafficking and drug consumption problems, creating a professional force simply was not a priority. Now that such challenges have become urgent, the presence of organized crime has dramatically increased the incentives for police misconduct.¹⁵ The drug trade is a multi-billion dollar industry with sufficient surplus to buy off the law enforcement officials needed to ensure its success. As summed up by the often used phrase, “plata o plomo” (the bribe or the bullet), organized crime is able to dominate the relationship between briber and bribe recipient. Although a police officer might be able to shake down an isolated law breaker, an organized crime syndicate provides its members with leverage and protection in confrontations with the law. While corruption is a rational strategy under normal conditions, given the presence of an aggressive organized crime syndicate, it becomes a survival strategy for some officers.

Theoretically, citizens and civil society should provide a counterbalance to the negative incentives within Mexican police forces and exacerbated by organized crime. Nonetheless, such a counterbalance has empirically not been forthcoming. Unfortunately, citizens also benefit from the ability to bribe police, avoid fines for traffic and other legal

¹⁴ López Portillo, Ernesto. 2002. *The Police in Mexico: Political Functions and Needed Reforms*

¹⁵ Sabet, Daniel. 2007. *The Border Bottleneck: Drug Trafficking and Incentives for Police Corruption*. in *Deceiving (Dis)Appearances: Analyzing Current Developments in Europe and North America's Border Regions*, edited by Harlan Koff. Brussels: PIE/Peter Lang. And Payan, Tony. 2006. *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security*. Westport, CN: Praeger Security International.

violations, and intervene in law enforcement on behalf of family and friends. Mexico vies with Paraguay for the highest rates of self-reported corruption in Latin America.

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer found that 31% of their Mexican sample reported that they or someone in their household had paid a bribe in the last year.¹⁶

When questioned about corruption, interviewed police officers and government officials frequently lay the blame on citizens, complaining that it is they who offer money without police extortion. While such arguments fail to recognize an officer's own culpability, they do raise a valid point about the ambivalence of citizens in addressing corruption. As Suárez points out in this volume, it is difficult to separate police culture from the broader culture.¹⁷

An additional reason why citizens have not provided a counterbalance to organized crime and corruption is fear. Several prominent members of Mexico's civil society, including journalists, prominent businessmen and women, and members of associations such as the chamber of commerce and good governance groups have been the targets of threats, disappearances, kidnappings, and assassinations. For example, in Tijuana, the head of a citizen public participation committee who had been a vocal advocate of improved security barely survived an attempt on his life by organized criminal elements.¹⁸ In Hermosillo, Sonora the refusal of a woman to pay a bribe to an officer landed her in jail on trumped up charges.¹⁹

Perhaps most importantly, however, citizens and civil society lack the tools to hold officials accountable. Ostensibly because of the delicate nature of security and investigation, law enforcement is able to avoid transparency and meaningful citizen

¹⁶ Transparency Internacional. 2006. *Global Corruption Barometer*.

¹⁷ This is not to suggest that corruption is a hardwired component of Mexican culture. Interviewed police also point out that U.S. tourists on vacation in Mexico are also more than willing to offer bribes.

¹⁸ *La Frontera*. 2007. Atenta comando contra Capella Ibarra. Nov. 17.

¹⁹ Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos. 2005. *Recomendación No. 09/2005*. <http://cedhson.uson.mx/Recomendaciones/rec9.htm>

²⁰ Guillén López, Tonatiuh. 2006. *Gobiernos Municipales en Mexico: Entre la Modernización y la Tradición Política*. Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Miguel Angel Porrúa Grupo Editorial.

oversight. The lack of information about police actions is demonstrated every time an officer is assassinated. Rather than eulogizing killed officers as heroes with marches in the streets denouncing organized crime, citizens are surprisingly silent. Unfortunately, at the news of an officers' death, there is always uncertainty as to why he was killed. Was he killed because he was carrying out his duty, because he was disloyal to a cartel that was paying him, or because he was supporting a rival syndicate? Thorough investigations are always promised, however, the facts of such killings almost never come to light. The silence of citizens reflects both their lack of information and their sense of powerlessness.

