This article was downloaded by: [Australian National University]

On: 22 June 2015, At: 20:54

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Global Crime

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fglc20>

The politics of crime in Mexico: democratic governance in a security trap

Rolando Ochoa^a

^a School of Sociology, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

Published online: 06 Nov 2014.

CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Rolando Ochoa (2015) The politics of crime in Mexico: democratic governance in a security trap, *Global Crime*, 16:1, 51-54, DOI: [10.1080/17440572.2014.977535](https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2014.977535)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2014.977535>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

form and the extent of the United States' cooperation with ICC – be it militarily, political, financial, or in the areas of intelligence and information – have become major factors influencing the courts' effectiveness and decision-making processes. Other world powers have also slowly and reluctantly acknowledged ICC's important role. ICC is no longer the timid organisation that it once was. Today, it is a massive institution with an annual budget of about \$100 million.

The book draws on governmental documents, non-governmental organisations' reports, ICC's files, diplomatic memoirs, the sizable scholarly literature on ICC and interviews with ICC's officials, diplomats and international institutions' officials. Although it offers little by the way of the uniqueness of perspective or novelty of insights into ICC not already mentioned in the existing literature, however, it is still an engrossing and meticulously researched book from beginning to the end. It is cohesive, comprehensive, and very easy to read. The reader does not need to be a specialist in the fields of law or jurisprudence to be able to read, understand and enjoy it, although it should be of particular interest to those interested in such areas. Undergraduate and graduate students of a variety of disciplines in social sciences and humanities can immensely benefit from it. Overall, it is a valuable contribution to the research on ICC. I highly recommend it.

Note

1. Sekuloski, "International Criminal Court", 144–66.

Bibliography

Sekuloski, Branko. "International Criminal Court." *European Scientific Journal* 9, no. 28 (2013): 144–166.

Reza Barmaki

University of Toronto, Mississauga

Reza.barmaki@utoronto.ca

© 2014, Reza Barmaki

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2014.977534>

The politics of crime in Mexico: democratic governance in a security trap, by Bailey, John, Boulder, CO, First Forum Press, 2014, 233 pp., US\$65 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-935049-89-0.

Mexico's security situation has been under deep scrutiny for many years, particularly since 2006 when then President Felipe Calderon 'declared war' on organised crime and tackled, head-on, drug cartels in that country, resulting in increased levels of violence and a death toll of some 60,000 according to the government. The results of such an action have polarised public opinion and put Mexico in the spotlight, creating large scholarly outputs in the process. While important, this output with a strong focus on organised crime has obscured some of the key structural and political issues which have contributed to Mexico's sub-par performance with regards to human security and more specifically citizen security. Bailey's most welcome book is a direct contribution to our understanding of the underpinnings of Mexico's security flaws and takes us beyond mere analysis of

homicide rates and organised crime to illustrate how and why Mexico is in a *security trap*, a situation where ‘...crime, violence, corruption and impunity become mutually reinforcing in civil society, state and regime, and override efforts to build ethical democratic governance’ (8). Using significant research skills and knowledge of the Mexican context, Bailey provides an ambitious and well-written manuscript which, he argues, seeks to understand the political economy of crime and violence and uncover the political effects of crime on democracy and good governance. The author’s lens of political science and policy allow for a well-rounded approach to the study of crime. What sets this tome apart is its explicit focus on ‘the politics of crime’ (7), or how this phenomenon feeds into a wider ‘Rule of Law’ discussion. Bailey uses historical as well as institutional variables to explain Mexico’s security trap, and nestles crime and violence among them as a self-reinforcing outcome.

The wide berth of crime in Mexico

The central thrust of the book is in itself straightforward. Bailey argues that there exist a number of political/institutional conditions – or *problems* and *deficits* as the author calls them – which obtain in Mexico that erode its capacity for successful governance and mires it in a security trap. The *problems* include: (1) the present lack of a substantial social contract in the wake of democratisation processes, (2) a disconnect between the party system and the electorate which leads to poor policymaking and allows parties to seek electoral wins at the expense of good quality public goods delivery, and (3) a very slow-paced and ineffective reform of the ‘Police–Justice’ system which is one of Mexico’s most important reform challenges by many accounts. These are compounded by a *deficit* in trust in institutions overall and a weak incentives to comply with the legal architecture from citizens in general. This broad political–economic context, Bailey argues, is the structural underpinning for Mexico’s failure to escape the security trap and find effective solutions to its crime and violence situation.

In order to deliver his analysis, Bailey ambitiously focuses on all – or nearly all – forms of crime and their impact on the larger polity. He thus classifies all crime to fit into an analytical matrix from ‘simple’ crimes such as regulatory evasion, economic informality, homicide and white collar crime to ‘complex’ crimes such as terrorism, sedition, international organised crime and complex bribery. He then classifies these according to their ‘political nature’, or the level of the social structure they affect, namely the economic, civil society, public parties and officials, the regime and the State (24). The core chapters of the book then address these classifications individually. There is a chapter on tax evasion and informality (Ch. 2), common crime (Ch. 3), organised crime as applied to kidnapping (Ch. 4), and a chapter on organised crime focused on drug trafficking organisations. The book then finishes off with two concluding chapters on State responses to organised crime and a last chapter on both policy ‘escape routes’ (181) and potential policy adaptation based on the Colombian case. The chapters flow together well and follow Bailey’s matrix throughout. Each chapter is detailed and provides the reader with an adequate narrative of the topics its touches on. In the end the reader is left with a good notion of what a security trap is and, perhaps, how we can go about overcoming it. Bailey advocates a very holistic approach to this as he encourages readers to look at ‘policymaking from the top-down, bottom-up and outside-in’ (196).

