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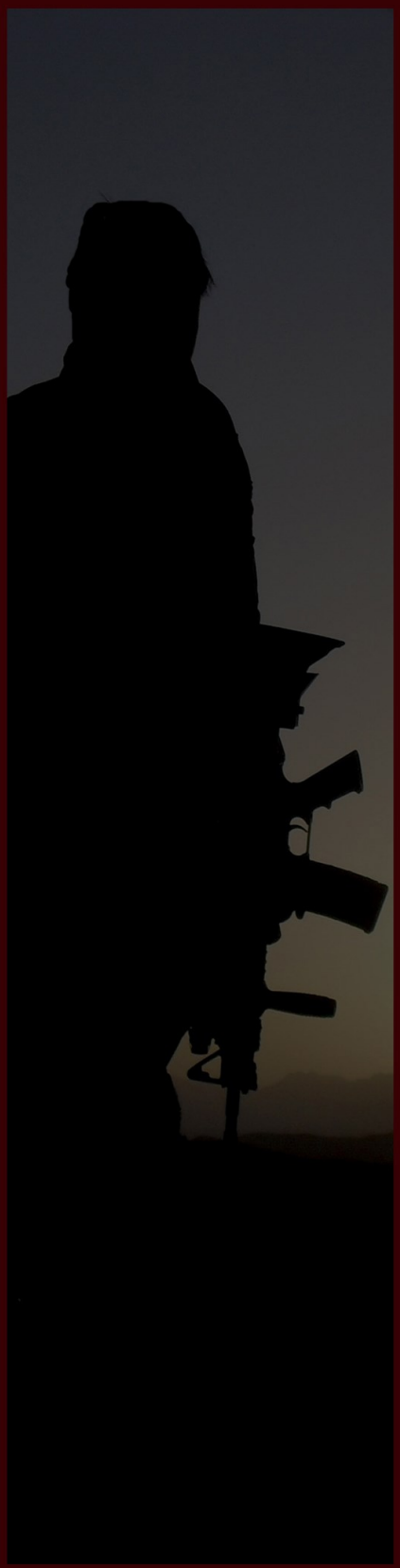

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Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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INDEXING & ABSTRACTING

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The Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (JCTS) provides a platform to analyse conflict transformation and security as processes for managing change in non-violent ways to produce equitable outcomes for all parties that are sustainable. A wide range of human security concerns can be tackled by both hard and soft measures, therefore the Journal's scope not only covers such security sector reform issues as restructuring security apparatus, reintegration of ex-combatants, clearance of explosive remnants of war and cross-border management, but also the protection of human rights, justice, rule of law and governance. JCTS explores the view that by addressing conflict transformation and security holistically it is possible to achieve a high level of stability and human security, requiring interventions at both policy and practitioner level. These would include conflict management, negotiated peace agreements, peacekeeping, physical reconstruction, economic recovery, psycho-social support, rebuilding of primary services such as education and health, and enabling social cohesion. Other macro-level governance issues from constitution writing to state accountability and human resource management also need to be considered as part of this process of change.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE **JCTS** *Volume 7, Number 1, 2019*

Perspectives from the field: Self-defence groups as a force for community resilience*

Martha Angélica Galicia Osorio

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ABSTRACT

Self-defence groups in Michoacan, Mexico, emerged and reproduced rapidly in 2013 and have proved effective in fighting the drug cartels that were harming the citizens of that state. In this paper, the testimonies of some founders of the Michoacan self-defence groups will be analysed using a narrative-based methodology. Theories of human security and theories that situate the state as a provider of security will be used to model the severe insecurity in Mexico and in Michoacan caused by drug cartels and will set the context for the emergence of self-defence groups. This study's analysis of the interviewees' narratives suggests that the self-defence movement has arisen as a result of community resilience.

Keywords: *Insecurity, self-defence groups, human security, state security, community resilience.*

Biographical Note: *Martha A. Galicia-Osorio obtained a master's degree from George Mason University's School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. She received her law degree from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo in Mexico, where she also obtained a master's degree in social sciences after researching the mediation process in the Centro de Justicia Alternativa de Pachuca. She has done conflict resolution field work with indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Mexico, and has interned in the International Peace and Security Institute in Washington DC. Her academic interests include community building through resilience enhancement and democratization.*

Introduction

In response to the increasing threat posed by drug cartels operating in the state of Michoacan, Mexico, local farmers and inhabitants took up arms to defend their communities in 2013. These self-defence groups from the state of Michoacan, which emerged on 24 February 2013, extended their control out to other communities in the Tierra Caliente region, and successfully set themselves free from the Caballeros Templarios drug cartel which had previously dominated the region.[1] This cartel and the Familia Michoacana had Michoacan's communities under control and extorted money and resources from the inhabitants, committing crimes against them for 12 years, without any effective response from local and federal governments.

The founders of the self-defence groups and inhabitants of the communities in Michoacan had to overcome specific challenges, such as fear and lack of experience, to provide for their communities' security and their work involved the strategic organization of defence groups, negotiating with the government, and resisting pressure from both organized crime and the government. In this essay, interviews with several Michoacan self-defence group founders are analysed along with those involving some inhabitants of the communities where these groups emerged. The narratives of the interview subjects reveal their capacity for changing their very difficult security situation, while also building community resilience. This analysis shows that Michoacan's self-defence group founders and community inhabitants had to overcome the fear of losing their lives in order to provide security for their families; furthermore, they developed skills and agency to keep their communities safe and prosperous, displaying signs of community resilience.

The objectives of this paper are to theorize the concept of community resilience, as well as to shed light on the premises of the state as a human security provider in the case of the self-defence movement in the state of Michoacan, Mexico. Narrative analysis allows for an explanation of the circumstances that gave rise to the self-defence movement in Michoacan and for the actions it has carried out. It also reveals the meanings assigned to the self-defence movement's actions by the people involved and shows how these actions relate to changes in their self-perception as they moved from being victims to actors.

The article will begin by explaining the theoretical basis of concepts such as human security and resilience, as well as the idea of the state as a security provider, and these will be related to the current state of insecurity in Mexico. Next, the results of the interviews conducted will be explored in relation to these concepts, and finally the findings of the study will be based on the interviewees' shared experiences and perceptions as they relate to the characteristics of community resilience that emerge in a context of extreme insecurity.