Scandals of police misconduct have also not produced effective tools for citizen oversight. While north of the border such scandals have produced powerful citizen led investigation committees, such as New York's Knapp Commission (1972), the Pennsylvania Crime Commission (1974), or Los Angeles's Mollen Commission (1994), no such commissions or citizen oversight mechanisms have been forthcoming in Mexico. As a result of these factors, citizens have not provided a counterbalance to corrupting influences.

In short, there are many reasons why police misconduct continues and policing fails to become a true profession. Nonetheless, it is still surprising that in over 3,000 departments more success stories have not emerged. There are, after all, reformers both within the police and among elected officials who have tried to overcome the collective action problems inherent in reform. Politicians and police leaders would benefit enormously from a reputation as a successful reformer. In addition, there are numerous honest police officers that are frustrated by the lack of professionalization within their own department. Most police would prefer to work in a department where they are well-paid, have sufficient resources, and are viewed as professionals and respected authority figures.

In fact, numerous police chiefs and city mayors have come to office with the genuine intention of professionalizing the police. Some of made considerable gains; however, as

alluded to above, those gains can be rolled back in successive administrations. It is one of the unfortunate aspects of politics in Mexico that each administration seeks to clearly distinguish itself from its predecessor, even when the predecessor is from the same party.²⁰ New city mayors do not necessarily honor agreements made by previous administrations, and they typically reappoint most top managers, who in turn change middle management. These appointments are filled by individuals literally as “trusted people” (or *gente de confianza*). As a result, it is not uncommon to hear members of civil society quip that municipal officials spend one year learning the job, one year working, and one year preparing for what they will do at the end of the administration. While some important advances might be made in a given administration, they risk being over turned in the next.

Based on the above discussion, it is possible to see the paradoxes identified in the introduction in a new light. Police leaders and politicians promising change often fail because of the collective action problems inherent in realizing reform, the threat of organized crime, and the exclusion of citizens from the policy arena. Three thousand police departments have only produced a few success stories because the efforts of one administration are often lost with the change in government.

Two steps forward in Chihuahua

Unlike many police departments in Mexico, the DSPM, a department of roughly 950 police officers, has managed to defy the odds and make major strides in the area of professionalization. Given that the DSPM is one of a handful of success stories in Mexico, it warrants a more thorough investigation. Below I discuss efforts to professionalize the DSPM through certification by an international policing accreditation agency and through improvements in training, promotion, and work conditions. This is followed by a discussion

²⁰ Guillén López, Tonatiuh. 2006. *Gobiernos Municipales en Mexico: Entre la Modernización y la Tradición Política*. Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Miguel Angel Porrúa Grupo Editorial.

of selection criteria and accountability mechanisms, two areas where the DSPM still faces considerable limitations.

CALEA accreditation: The most celebrated of the DSPM's advances is the accreditation of the U.S. based Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). CALEA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1979 as a joint effort by several prominent law enforcement executive associations. It certifies police agencies for maintaining a body of standards covering many aspects of policing and accepted by public security practitioners and experts. CALEA offers two levels of certification: recognition and accreditation. Obtaining accreditation is rigorous, time-consuming, expensive, and requires that departments comply with 459 standards. To date around 870 police agencies have been accredited by CALEA, primarily in the United States. The DSPM, which obtained recognition in March 2004 and then accreditation in May 2007, was the first and to date only police force in Mexico to be accredited by the Commission.²¹

The CALEA process has resulted in substantial changes in policing in Chihuahua. It has corresponded with what several officers referred to as a transition away from *policías empíricos*, or basing one's decisions on one's own personal experience, to *policías científicos*, working based on best accepted practices. Procedures might appear to be common sense; however, when neglected they can open up considerable loopholes for abuse. For example, a common complaint made by arrestees is that personal belongings surrendered for admission to detention facilities are stolen. As a result of CALEA procedures, an inventory of items belonging to the detainee is taken, items are placed in bags in front of the detainee, and the bags are stapled shut with the inventory list, which is

²¹ The state police in Coahuila has obtained recognition and at least ten agencies are in the initial self assessment stage. It should be mentioned that the DSPM also has ISO-9000 certification in several areas.

then signed by the individual taking the items. If followed, such a procedure can reduce incidences of theft and give internal affairs investigators a tool to determine if personnel acted properly.