Crime, causes and effect, policy responses

Bailey's approach to his chosen subject is mostly qualitative and he presents an impressive amount of data and information on crime, corruption, and institutional reform and policy initiatives. Throughout the central chapters of the book he builds his argument, convincingly enough, of the historical/institutional determinants of Mexico's security situation. He takes the reader through the transition from a dominant one-party political system through to an open-market democracy which has in many ways exacerbated the issues of mistrust and informality which feed into the security trap. Bailey argues that the Mexican political system as it stands today does not create opportunities for long-term policy design but rather forces politicians and political parties to behave in short-term election-centred manners. This undermines efforts to reform and improve Mexico's security situation through successful police–justice reform. Bailey's line of thought here is crystal clear: crime and violence cannot be tackled successfully unless deep structural changes take place which not only means justice system reform and the like but a change in the cultural and institutional compositions of the country itself, starting with the high levels of mistrust and informality found there. This is more evident as the author tackles organised crime – from its street level organisations to the top tier of transnational organisations – and its deleterious effects on government performance at all levels through corruption and violent competition. Bailey outlines some policy initiatives through which Mexico may continue its arduous path to exit its security trap. Continuous social mobilisation, party-electoral reform and police–justice reform are all vital elements of this path and he enriches this by a timely and nuanced comparative case study focused on Colombia. Timing and sequencing of reforms 'learnt' in that country are the key elements in their ultimate success (or a success at least greater than Mexico's is to date) and the author highlights a number of important policy initiatives which may be transported to Mexico, without coming across as prescriptive.

Conclusions

Interestingly, the books' most significant strength, namely its broad, all-encompassing take on security in Mexico could also be seen as its most important weakness. By attempting to cover all aspects of the crime/violence conundrum – from tax evasion and theft to transnational organised crime, from police–justice reform and corruption to the institutional architecture of bilateral relations with the US vis-à-vis the drug war – the author must necessarily brush over some of the deeper details of the security trap and at times venture into some risky speculation, for example on the number of vehicle-trips needed to 'service the internal wholesale market [of cannabis]' (130). These issues may subtract depth from the book and ultimately adversely impact on its main contributions by creating a sense that the text is, at times, too general. For such a complete manuscript, it would be desirable to read more regarding civil society. Bailey certainly underlines its importance, and mentions particular social mobilisations and actors. However, civil society tends to take a third-in-line role with regards to the State and crime/criminals even though they occupy the same spaces, interact regularly and shape each other's actions, preferences and general behaviours. Aside from these considerations, we have today in Bailey's book a very solid and illustrative book that will leave the reader, especially those who may not be as familiar with the Mexican context as he is, with a very good image of what the current security situation is there and, importantly, what are some of the avenues needed to explore in order to further the small advances already

made to strengthen the Rule of Law and enhance citizen security in that country through effective democratic governance.

Rolando Ochoa

School of Sociology, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

rolando.ochoa@anu.edu.au

© 2014, Rolando Ochoa

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2014.977535>

Anarchy unbound: why self-governance works better than you think, by Peter T. Leeson, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 263 pp., US\$27.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781107629707

Few criminologists would be convinced by the statement that ‘anarchy might work better than you think’ (2). Statelessness, a condition criminologists would most certainly associate with non-existent social and formal control – mere chaos in other words – isn’t your typical recommendation to improve social peace and wealth among a sub- or an entire population. Defending the virtues of self-governance throughout an anarchic state is nonetheless the main purpose of Leeson’s book. Challenging Hobbes’ main ideas about government being the sole entity able to create harmony among its people, Leeson’s goal is to show that life under anarchy does not automatically lead to a ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’ (1) life.

Accessible to a large audience, the book, which is structured as a collection of various essays rather than a coherent whole, traces back most of the author’s academic work to date.¹ Relying on several case studies, Leeson, a professor of economics and law at George Mason University, uses rational choice theory and economic reasoning to show how various self-governance mechanisms have developed under statelessness throughout history, facilitating cooperation within what he calls the ‘discipline of continuous dealings’ (3).

Refreshing as it is to read authors thinking outside the box, Leeson’s book does not come up to the expectations it promises along the entire book. Leeson’s major short-coming can be traced back to his conceptual definitions, namely anarchy and government. He first defines anarchy as being obviously ‘government’s absence’ (5). Though he acknowledges that defining government is ‘a bit more complicated’ (5), the author cannot clarify or specify what he considers, or not, as government. Leeson’s ambiguity is confirmed when he finally decides to rely on the ‘you know it when you see it’ (9) approach.

There are several problems in favouring such a strategy, yet one that has been thoroughly summarised in the work of gang experts, Cheryl Maxson and Malcom Klein, in a research field where definitions are always a source of disagreement: ‘Let me make the definition and I’ll win any argument’ (70).² In such instance, the thesis becomes mainly irrefutable. Readers do not have any choice but to follow and accept what the author considers anarchy, although it is highly questionable whether several cases presented throughout the book can be qualified as anarchy at all. On many occasions the author indeed associates anarchy, a fundamental anti-hierarchical movement, with collectivities and sub-groups organised around some sort of hierarchy or authority. Furthermore, the author seems to blur the distinctions between deregulated environments, which can assuredly exist within a government or with extra-legal governance systems, and anarchy.