Human security and the state as a security provider in the Mexican context

The western concept of security has traditionally been closely related to the notion of the nation- state and military power, as the phrase "national security" makes clear. From this perspective, a population is going to be secure if its state is capable of maintaining border security, and can keep it safe from other states' attacks. According to this model, the state is the only security provider, and, for this reason, its population must accept the state's monopoly over the use of force.[2]

After World War Two, the recently formed United Nations established the foundations of the concept of collective security, which suggested that nations should avoid using violence to preserve their security or to satisfy their needs. Instead, negotiation or collaboration were to become the preferred methods for resolving controversies. Later, a shift in focus from security among nations to individual security took place, widening the scope of the notion of security to include the human security concept. Individuals and populations became recognized as the main

[1] Fuentes Díaz, Antonio, "Autodefensa y Justicia en los Márgenes del Estado".

[2] Chojnacki and Branovic, "New Modes of Security"; Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, "Evolution of the Concept of Security"; Risse, "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood".

beneficiaries of security, because there can be no real security, even if national borders are safe, while a population lacks the essential means to live and develop. As Manuel Fröhlich and Jan Lemanski note, the human security concept includes seven dimensions: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security.[3] Fröhlich and Lemanski also recognize the state as the primary provider of security in all its dimensions, and, in its absence, the international community takes on this role.

These ideas were modified when the international community experienced difficulties in providing security in weak states where terrorism or natural disasters challenged nation's capacities in this respect, and the idea of preventing generalized poverty and enhancing development instead of strengthening border security was advanced.[4] It is assumed that, in an ideal version of modern statehood, certain standards of human rights, democracy, and rule of law should be guaranteed by the government, which should provide common goods such as security, welfare, and a clean environment.[5] However, Sven Chojnacki and Zeljko Branovic recognize that there are countries with limited monopoly over force where the lack of security creates suitable circumstances for groups to profit from insecurity through violent strategies.[6] In such cases, Chojnacki and Branovic argue, "two basic forms of security without or beside the state can be ascertained: (1) security by coercion and a certain degree of institutionalization and reliability; and (2) self-organized forms of protection against internal or external threats [self-protective security]".[7] These authors acknowledge that when a state is not capable of providing security to its citizens, two phenomena might occur. First, criminal groups fight for control of the economic, social, and political sectors in specific geographic areas. Second, self-defence groups emerge in those areas to counterattack the aggressions and violence of criminal groups. According to Chojnacki and Branovic, security is narrowed to "a situation in which means applied with the intention of maintaining protection against a defined group succeed in reducing the risk level with respect to existential threats".[8]

Mexico provides a clear example of these two phenomena because it has experienced a rise in self-defence groups in response to the threat posed by non-state actors as well as a government lacking the capacity to provide security to its population. The World Justice Project, in its Rule of Law Index 2015, classifies Mexico in 79th place out of 102 countries and 14th among 19 in Latin America, and these ratings illustrate Mexico's weakness on issues such as constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice.[9] Mexico has been dealing with a wave of crime and violence that began to spread throughout of all its social sectors and geographical areas when the country's war on drugs began in 2006. Mexico's National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI) has reported that, during 2013, there were 33.1 million felonies in Mexico; furthermore, the number of felonies per every 100,000 inhabitants was 41,563. The same report also noted that, during the same period, 33.9 per cent of the country's homes were occupied by at least one victim of crime and the rate of felonies had increased by about 3 per cent every year since 2010.[10]

These increasing crime rates are explained by Mariclaire Acosta Urquidi, who explains that drug trafficking in Mexico manifests in three key ways: firstly, it is evidenced by the existence of hitmen who carry out executions, mainly among cartel members; secondly, clandestine enterprises dedicated to drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion have emerged; and,

[3] Fröhlich, et al., "Human Security, the Evolution of a Concept", 26.
[4] Duffield, "Human Security", Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, "Evolution of the Concept of Security"; King and Murray, "Rethinking Human Security".
[5] Risse, "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood", 1.
[6] Chojnacki and Branovic, "New Modes of Security", 89.
[7] Ibid., 92.
[8] Ibid., 89.
[9] World Justice Project, "Rule of Law Index 2015", https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/roli_2015_0.pdf (Accessed 7 February 2018).
[10] INEGI, "ENVIPE 2014", http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/encuestas/hogares/regulares/envipe/envipe2014/default.aspx (Accessed 8 February 2018).

thirdly, informal structures that have effectively taken over the role of the government by selling protection, collecting taxes, and influencing the decisions of formal authorities have arisen.[11] Acosta Urquidi also describes a marked increase in murder, kidnapping, extortion, theft, and rape, as well as severe human rights violations committed by the local and federal governments.[12] Among the 86 countries observed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mexico showed the third highest average increase in murders (33.9 per cent) between 2008 and 2010, with murders increasing from 12.7 to 22.7 per every 100,000 inhabitants. Half of these homicides were attributable to organized crime. With respect to kidnapping, there were 131,946 cases in 2013 alone.[13]

Despite the severity of this situation, Mexico's government has consistently demonstrated itself to be incapable of fighting crime and administering justice. The INEGI report for 2014 estimates that 93.8 per cent of reported felonies were not denounced to the proper authorities or, once they were, they did not open investigations. The report also showed that, of the investigations opened that year, 49.9 per cent were not resolved.[14] Acosta Urquidi suggests that only three per cent of these cases yielded a sentence. The reason that 52 per cent of the population chose not to report a felony was because they considered it to be a waste of time or because of a distrust of the authorities.[15] These statistics, drawn from the years preceding the emergence of self-defence groups in Michoacan, demonstrate the extreme level of insecurity in the country, as well as a lack of trust among the population in either the government's ability to provide security or its capacity to respond effectively to organized crime.