In addition to improving procedures affecting day to day police work, the department also had to improve its internal management and supervision. Police are now evaluated annually by their superiors. Policy was improved for determining pay and promotion. The DSPM was required to update facilities and create a Department of Citizen Attention (Subdirección de Atención a la Ciudadanía) to receive citizen request for services and complaints about police actions. A high school education has become a requirement for entering cadets. All officers must receive annual in-service training. And, not insignificantly, all police have been provided with a copy of the manual governing their behavior and that of the institution. As a result, in the department's internal survey, 76% of the respondents felt that complying with CALEA procedures would improve police effectiveness (See Table 1).

(Insert Table 1 here)

Training: When asked why Chihuahua has successfully professionalized, most respondents attributed the change to improved training. While its facilities are modest, the DSPM's police academy, which was founded in 1964, has a longer history than most, and it is accredited by the National Public Security System (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública) and the state education authority (Secretaría de Educación y Cultura). Accreditation by the former ensures quality police training and by the latter signifies that graduates of the academy earn a recognized technical degree. In addition, certification as a technical school does not permit the police leadership to drastically reduce the nine month training period (including 2 months of practical training) to meet immediate operational needs.

Perhaps more important and less common in Mexico, is a CALEA requirement that all police must return to the academy for a one week re-training each year on basic police tactics. As discussed above, in most municipal departments, trainings are conducted on an ad-hoc rather than permanent basis and rarely trickle down through the ranks. In addition, the department has been encouraging general education. Those with only a middle-school education are encouraged to attend continuing education high school classes, and a high school degree is now a requirement for promotion to a supervisory position. In addition, academic institutions have provided pro bono services to the police department, allowing 80 police to complete a technical degree in police investigations, 46 police and administrators to take a 180 hour certificate in leadership and administration, and 40 police to complete a course on basic computing. In addition, 15 officers are currently working on a bachelor's degree in law and 3 are enrolled in a master's degree program in "citizen security."

Incentives: Although higher than some police departments, the salary for agents in Chihuahua is still low by many standards. The base salary for agents is \$674 a month (\$6,741 pesos) with modest increases for rank, years of service, and participation in units with specialized training. In addition, agents typically receive a 12% monthly bonus if they do not miss work and do not have faults on their record. Police also have access to medical coverage (beyond the standard state employee medical insurance), a pension, life insurance, and potential access to credit, an important incentive given that police in Mexico are not eligible for credit from Mexican banks. In addition, the department plans to invest an additional \$3 million in improving incentives as part of the SUBSEMUN program. Among several requirements to obtain the substantial federal subsidy, municipalities must match a certain percentage and invest that amount in improving financial benefits. It should also be mentioned that the police have benefited from the creation of a Citizen Public Security

Committee, which has mobilized community resources to offer access to housing credit and discounts on goods and services from local businesses.

The DSPM first attempted to create a police civil service (sistema de carrera policial) in 2001; however, as discussed above, there are serious collective action problems in doing so. The killings of two policemen in 2006 revealed that a high level officer used on-duty police to provide private protection for a businessman with alleged ties to organized crime, suggesting that promotion was based on factors other than merit and honesty.²² When surveyed in 2006 only 39.19% of the sample of police felt that the system for promotion was fair (See Table 1). In response to the survey results, additional efforts made the process more transparent, including the participation of members of the citizen council. Under the current system implemented in 2007, given a set number of years at one's current position and a minimum level of education, officers become eligible for promotion. Following their application, promotion is determined by performance at the conclusion of a two week promotion course. Citizen council members participate in overseeing the process and course results are posted publicly. While the police officers interviews for this study are not a representative sample, all but one of the eleven felt that the current promotion criteria were fair and had improved markedly.

While, academics and citizens might be inclined to believe that improved accountability mechanisms are the essential factors to professionalizing the police and improving police integrity, interviewed police respondents argued that it is improved technology and equipment that allows for a greater sense of pride, specialization, and professionalism. Although survey respondents perceived a continued need for more

²² *Tiempo*. 2006. La SIEDO debe aclarar identidad de Julio Porras. May 29. http://www.tiempo.com.mx/imprimir.php?id_n=7494&PHPSESSID=800b90e00fa0ee9bf97aae123138f217

equipment, Chihuahua has invested heavily in technology. The department has a modern dispatching system, a high-tech mobile command unit, twenty-eight cameras throughout the city, several specialized units such as a SWAT-like team, laptops in supervisors' cars, and a helicopter. In addition, police are assigned their own cars, carry designated guns, and are less likely to be abused through excessive or unrealistic work hours. Officers work 12 hour shifts followed by either 24 hours or 48 hours off: averaging a 42 hour work week. In the department's internal survey, 76.35% agreed that the assignment of work zones was fair and 87% felt that the work hours were fair.

In summary, Chihuahua has made major strides in a number of areas, and as a result, police departments throughout Northern Mexico are following the DSPM's lead. At least 10 other departments were, at the time of writing, in the self-assessment stage of CALEA accreditation. Of course, CALEA does not represent a panacea. As one interview respondent put it, "a lot has to come before CALEA and a lot has to come after," in order for police departments to change. As the troubles in implementing meritocratic promotion criteria reveal, writing a formal policy and carrying it out in practice are two very different things. What has distinguished the DSPM has been its ability to implement such policies, and as a result of its efforts, the DSPM has been recognized both nationally and internationally.²³ However, as the next section illustrates, this discussion does not imply that the department does not have considerable challenges ahead.

Selection criteria: The DSPM has struggled to ensure the quality of incoming agents. In 2004, the former mayor of Chihuahua, José Reyes Baeza was elected state governor. He brought with him the DSPM's police chief Raúl Grajeda Domínguez to lead the state police, which formed a new elite unit called the Intelligence Police Force (Cuerpo

²³ For example, the department received an award from President Vicente Fox in 2004; it was given an exemplary evaluation by the Atlus Global Alliance; and its police chief is president of the Asociación Nacional de Jefes de Policía Municipal (National Association of Municipal Police Chiefs).

de Inteligencia Policial – CIPOL). To fill its ranks, CIPOL pulled heavily from the police department that Grajeda formally commanded, drawing over 200 police away from the DSPM and leaving the municipality with a deficit of police that it had to fill in the short term. Unfortunately, attracting a sufficient number of new police to the department required relaxing acceptance criteria, and several interviewed police complained about the quality and the integrity of these now junior police agents. While the DSPM has tightened up its criteria, requiring a high school degree and passing anti-doping, health, knowledge, socio-cultural, and psychological tests, some damage might have already been done.

It should also be mentioned that raising the selection criteria has limited the department's applicant pool. Seeking to admit 55 cadets in the upcoming class, roughly 100 applicants only produced around 45 acceptable candidates. This highlights the challenge raised early in this chapter. Because policing still has a negative image, departments have a hard time attracting adequate candidates. The finding suggests that departments such as the DSPM need to not only raise the criteria for entering cadets, but complement the criteria with active recruiting efforts among targeted groups.

Accountability Mechanisms: The DSPM has also been hesitant to directly address the problem of corruption. On the one hand, there are several mechanisms designed to ensure police accountability in Chihuahua City, including the State Commission for Human Rights (Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos), the Department of Internal Affairs (Subdirección de Asuntos Internos), the Department of Citizen Attention (Subdirección de Atención a la Ciudadanía), and the Honor and Justice Council (Consejo de Honor y Justicia). The state human rights commission investigates alleged human rights violations and makes recommendations to the municipal government and the police. The Department of Internal Affairs is organized outside of the police department but is within the municipal government. It investigates any allegations of police misconduct and makes

recommendations to the Honor and Justice Council. The Office of Citizen Attention is organized within the police department and receives both requests for service and complaints against the police. Working with police leadership, some complaints are addressed directly within the department and others are referred to internal affairs for investigation.