The state of Michoacan is considered key to the drug trafficking system of Mexico, in geographic terms, as it has been an important producer of marijuana and the poppies used in the production of heroin. The state also holds strategic value because of its location on the Pacific route for drug traffickers. Consequently, different cartels have fought, and fight, for control of the zone. Additionally, the war between the state and the drug cartels in Michoacan has caused more violence and a diversification of felonies,[16] which include extortion, theft on public roads, and vehicular thefts. In 2013, there were 20 murders per 100,000 inhabitants and 8,204 incidents of extortion, representing 20,002 victims of crime per 100,000 inhabitants that year.[17] The rate of felonies increased from 15,469 in 2010 to 25,126 in 2013. In 2014, 82 per cent of the population considered their state to be unsecure. In terms of crime reporting, Michoacan reflected national patterns: only 10.3 per cent of felonies were reported and the authorities only opened a case for 58.4 per cent of those incidents according to the ENVIPE report in 2014; these facts reflect and help to explain the lack of trust in the government among the populace.[18]

The nongovernmental organization Mexico Unido Contra la Delincuencia (Mexico United Against Delinquency) stated that, between 2011 and 2012, Michoacan reported the highest number of kidnappings nationally,[19] despite the fact that the state only represents 3.9 per cent of the country's population.[20]

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[11] Acosta Urquidi, "El Desafío de la Delincuencia", 49, http://www.revistafolios.mx/files/837.pdf (Accessed 8 February 2018).
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ramírez de Alba Leal, "La Violencia en México", http://biblat.unam.mx/en/revista/bien-comun/articulo/la-violencia-en-mexico-y-su-relacion-con-el-crimen-organizado (Accessed 11 January 2016).
[14] INEGI, ENVIPE 2014, http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/encuestas/hogares/regulares/envipe/envipe2014/default.aspx (Accessed 11 January 2016).
[15] Acosta Urquidi, "El Desafío de la Delincuencia", 49, http://www.revistafolios.mx/files/837.pdf (Accessed 8 February 2018).
[16] Calderón et al., "The Beheading of Criminal Organizations", 1455.
[17] INEGI, ENVIPE 2014, http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/encuestas/hogares/regulares/envipe/envipe2014/default.aspx (Accessed 11 January 2016).
[18] Ibid.
[19] INEGI, "Cuéntame, Información por Entidad", http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/mich/default.aspx?tema=me&e=16 (Accessed 8 February 2018)
[20] Mexico Unido Contra la Delincuencia, "Delitos en México", http://mucd.org.mx/recursos/Contenidos/Estudiosycifras/documentos2/Datos%20sobre%20delitos%20en%20Mexico.pdf (Accessed 11 January 2016).

Table 1: Most Common Felonies in Michoacán 2006-2014

Year	Murders	Kidnappings	Extortion
2006	666	16	114
2007	527	35	183
2008	565	88	293
2009	728	98	358
2010	661	136	172
2011	773	130	184
2012	755	135	342
2013	902	194	261
2014 (Jan – July)	624	92	234

SESNSP (Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security)

Persistent insecurity led to the rise of the self-defence movement in two of Michoacan's communities on 24 February 2013.[21] The first uprising occurred in La Ruana (population 10,217), a community of the municipality of Buena Vista; the second uprising occurred two hours later in Tepalcatepec (population 15,221), the main community in the municipality of the same name.[22] By January 2014, the movement had spread from these two communities to 26 municipalities and it was at this point that the federal government prohibited self-defence groups from spreading their influence to other towns.[23] During their first year, self-defence groups accomplished common goals and acted in a coordinated manner.

This paper argues that the self-defence movement was effective in its primary objective of fighting the drug cartels and of securing the communities in which it developed. Furthermore, the self-defence movement in Michoacan destabilized the system of fear and passivity that had previously overwhelmed Michoacan's society. This paper poses a number of questions in order to examine these achievements: it asks if the self-defence movement in Michoacan represents a case of community resilience; it asks how the movement's participants made sense of their actions and accomplishments at the beginning of the movement and at later stages; and it considers whether or not they achieved more than merely ejecting criminals from their towns.

Community resilience and human security

Resilience is a versatile term that is used in a variety of sciences, from material sciences and ecology to education and social studies. This paper focuses on the concept of community resilience as defined by Martin-Been and Anderies, who identify it as "the ability of systems – households, people, communities, ecosystems, nations – to generate *new* ways of operating, new systemic relationships".[24] On these terms, resilience and community resilience theories help us to understand successful community cases that are apparently unexplainable due to the hazardous environments from which they emerge. For Martin-Been and Anderies, novelty and innovation are essential features within the process of self-organization, and therefore the functions of organizations may be maintained despite structural changes. The authors agree that structural change is generated by the confluence of different people's ideas and backgrounds, which can produce constant novel and unpredictable actions.[25] With respect to community, Robert J. Chaskin states that a community can be seen both as a context and as an agent of change, serving as both a foundation and a method for the resilience of the population.[26] Chaskin includes within his definition of a community's capacity aspects such as the interaction among human capital resources, organizational resources, and social capital. He also suggests that a community can be seen as a unit of belonging and identity; as a unit of production and exchange; as a network of relations; and as a political unit that

[21] Martínez, "Avanzan Grupos de Autodefensa", 31 December 2013, http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/2013/impreso/avanzan-grupos-de-autodefensa-93308.html (Accessed 8 February 2018).

[22] Unidad de Microrregiones, "Cedulas de Informacion Municipal", http://www.microrregiones.gob.mx/zap/datGenerales.aspx?entra=pdzp&ent=16&mun=012 (Accessed 8 February 2018).

[23] Badillo, "Michoacan, El Mapa", 4, http://www.milenio.com/policia/Michoacan-Tierra-Caliente-autodefensas-crimen-organizado-templarios-federales-ejercito-comunidades-Apatzingan-Antunez-camiones_5_228027198.html (Accessed 8 February 2018).