On the other hand, while there are many organizations, with the exception of the Honor and Justice Council, none of the other three agencies have the power to emit sanctions. Rather, this power is reserved for the Council, which is made up city and police officials. Unfortunately, according to the municipality, the Council emitted 0 serious sanctions against police officers in 2006, only 4 in 2007, and only 3 in the first half of 2008.²⁴ Theoretically, this could be a reflection of clean police department; however, police leaders and officers acknowledge the continued problem of police corruption. The numbers also do not correspond with the 94 citizen complaints of extortion reported to the Department of Citizen Attention in 2007. Moreover, members of civil society expressed concern about infiltration by organized crime and the above mentioned allegations against a senior member of the force has also undermined citizen confidence. This suggests a lack of political will to address corruption directly and a hope that improving conditions for police, training, and the possibility for promotion will create sufficient carrots for good behavior even absent a credible stick.

In summary, the DSPM still faces several challenges, particularly in the areas of candidate selection and accountability mechanisms. Nonetheless, the department has still won considerable recognition for the advances that it has made in professionalization. These advances are possibly reflected in recent opinion polling conducted by the Instituto

²⁴ Número de Elementos Policiacos Sancionados por el Consejo de Honor y Justicia. 2008. Sistema de Indicadores de Gestión Municipal Administrativa. <http://ras.municipiochihuahua.gob.mx/Default.aspx>.

Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey. On a scale of 1-10, residents of Chihuahua rate the police as 6, a modest advantage over the aforementioned national surveys (See Figure 1). Trust and respect increases when survey questions ask about police assigned to the respondents' specific neighborhoods. Sixty-eight percent of respondents strongly or moderately respected the police working in their community. Fifty-four percent strongly or moderately trusted the police working in their community. In addition 37% of the sample reported awareness of CALEA accreditation (See Table 4). While these numbers fall short of demonstrating citizen confidence in the police, they do suggest greater public trust than national averages.

(Insert Figure 1 and Table 2 here)

The 250 police respondents, for their part and perhaps not surprisingly, rated themselves very well. As illustrated in Table 3, they felt that citizens would most commonly award them an eight on a scale of 1-10. In addition, 71% rated the honesty of the police a 8, 9, or 10 on a scale of 1-10 (although 10% of the sample did not answer the question.) Finally, when asked what moral values were the most essential to being a police officer, the most common answer, given by 26% of the sample, was honesty.

(Insert Table 3 here)

Explaining Chihuahua's advances

The advances in Chihuahua City given the continued problems in so many departments, begs the question: what makes Chihuahua City different? On the one hand, municipal and police leadership have instituted a number of policies and programs that have converted vicious cycles into virtuous ones. But why was Chihuahua able to successfully implement these and other policies. In other words, the question is not just what has been the effect of measures such as CALEA accreditation on Chihuahua's policing, but why was the DSPM able to achieve accreditation in the first place.

To begin to answer this question, it should be mentioned that Chihuahua City has two natural advantages over other locations in Mexico. First, the city and state are wealthier than many parts of the country and therefore have the ability to make greater investments in salaries, incentives, equipment, and administration. Second, Chihuahua City has not been as affected by organized crime to the extent of many other cities in Northern Mexico, such as the border cities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros. Nonetheless, as will be discussed below, Chihuahua City has not escaped the scourge of organized crime nor is it devoid of financial concerns. Moreover, these two factors represent insufficient explanations.

When asked when Chihuahua began to professionalize, senior police point back to 1992. According to one high level officer with twenty-one years on the force:

Since 1992 we have experienced a complete turnout. We have better technology; we are more professional; we have paid more attention to our human resources, and CALEA has been the icing on the cake. When I joined the force, the chiefs didn't even know how to read or write. It bothered me because I had a high school education and many of them didn't even have primary school – and they were the bosses.

In that year, Patricio Martínez García was elected mayor, and he appointed Steven Slater, a former U.S. police officer from New Mexico, to head Chihuahua City's police academy. Slater brought with him the perspective of U.S. policing, and current police leadership credit him with making several small changes that have had long-term effects. Of particular importance was his focus on standardization. He initiated a process of standardizing police procedures and police trainings. In addition, he used his connections to attract U.S. police trainers to teach courses and promoted regular in-service training. Finally, he helped the department create specialized police units, such as the K-9 and special tactics units that

continue to this day. As is the custom in Mexican politics, Slater would leave with the change in administration three years later, but his efforts would have a long term impact. Here is where Chihuahua parts ways with other Mexican departments. Good leadership is not uncommon in Mexican policing. There have been a number of visionaries that have developed and implemented good programs and policies; however, as discussed above, such initiatives have too often ended with the change of administration.

In Chihuahua, however, rather than replace these policies, they were built upon. Interviewed members of the force all felt that the evolution of the police had been linear; this is to say one of constant progress. In fact, the DSPM has experienced an unprecedented degree of continuity. To illustrate, Mayor José Reyes Baeza, who came to office in 1998 appointed Raúl Grajeda Domínguez to head the municipal police force. Grajeda's administration lasted six years and expanded over three city mayors from the PRI political party, an unusual feat in Mexican local politics even given the continuity of the party in power. Grajeda left the agency after the PAN won the municipal government in 2004, and the new mayor Juan Alberto Blanco Zaldívar appointed Lázaro Gaytán Aguirre to head the organization. Gaytán also managed to outlast an administration change and remains municipal director under the current PAN administration of Carlos Borrueal Baquera. While it is not impossible, it would be surprising to find another municipal police agency that has only been led by two men over a ten year period.

Continuity has also occurred within the ranks of the police itself. Since legal reforms in 1993, the chief operations officers have come from within the ranks of the DSPM, ensuring that operations benefit from both institutional memory and local knowledge. The current operational director has led operations for the past four years – again overlapping two political administrations. In addition, the police statutes passed in 2001 outline something akin to a civil service reform for the police, allowing for a slow progress up

through the ranks. Although leadership appointments can still be politically manipulated, such manipulation has to occur within a framework mandating a certain number of years on the force to be eligible for different ranks. As a result, all of the current police senior leadership at the rank of Captain (or *Coordinador*) have served for over 20 years in the department.

There is even continuity in police-citizen interactions. In most Mexican police agencies, officers are rotated regularly and never patrol for long in the same area. Ostensibly this is an anti-corruption mechanism, designed to prevent police from extorting businesses for protection or developing commitments to criminal elements. However, there is a compelling counterargument to this policy: given constant rotation, the police never develop a relationship with the citizens that they are protecting, gain the trust of the community, or develop local knowledge about crime problems. Most importantly for this discussion, citizens have no means to monitor individual officers in their neighborhood because the police are constantly changing. In other words, constantly transferring leaders and police might not only fail to prevent misconduct, but prevent corrupt elements from being caught. As one interviewed officer commented about rotation policies, “If they are going to be corrupt here, then they are going to be corrupt somewhere else.” Unlike most departments, however, Chihuahua’s police have maintained their patrols in the same communities.

Finally and most importantly, there has been continuity in policy. To illustrate, the process for CALEA accreditation actually began during a PRI government while Raúl Grajeda Domínguez was chief of police. Even though the accreditation process began under a different chief, under a different mayor, and a different political party; the incoming chief Gaytán Aguirre continued the program of his predecessor and obtained accreditation. This is not insignificant. In the nearby cities of Mexicali, Baja California and Hermosillo,

Sonora, earlier administrations developed procedures and obtained the certification of ISO-9000, an international standard not specific to policing and commonly used in industry. While the initiative was much celebrated as a success of the administration, the following government simply allowed the certification to lapse. While the procedures developed at that time still exist on paper, they have not been updated, officers do not have a copy, and there is little emphasis on following them. It appeared likely that the same thing would occur in Chihuahua City. During his 2004 campaign, the PAN mayoral candidate criticized the accomplishment of his PRI predecessor, declaring that the police should obtain the “accreditation” of the citizens of Chihuahua rather than that of an international organization. Fortunately and to his credit, the new mayor was prevailed upon to allow the program to continue. Nonetheless, the episode reveals the pressure on political candidates to repudiate the achievements of their predecessors rather than ensure their continuity.

Figures 2 and 3 sum up the argument made here. Were the typical informal rules of Mexican local politics followed in Chihuahua City, then the past five administrations would have appointed at least five police chiefs and initiated at least five distinct sets of policies. This hypothesized lack of continuity is illustrated in Figure 2. Chihuahua City, however, witnessed continuity in its police chiefs and in its policies across different administrations and across different political parties. It is because of this degree of continuity that operational leaders can point as far back as 1992 to the beginning of the department’s professionalization. It is for this reason that the advances made by an academy director sixteen years in the past are still viewed as important for the department’s current development.