[24] Martin-Been et al., "Resilience: A Literature Review", 7.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Chaskin, "Resilience, Community and Resilient Communities".

structures democracy. Finally, Chaskin recognizes that, when there are high levels of violence and crime within a community, these are impediments which restrict its capacity to protect the population.[27] Sonn and Fisher argue that not all communities are capable of providing the goods aforementioned, because they may lack competence or are disorganized, damaged, and unable to provide adequate social and psychological resources to help their members cope with adversity.[28]

Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross distinguish six social resilience attributes: knowledge, skills and learning; community networks; people-place connections; community infrastructure; a diverse and innovative economy; and engaged governance.[29] To these six attributes of resilient communities, Berkes and Ross add three more: values and beliefs; leadership; and a positive outlook, which includes readiness for change. These additional attributes were added after Berkes and Ross integrated approaches to resilience which understand it either in terms of a social-ecological system or a process of psychological/mental health and personal development. Berkes and Ross believe that resilient leaders are capable of contributing to community and even to regional resilience, and this belief assigns a central role to people's adaptive capacity, since humans are capable of anticipating change and using social, political, and cultural means to influence resilience. The authors also believe that two more components can build an individual's inclination to be resilient: agency, understood as the capacity to act independently and to make free choices, and self-efficacy, the belief in one's own ability to perform a task and to manage situations that might emerge in the future.[30]

Using a wider perspective, Ola Dahlman argues that the emergence of resilience may facilitate an understanding of the stability and security of a nation or any large-scale social-economic-political system. These systems have a dynamic with four principal phases: a growth or entrepreneurial exploitation phase; a conservation or organizational phase; a destruction or release phase; and a restructuring or reorganizational phase. Between the first two and the latter two phases, a rapid and unpredictable process of creative or destructive transformation takes place, which depends on persons and groups. For Dahlman, a society or system has stability landscapes which are compounded by various subsystems that may fail, potentially causing the failure of the whole system. Therefore, it is important to define what functions or elements of the system are resilient to what changes in order to understand how much change a system can undergo and still resist disturbance. Dahlman argues that, after a major disturbance, human actors are critical drivers in bringing a system back to normal functionality or creating a new stability landscape, even when individual stakeholders carry out irrational actions. Furthermore, Dahlman stresses the value of creating a new approach to managing systems, one that involves learning to live within rather than control systems. Resilient management has to be flexible and open to learning, enabling stakeholders to compare maps of various pathways to the future; Dahlman suggests that rigid control mechanisms worsen the condition of social-economic-political systems and produce their collapse.[31] These theoretical perspectives on resilience and community resilience provide a lens to illuminate how communities, such as those in Michoacan, respond to violence and threats and it also casts light on how they make sense of their actions.

Community resilience and narrative analysis: a useful pair

This paper analyses the results of research based on the perspectives of four Michoacan self-defence group founders and three people from the communities where these groups emerged. This kind of detailed first-hand information, based on the irreplaceable perspectives of the actors involved, is key to any understanding of this phenomenon. This study's interviews were conducted in 2015 and reflect on the participants' experiences within the self-defence movement from its inception on 24 February 2013. The interviews therefore reveal information about the self-defence groups' stages of emergence, as well as the

[27] Ibid.
[28] Sonn et al., "Sense of Community", 457.
[29] Maclean et al, "Six Attributes of Social Resilience", 145.
[30] Berkes et al., "Community Resilience: Toward an Integrated Approach".
[31] Dahlman, "Security and Resilience".

interviewees' perceptions of the future role they might play in maintaining security in the region.

A snowball sampling technique was used to gather the participants. This technique helps to encourage interviewees' readiness to share their experiences, as people are contacted through someone they already know and trust.[32] In this case, the technique was effective, since the first participants from Michoacan were contacted while they were in the United States and they helped contact the other participants who were living in Michoacan. All interviewees agreed to participate after they knew their testimonies were going to provide the basis for an academic article, and they all agreed to be identified if necessary. George Mason University's ethic guidelines were followed in this research.

Semi-structured interviews were used as they allow the interviewer to elicit information about the same topics from all the respondents while allowing enough flexibility for the respondents to define the content of their answers.[33] Narrative analysis offered the means to interpret their testimonies as well as other sources, such as videos available on the internet or news items about the uprising. Narrative analysis allows the researcher to observe the positions that narrators assign themselves within a plot, and, in this case, it sheds light on how participants in self-defence groups situate themselves either as actors with agency or as victims incapable of changing their security issues. Sara Cobb has used this approach to show how women victims of rape make sense of their experience through the way they narrate it.[34] Catherine Riessman has also argued that narrative analysis provides people with a useful way to make sense of their own experience with the assistance of an interviewer.[35]

One of this study's challenges involved distance, as the author was living in the US during the interview period. Therefore, most of the interviews were conducted through telephone and Skype conversations, which produced some technical and logistical issues. It is also necessary to acknowledge that this research has methodological limitations, such as weak representation of the studied population, and this may have affected the validity and reliability of the study.

Perspectives from Michoacan's self-defence group founders and inhabitants

Ola Dahlman has described some phases that are necessary for the creation of resilience, arguing that only change can build a system's resilience. The phases Dahlman identifies as necessary to the development of any social, economic, and political system are: a growth or entrepreneurial exploitation phase, a conservation or organizational phase, a destruction or release phase, and a restructuring or reorganization phase.[36] Additionally, Roderick J. Watts distinguishes five stages that contribute towards socio-political development. The first is the critical stage in which people perceive themselves as powerless and inferior. The next is the adaptive stage, where people lose their ability to make choices, accept others' prescriptions, and in this manner adapt to oppression. There is a point where people become aware of the resource asymmetry caused by the control of some people over others. This is the pre-critical stage and it is characterized by a strong motivation to acquire the critical skills needed to overcome asymmetry. During the critical stage, personal political ideology is built, provoking awareness about individual and group oppression. The next stage is the liberation stage, and it is characterized by an understanding that warrior energy can be used for personal and social transformation. In this stage, people use newfound skills and a feeling of self-efficacy to improve their community's situation. A sense of solidarity is a basic element of this stage.[37] In order to explore the narrative that emerged from this study's interviews, four narrative stages will be elucidated: these phases involved overcoming fear, improvising and learning to fight, fighting on two flanks, and the evolution of the self-defence movement.

[32] Sierra Caballero, "Función y Sentido de la Entrevista", 313.
[33] Vela, "Un Acto Metodológico Básico".
[34] Cobb, "Transcribing the Body and Materializing the Subject".
[35] Catherine Kohler Riessman et al., *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.
[36] Dahlman, "Security and Resilience", 44.
[37] Watts, "Oppression and Sociopolitical Development", 24.