(Insert Figures 2 and 3 about here)

Discussion

This paper began with a question: given efforts to improve the integrity of law enforcement and around 3,000 different departments, why have only a handful of Mexican police departments managed to professionalize? To answer this question, I explore a case study of one of Mexico's few success stories, the DSPM of Chihuahua City. I find that the primary difference between Chihuahua and other municipalities has been continuity. As a result, Chihuahua City's DSPM has experienced a steady rate of improvement over time that has not occurred in other locations.

Unfortunately, however, continuity is something of a double edged sword. In fact, continuity has traditionally been avoided in Mexican policing precisely as a means to reduce opportunities for police misconduct. By changing police chiefs frequently, it is hoped that they will not be corrupted during their short tenures, and by rotating police, it is hoped that they will not become co-opted by local criminal groups. In fact, the continuity of corrupt politicians, police chiefs, or police agents in their positions can produce a vicious circle that only ensures the continuation of police misconduct.

On the other hand, allowing for the continuity of good personnel, good policies, and good ideas allows for virtuous circles and an evolutionary professional development. So how does one separate out these two sides of the continuity argument? At its core, police professionalization means making an investment in the human resources of a police department. Departments would be better off prioritizing the continuity of personnel, policies, and ideas, while building sufficient accountability mechanisms to "discontinue" the individuals and policies that perpetuate police misconduct. In other words, there needs to be both carrots and sticks.

The importance of accountability mechanisms to solving the continuity dilemma points to a chink in the DSPM's armor. Although Chihuahua City's DSPM is a success story, it would be erroneous to overstate the gains made in Chihuahua or suggest that they

cannot be eroded. The weakness of the department's accountability mechanisms is all the more salient given the increasing influence of organized criminal elements in the state. Since the beginning of 2008, Chihuahua has become a major battleground between rival organized criminal groups. In just the first half of 2008, a shocking 50 law enforcement officials were assassinated in the state. The vast majority of these were municipal police officers from Ciudad Juárez, traditional home of the Juárez cartel, and state investigative police.²⁵

While Chihuahua City has avoided much of the drug related violence, it has not escaped unscathed, and two of its officers were killed in the first half of 2008. Many residents fear that Chihuahua City could become the next Monterrey, Nuevo León a metropolitan area that prior to 2005 had been largely untouched by the drug trade's violence. However, when a turf war broke out between two rival cartels, Monterrey became the site of numerous murders and assassinations. The metropolitan area's police departments found themselves in the center of the conflict, as they had been infiltrated by the two competing organized crime syndicates. As a result, dozens of police were executed during 2006 and 2007. Two knowledgeable individuals interviewed for this study expressed concern that the drug cartels had successfully infiltrated Chihuahua's municipal department. In fact, the current state governor recently made the statement, "All the public security agencies are infiltrated – simply all of them..."²⁶ Time will tell if advances towards professionalism will help insulated the department against the increasing threat of the drug cartels; however, the weaknesses in accountability mechanisms and limitations of citizen oversight are reason for concern.

²⁵ Hernández, José, 2008, Reporte de guerra al narco. *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*. July 7.

²⁶ *El Diario*. 2008. Todos los policías están infiltradas: Reyes Baeza. March 25.

The drug trade presents an additional challenge to the DSPM and municipal police forces throughout the country. Technically even low volume drug dealing and consumption are federal offenses that fall under the jurisdiction of the federal police. As a result, the DSPM is dependent on a limited number of federal police to address an extensive problem that is at its core a very local police issue. As a result, citizens are forced to watch drug deals occur with impunity as crime rates rise and allegations mount of local police turning a blind eye. At the end of the day, there is not an exact negative correlation between police professionalism and crime, and most citizens care first about crime rates and second about efforts to professionalize the police, viewing the latter as a means to address the former. In short, even given the advances that have been made in Chihuahua, the DSPM will have to directly address corruption and decrease crime rates to gain the confidence of its citizens.