Overcoming fear

The first stage of the self-defence movement recognized by this study's interviewees was the period of 12 years of fear that preceded the uprising in 2013. During this period, inhabitants suffered quietly from the offenses of Los Zetas, La Familia Michoacana, and Los Caballeros Templarios, the main organized criminal groups operating in the area. The members of these drug cartels operated within their communities, where they ruled life. Most of the participants explained that citizens could not be outside their homes in the late afternoon and could not walk or talk in pairs in the street because criminals living inside the community would see this as an attempt to plot against them. Another alarming sign of abuse was the high amount of pregnancies among school-aged girls as described by one of the participants who explained that these pregnancies were the result of rapes.

Wealthy people in these communities were afraid of being kidnapped, tortured, and killed if they did not pay the fees demanded by the criminals. Many had to abandon and legally grant their properties to the criminals to avoid fatal punishments. The owners of any productive enterprises were directed to buy and sell only to people approved of by cartel members' orders. This state of affairs could be compared with the critical stage described by Watts, as communities felt disempowered or inferior.[38] Even the municipal authorities had to pay the fees established by Los Caballeros Templarios*;* other authorities were allies of the drug cartels, as was demonstrated when these authorities were incarcerated by the federal forces after the self-defence groups formed. From these examples, it is noticeable that in the communities of Tierra Caliente, human security was completely absent. The personal, economic, health, community, and political components of human security were missing, and could not be protected by the municipal, local, and national authorities, or by the international community in the manner Fröhlich and Lemanski suggest is possible.[39]

The social groups that were most vulnerable to criminal activities were the more marginalized ones, which included people such as day labourers. These people, whose only income was the wage they could make from a day's work, were prevented from collecting limes or any other fruit so that the cartels could control the prices of the products. This study's interviewees recognized that the self-defence groups were mainly made up of poor people, such as farmers, harvesters, or people in modest occupations, who had to work to obtain enough money to eat every day. These facts correlate with Chaskin's insight that communities suffering from high levels of violence and crime are incapable of protecting their populations, since members of the community are prevented from making a living and lack support from other community members or authorities.[40]

In Michoacan, the self-defence movement was started by lime producers and cattle ranchers. One respondent, referred to here as P6, explained how his son was prevented from selling limes to one of the packing companies in La Ruana and how that event triggered P6's actions to organize the self-defence movement. P6 had already been trying to organize people to fight the drug cartels for four years before the uprising with no success. Finally, he convinced five of his friends from La Ruana, and a friend from Tepalcatepec, to organize brave people there to fight Los Caballeros Templarios. P6 demonstrated what Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross would consider to be social resilience attributes because he made use of connections with people and places; he showed leadership and had a positive outlook; and overall, he demonstrated personal resilience.[41]

The uprising took place in La Ruana's plaza on 24 February 2013 and two hours later in Tepalcatepec. P6 exhorted people gathered in the main plaza of La Ruana to take action, saying: "You know how Los Caballeros Templarios do not allow us to work, and they are taking the food from our tables. The ones with the courage to fight for their rights and to kick Los Templarios out of town, jump up here with me, please!" He added: "They almost ran over me". P6 gathered about 250 people who

[38] Ibid.
[39] Fröhlich et al., "Human Security: The Evolution of a Concept".
[40] Chaskin, "Resilience, Community and Resilient Communities".
[41] Maclean et al., "Six Attributes of Social Resilience".

brought any arms they had. Later, they established monitoring points at the entrances of the town. These actions, fostered by individuals, offer evidence for Dahlman's argument that human actors are a critical key driver for the creation of any new stability landscape.[42]

In the case of Tepalcatepec, P7 explained that, even though he used to join every week with eight other members of the local founding families, it took about two years to make a decision to take action against Los Caballeros Templarios and he attributed this hesitancy to a lack of courage. Their goal for the uprising was to get at least one man from every family to join. Apparently, fear dominated the will of all the inhabitants of Tierra Caliente, but once the first sign of bravery and liberation was displayed in Tepalcatepec, it was inevitable that they would join the uprising, and, by late in the night of 24 February, 3,000 well-armed men had enrolled in the movement. Their sudden changes of mind and actions represent the kind of instability that Dahlman describes as part of the release phase that leads to structural change. Certainly, the system's weakened control creates opportunities for the transformation of the rules that guide relationships within it.[43] In Watts' terms, the phase when the respondents were subject to other people's choices represented the adaptive stage. The pre-critical stage corresponded to the actions the respondents took, since they demonstrated awareness of asymmetry in the distribution of resources and people found the motivation to take a new path. At the critical stage, a personal political ideology was built in Michoacan's inhabitants as they understood themselves to be part of an oppressed group.[44]

Improvising and learning to fight

In the beginning, it seemed easy to expel Los Caballeros Templarios from La Ruana and Tepalcatepec. Nevertheless, cartel members remained in the neighbouring towns. The criminals' strategy was to prevent any communication between La Ruana and Tepalcatepec and the communities around them by sealing off the roads. These two communities could not receive food, medicines, natural gas, or gasoline, and the inhabitants could not sell their products outside their towns. They were safe but locked inside their communities and their participation in the movement exposed them to danger. In April, a caravan formed by men, women, children, elderly people, and indigenous migrants from La Ruana was ambushed despite the fact that they were being escorted by federal police patrols. Their goal was to ask the state governor to liberate the roads and eliminate the cartels' economic interruptions. Approximately 40 people died and several more were wounded. In this ambush, P5 lost her father.

In the same month, Tepalcatepec and La Ruana suffered simultaneous attacks at the towns' key entry points. Nevertheless, the self-defence group members resisted the criminal contingent. P6 explained how a group of approximately 300 criminals carrying AK-47 rifles and grenade launchers attacked the barricade positioned at the entrance of the town. There were only about 50 self-defence group members present, but they fought with courage and were able to expel the criminals. The self-defence groups received help from the federal police and the army during these skirmishes. Those two organizations opened the roads on 21 May and free transit was re-established.[45]

At this point, another stage in the self-defence groups' development can be distinguished. This period was characterized by the expansion of the movement and the execution of several strategies that allowed the self-defence members to effectively fight crime and build their self-confidence. One of the participants explained that he rang the bells of the town's church on the day of the uprising, and it is clear that this sign was recognized as an act of resistance by the community as it was communicated through a local radio station.