Table 1: Police responses about their work environment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Do you think that complying with CALEA will help improve your work.	46.53%	30.56%	13.19%	5.56%	4.17%
Do you think that the process for determining promotions is clear and fair?	10.14%	29.05%	25.68%	15.54%	19.59%
Do you think that the DSPM equipment is adequate?	8.16%	27.21%	21.77%	25.17%	17.69%
Do you think that the designation of patrol zones is fair	26.35%	50%	13.51%	4.73%	5.41%
Do you think that the work hours are adequate?	55.10%	31.97%	4.76%	4.08%	4.08%

Source: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, 2006

Table 2: Citizen perceptions of the police

	Yes, strongly	Yes, moderately	Yes, weakly	No	NA
Do you respect the police that work in your neighborhood?	33.67%	34.72%	13.59%	14.74%	3.30%
Do you trust the police that work in your neighborhood?	21.73%	32.22%	18.93%	23.73%	3.40%
	Yes	.	.	No	NA
Did you know that the municipal police is accredited by CALEA?	37.16%	.	.	60.39%	2.45%

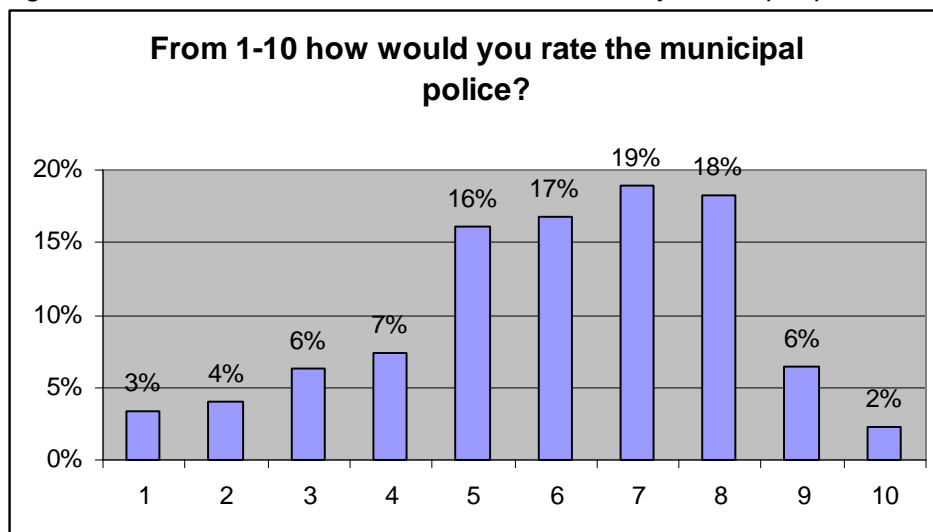
Source: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, 2006

Table 3: Police self-evaluations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
In your opinion, from 1-10, how do you think citizens would rate the police?	0%	1%	1%	1%	14%	12%	18%	44%	5%	2%	1%
How would you rate the honesty in the DSPM on a scale from 1-10?	1%	3%	0%	2%	3%	6%	5%	20%	37%	14%	10%

Source: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, 2006

Figure 1: Citizen confidence in the Chihuahua City municipal police



Source: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, 2006

Figure 2: Hypothesized lack of continuity across administrations in Chihuahua City

Timeline	1998-2001	2001-2002	2002-2004	2004-2007	2007-present
Party	PRI			PAN	
Mayor	Reyes Baeza	Barousse Moreno	Cano Ricaud	Blanco Zaldívar	Borruel Baquera
Police Chief	Chief 1	Chief 2	Chief 3	Chief 4	Chief 5
Policy	Policy 1	Policy 2	Policy 3	Policy 4	Policy 5

Figure 3: Empirical continuity across administrations in Chihuahua City

Timeline	1998-2001	2001-2002	2002-2004	2004-2007	2007-present
Party in power	PRI			PAN	
Mayor	Reyes Baeza	Barousse Moreno	Cano Ricaud	Blanco Zaldívar	Borruel Baquera
Police Chief	Raúl Grajeda Domínguez			Lazaro Gaytán Aguirre	
Policy	CALEA Accreditation				