P4 acknowledged that fighting with enthusiasm was another strategy used by self-defence group members. He explained that they could repel a Templario attack with only seven men at

[42] Dahlman, "Security and Resilience".
[43] Ibid.
[44] Watts, "Oppression and Sociopolitical Development", 24.
[45] Maerker, "Autodefensas Michoacan 21 1 2014 Segunda Parte", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j9ES3o--nM (Accessed 12 January 2016).

the entrance of the town. The criminals could not enter, and that fact encouraged the self-defence group members to continue fighting and organizing. This positive perception of one's achievements is referred to by Berkes and Ross as self-efficacy,[46] or a person's belief in their own ability to perform and manage situations that might emerge. Berkes and Ross also consider agency to be an element of resilience because it represents people's capacity to act independently and to make free choices. This was the case when the self-defence group from Tepalcatepec helped the Aguililla community to kick out Los Templarios and organize the first structures needed to establish security. At some point, people from Aguililla began to establish their own independent decision-making process. Once this happened, more complex crime-fighting strategies were used in Aguililla. P3 explained how people in the community created a Citizen Council for Development to prevent the self-defence groups from abusing their power. This council was formed by a representative from every neighbourhood and it became the organization in charge of deciding the actions of Aguililla's self-defence group. The community's agency was displayed through these efforts to control the direction of the self-defence movement in their community.

According to P3, the Citizen Council was necessary because the emergence of the self-defence groups was very suspicious. He suspected that the groups coming from Tepalcatepec could be being directed by the federal government to establish an organization loyal to the government's interests. This predisposition to distrust the government may reveal what Berkes and Ross call the human capacity to anticipate change, since self-defence members were attentive to any sign of threat to their community's security and stability.[47] P3 explained that his suspicion grew when he heard that a commission from the government of the Mexican president, Peña Nieto, maintained talks with the leaders of Los Caballeros Templarios. Supposedly, the commission demanded that the criminal group carry out the actions of a drug cartel but not the actions of the government, such as collecting taxes and making decisions relating to the communities' mayoralties.

Self-defence groups received help from the federal police and the army to expand their zone of influence. Members of the founding groups travelled to their neighbouring towns from June to December of 2013 and asked people if they wanted them to stay to help them organize their own community groups.[48] These communities regularly received the self-defence groups with joy and hope, and new groups formed. In some other cases, people did not join because cartel members were from those communities and the community's livelihood depended on the cartel's revenues.

The self-defence groups maintained the security of their territories by communicating with neighbouring communities when they knew that cartel members were going near their borders. In this manner, the self-defence groups secured their territory and prevented criminals from coming close to their borders. There was also coordination between the self-defence groups in different communities. For example, one of the participants was designated as the spokesman of the self-defence groups in Michoacan. Sometimes self-defence groups coordinated with members of the army and the federal police. This cooperation proved to be advantageous for the authorities as well because members of the local communities already knew who the drug cartel members were, whereas policemen or soldiers unfamiliar with the area could run into criminals on the roads without realising that they were cartel members. This situation, in addition to the furious attacks against unarmed civilians, spurred joint action by the self-defence groups and the federal forces. P7 mentioned that sometimes one of the colonels who fought along with him agreed to share some of the arms confiscated from the criminals. Still, the support of governmental organizations was not always consistent and clear. This participant believes that the military was divided because, while

[46] Berkes et al., "Community Resilience: Toward an Integrated Approach".
[47] Ibid.
[48] Martínez, "Avanzan Grupos de Autodefensa", 31 December 2013, http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/2013/ impreso/avanzan-grupos-de-autodefensa-93308.html (Accessed 8 February 2018)

some generals supported the self-defence groups' advances in different ways and even gave them strategic advice, other members of the army simply did not appear during attacks by Los Caballeros Templarios, even when they were close by. All seven participants suggested that perhaps the government had never truly fought the different drug cartels in the state: "Maybe it is because they cannot beat the criminals, or maybe it is because they do not want to", said P4.

With respect to resources, participants said that, early on, the self-defence movement had very few and outdated arms. Furthermore, P6 commented that it was, and still is, very difficult to maintain the movement because of a lack of economic resources, though he added that, in the cases of Tepalcatepec and other communities, entrepreneurs were happy to support the self-defence groups because the financial impact on them involved only a small portion of the amount of money they had had to pay every month to Los Caballeros Templarios. In any case, the fact that self-defence groups kept fighting, even though they lacked resources, represents what Watts identifies as true warriorship in his liberation stage.[49] Finally, self-defence groups, jointly with the federal forces, were able to impact on human security in terms of personal, community, economic, food, health, and political outcomes.

Fighting on two flanks

On 13 January 2014, the federal government launched a strategy to control Michoacan's self-defence groups. They were asked to leave their arms and go back to their homes because the government was going to take charge of security and fighting criminals. For self-defence groups, giving up arms was a life or death issue. P7 said that they could not give up arms until they could see that criminals were incarcerated and that security conditions for them and for their families would be maintained.

Finally, on 11 May 2014, the Fuerzas Rurales del Estado (a community police group) was formalized through a presidential order and the government and the self-defence groups agreed to integrate the groups into that organization. People who were not part of the state rural forces could carry arms, but these arms had to be registered in the army's files. In theory, this agreement was acceptable to both parties; however, during the formation of the state rural forces, the government carried out a number of actions that the participants considered detrimental to their effectiveness as self-defence groups.

P5 explained that, to be registered as a member of the state rural forces, candidates had to go through physical, psychological, and criminal record tests. Not all of the members of the founding self-defence groups were accepted into the organization. However, the real problem, P3 and P4 suggest, was that some people, particularly in Aguililla, who were designated by the local government as leaders of the Fuerzas Rurales del Estado were more likely to support the government's interests than those of the self-defence groups, and some were even former members of drug cartels. For this reason, P4 said, the entire community denounced the situation by all means available. The public outcry eventually led to the revocation by the government of those designations. However, people supporting the government inside the community, as well as those designated by the government to be part of Aguililla's Fuerzas Rurales del Estado, dismantled the Citizen Council for Development. Participants also said the government stopped a development project for an iron mine that the community tried to carry out.

P4 said that it was not uncommon for the police to arrest inhabitants who were carrying weapons, and he said that people in town preferred to be arrested for carrying a gun than to be killed by criminals. Although P3 and P4 were very concerned about their community's security situation, they still got involved with the Fuerzas Rurales del Estado, the federal police, and the army when there were red alerts, issued by anyone, due to forthcoming drug cartel attacks.

All seven participants agree that criminals have infiltrated the Fuerzas Rurales del Estado. Some of them recognize criminals in that organization, despite the fact that the records of

[49] Watts, "Oppression and Sociopolitical Development", 24.

the candidates were well investigated. Others recognize among police officers the criminals who kidnapped or killed one of their relatives. Additionally, P3 said that the federal forces try to provoke local citizens and former self-defence group members to violence so that they can be imprisoned for their actions.

These conflicts of interest have created divisions among the self-defence groups. There are some groups that openly support the government and continually state that there is less violence and crime in Michoacan. Currently, there are two segments among the Fuerzas Rurales del Estado: Las Autodefensas de Michoacan and Las Autodefensas Legítimas de Michoacan (all of the participants in this study belong to the latter group and it was not possible to reach anyone from the former group). Participants mentioned that in some communities the drug cartels have established a self-defence group only to prevent Las Autodefensas Legítimas from going to those communities to expel criminals. One of the most well-known cases of confrontation between self-defence groups was that at La Ruana on 16 December 2014. Self-defence leader Luis Antonio Torres, also known as "El Americano", attacked La Ruana's group. After this attack, all the members of both groups were put in jail. Nevertheless, weeks later, the members of both groups were released because nobody was found guilty by the judiciary.

In this scenario, one can agree with Dahlman, who grants to resilient systems the capacity to cope with irrational actions by individual stakeholders.[50] Certainly, self-defence groups resisted the aggression of local and federal governments in order to secure a greater prize, their security. They were reinforcing the notion of struggle and even cooperating with others, in line with the behaviours Watts assigns to his liberation stage.[51] Self-defence groups also found new ways to operate in order to maintain their organizations' function despite structural change.[52]

Evolution of the self-defence movement

Participants from La Ruana consider that their community is divided, because while some people support the self-defence leader, many others would like to see the self-defence group disbanded, since their economic interests have been harmed by its actions. Examples of this division can be seen in cartel members' attempts to kidnap P5. P6 explained that, in these kinds of circumstances, it has been very difficult to protect his community and it is suffering. However, he said he is going to maintain his position because he cannot be wounded more than he has been already. He believes that the lesson to be learned from the rise in the self-defence movement is for communities to keep their chin up and defend themselves from their aggressors. He said that he thinks the government is learning a lesson as well and its representatives now acknowledge that self-defence groups are not going to stay quiet anymore. He thinks that if the government's members do not do their job, the citizens will. While he acknowledges that members of the government, like everyone else, can make genuine human errors, he sees it as the duty of the government to protect Michoacan's people. He said that Michoacan has been changing little by little since the self-defence groups emerged, but to achieve real security, peace, and development the government needs to be honest and put criminals in jail.

It is clear, from this narrative, that the interviewees have changed their perspective on crime and violent threats from the stage when they were fearful of organized crime. A sense of agency and adaptive capacity is noticeable in the participants' words.[53] Another example of the same phenomena can be found in P5's testimony when she notes that self-defence group members are trying to be united in order to be strong and are following all the orders of the commander in La Ruana. She said that self-defence groups are doing their best to maintain security for all people and will continue with their movement without succumbing to provocations. She added that she is stronger since she lost her father and she is not going to stay quiet about the offences committed by criminal organizations. She also considers that her community has changed since the self-

[50] Dahlman, "Security and Resilience".
[51] Watts, "Oppression and Sociopolitical Development", 24.
[52] Martin-Been et al., "Resilience: A Literature Review", 7.
[53] Berkes et al., "Community Resilience: Toward an Integrated Approach".

defence uprising because people are able to work more and with more security, without fear of extortion. Confirming this sense at a personal level, P4 said that he does not fear for his children when they are out. He said that at least the criminals cannot act openly and without any consequence any more. He added that, even though his community's self-defence group has lost full control of its security, its members continue to collaborate with the state's rural forces when they know that there is an attack forthcoming. He added that he was sure that, if necessary, people would continue to rise up against any threat.

As for the situation in Aguililla, P3 said that the government was trying to show that Michoacan was secure, that economic development was fostered in the state, and that crime was controlled. With respect to the efficacy of the self-defence groups, he stated that in other communities Las Autodefensas Legítimas de Michoacan continued with their security activities with very good results, but he said there was no positive change in the community's thinking and people continued acting the same way as before. He believed that, in order to strengthen the community's positive values, their economic situation would have to improve. In contrast, P1 said that after the self-defence uprising everyone in Michoacan learned that they could suffer consequences from acting in a dishonest way. Furthermore, he believed that the strength of Las Autodefensas Legítimas de Michoacan lay in maintaining their honesty instead of yielding to bribery from the drug cartels. According to P2, the main achievement of the self-defence groups was to regain freedom and peace, although he could not condone the armed actions they had to take since he is a pacifist. These words demonstrate the knowledge, skills, learning capacity, and engagement with governance acquired during the self-defence uprising, all attributes linked to community resilience by Maclean, Cuthill, and Ross.[54] In the last stage of the self-defence movement delineated here, most of the participants feel a sense of betrayal or abandonment by the federal government, since this institution has not allowed them to accomplish their objective to expel the criminals from their communities. Moreover, the participants believe that the government is protecting criminals as they rebuild their positions inside Michoacan's communities.

Clearly, every participant perceived the uprising and development of the self-defence groups in a different manner, according to their ideology and their roles in their respective communities and self-defence groups; however, many commonalities also exist. All participants considered the emergence of the self-defence groups as necessary to counter the abuses and attacks from drug cartel members, and all described how they effectively fought criminals. They also elaborated on how that fight involved social communication, coordination, creativity, and negotiation, aspects that Robert Chaskin equates with human and social capital, as well as organizational resources, and their interaction generates community capacity.[55] The participants also agreed that, historically, the government has not protected Michoacan society from the aggressions and abuses of the drug cartels. The seven participants agreed that criminals infiltrated the Fuerzas Rurales del Estado and that there was corruption inside the local and federal governments.

Despite of all these obstacles, interviewees continued participating in the strengthening of Michoacan society through the discipline and cooperation that Watts sees as characteristic of a liberation stage in which people channel warrior energy for personal and social transformation.[56] One of the participants was part of an organization devoted to generating economic development. He travelled to several cities in the US and visited universities, members of Congress, and embassies in Washington, DC, to share the difficult conditions Michoacan was dealing with. This participant was supported by P2, still an activist, who did not believe in the suitability of the current voting system for electing representatives. He was also supporting P3's efforts to spread the idea among Mexicans in the US that citizen councils for development should be created to rule communities. P3 believed that these councils could help citizens have more control

[54] Maclean et al., "Six Attributes of Social Resilience".
[55] Chaskin, "Resilience, Community and Resilient Communities".
[56] Watts, "Oppression and Sociopolitical Development", 24.

over the public decision-making process and that they could prevent corruption at all government levels. He promoted his ideas through several social media platforms. Taking a different approach, P6 participated in a political campaign to become a federal representative. He declared that the people from Michoacan need a voice within governmental organizations, and he intended to propose a law to legitimize self-defence groups.

In summary, this study's participants described where they were coming from during the initial uprising and the different developmental stages that the self-defence groups went through. First, they positioned themselves as victims of fear and of the drug cartels; they then took control over their fears as well as over the physical security of their communities. During this stage, the participants built coping skills to fight the drug cartel members through social organization. Later, the participants showed, to a greater or lesser extent, that they were victims of the ambiguous actions of the government that continues attacking them and protecting drug cartel members. None of the participants demonstrated a passive attitude toward the circumstances that are affecting their communities. On the contrary, they acted to overcome those circumstances by applying different strategies such as denouncing criminal infiltration even though they live with the enemy inside their communities. In other cases, there are self-defence groups that fully maintain their function of protection over their communities and control their actions and members.

Gains in Michoacan's communities

Figure 1: Stages of the self-defence movement

The transformation of the self-defence groups from victims of both drug cartels and the government to fighters, and even winners of the fight, against impunity and violence is a process yet unfinished, and this process, according to Judith Rodin, is the resilience dividend.[57] Rodin argues that awareness, diversity, integration, self-regulation, and adaptation are characteristics of community resilience. The self-defence groups of Michoacan have clearly demonstrated these characteristics, depending on the particularities of each community. Their self-defence movement had the capacity to harness people's qualities and skills to create organizations that effectively take care of their communities and are capable of adapting to new challenges. Therefore, these groups self-regulate and take advantage of their

[57] Judith Rodin, *The Resilience Dividend*.

populations' diversity, integrating it effectively into their fight against crime. Self-defence groups tried to return to the security and peace they had decades ago using a support structure that is not based on the drug economy. These groups are aware both of the consequences of Martin-Been and Anderies similarly state that the capacity to transform, or "the ability of a part of a complex adaptive system to assume a *new* function" is an essential feature of resilience.[58] Michoacan's self-defence groups assumed the function of the government by providing effective security to their communities; however, their actions were different from those of the federal forces. Self-defence groups started moving out of their communities to help other communities establish their own groups. The strategies they used were different from those used by the government because they initially had neither powerful arms nor vehicles. They started using the arms and vehicles taken from the criminals and then used social networks inside communities to obtain economic and human resources. In addition, the functions of people changed. They moved from being workers, harvesters, and farmers to being policers of their communities, using arms, designing combat strategies, and fighting criminals. They acted as witnesses too when they recognized and identified organized crime members. Self-defence groups became functional entities that contested crime and combatted the government's incapability, negligence, and corruption.

Conclusion

The elements that fostered resilience in Las Autodefensas Legítimas de Michoacan were not conditions implanted in a community from outside; instead they have arisen through meaningful life lessons that shaped people's characters within their community. In this case, resilience is a mixture of strong motivation and individuals' skills and knowledge that led to social gains being obtained during a development lifecycle. In the cases of these research subjects, resilience was triggered by an event, but it was not caused by an event. Resilience was the result of the oppression that Michoacan communities endured even as they were figuring out how to fight drug cartels in the past errors and of the risks they still have to confront. Their skills and adaptation mechanisms could be easily equated to those considered as components of community resilience by Judith Rodin.

fear stage. Self-defence groups applied the skills and knowledge they already had, and they also acquired new skills through fighting drug cartels which enabled them to act and improvise effectively. At the same time, they also gained self-esteem and a sense of their capacity for self-determination. They were able to overcome their fear of being killed by the cartels and then they innovated strategies to successfully fight back. They were able to adapt to the new schemas established by local and federal governments, including incarceration and disarmament. They were also aware of the future challenges that might arise in their context and they were looking forward, attempting to find neutralizing strategies.

Michoacan was full of different actors with different interests that directly affected the original self-defence movement. Members of drug cartels infiltrated the self-defence groups to fight other drug cartels. The government joined or attacked the self-defence groups at its own convenience. Some people did not like the self-defence groups because they directly affected their livelihoods. Moreover, the government and other critics have claimed that the solution provided by self-defence groups to counter violence was illegal because it involves the irregular use of force. However, the uprising of Michoacan's original self-defence movement was a response to the Mexican government abandoning the function of security provider at federal, local, and municipal levels. The intervention of the self-defence groups allowed Michoacan communities to improve their political, economic, health, food, community, and personal security through organization, creativity, innovation, and adaptation. In this way, Las Autodefensas Legitímas de Michoacan were able to improve the state of human security, in all of its aspects, for their communities.

Although each Michoacan community that experienced a self-defence movement had different organizational processes, and even

[58] Martin-Been et al., "Resilience: A Literature Review".

though the participants in this research have diverging and often opposing views about the best way to obtain more independence to secure their communities, self-defence groups took joint actions and had shared needs and desires. Consequently, these groups have become a source of renovating energy. They have disrupted the synergy of violence, corruption, and impunity imposed in Michoacan by the drug cartels' hegemony and the absence of security guarantees by the Mexican government, and they have become, in this way, a force of community resilience.

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