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Life That Thrives In Hostility: Mexico's Indigenous Communities and Self-Defense Forces

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**Life That Thrives In Hostility:
Mexico's Indigenous Communities and Self-Defense Forces
Kassia Halcli
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I. Introduction

Mexico is at war. Since 2006, the Mexican government has struggled to impose order and control between the state's many competing drug trafficking organizations. While this conflict can be viewed as a civil war, it has an important international dimension: the drug trade is fueled by the United States' consumer demand for drugs. The U.S. government, conscious of drug trafficking and spillover violence on its southern border, is somewhat constrained in both its capability and willingness to intervene. Mexico's weak police and judicial institutions, as well as varying levels of executive corruption, make intervention on behalf of the state risky. Collusion is part of Mexico's political culture, especially where the trade is so lucrative and the executive payouts are substantial. Furthermore, the American public is less inclined to support expensive and dangerous involvement in a drug war than another kind of war. The U.S. has, despite this, exerted powerful influence on the progression of this ongoing conflict. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has allegedly provided intelligence and weapons to the powerful Sinaloa Cartel in an effort to streamline drug traffic but most details have been concealed.¹ Empowering Sinaloa dominance over the flow of drugs from production in the south to wholesale in the north would, in theory, moderate violence-producing cartel rivalries. While it may be realistically difficult to stop the drug trade, it is realistically possible to stop the war.

A new dimension to this stalling conflict emerged in mid-2012 and early 2013.

¹ These allegations stem from an investigative report published by *El Universal* in early 2014. The newspaper gathered "official and court documents from Mexico and the United States and interviewed over a hundred active or retired officials from each country." The report is plausible and convincing. The evidence corroborates with the steady rise of the Sinaloa Cartel on the same timeline as the supposed cooperation with the US. Doris Gómora, "La guerra secreta de la DEA in Mexico," *El Universal*, January 6, 2014.

These were the *fuerzas autodefensas* or “self-defense forces,” which arose first in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero, then spread outwards throughout southern Mexico. The ranks of the self-defense groups are composed of mostly poor rural men responding to cartel violence in their communities. Not only did these self-defense groups prove to be an unlikely force for good, emerging—improbably—from a landscape of fear and criminality, but they were also effective. To varying degrees of success, these groups managed to purge cartel leaders from their towns and villages, redistribute the balance of power of the community, and restore, in some small way, order. The *autodefensas* exceeded the expectations of their human-interest narrative: these were tactical, though localized, victories the state had not produced in six years. With momentum unimpeded by the central government, the groups proliferated rapidly, reproducing the same models of organization. Seventeen out of the thirty-two Mexican states currently have or at some point in the last three years had self-defense forces operating within their boundaries.

Few academic inquiries have been made into the cause and effects of these self-groups, likely due to a lack of data amidst a live issue. The phenomenon is frequently yet superficially covered in both Spanish and English language media, but many questions remain. What underlying mechanisms impel private individuals, many without proper weaponry or training, to resist well-funded, well-organized, and well-defended organized criminals? Why did these groups emerge in 2012, and not before? And why are the self-defense groups concentrated in a southern bloc of states, as opposed to cropping up only in the most violent regions?

The cluster of self-defense groups in the South must be caused by something sociological particular to the region. The cluster is not evenly correlated with areas with

the greatest drug-related violence. The southern states contain larger indigenous populations. No Mexicans have a more place-based identity than the indigenous population. Furthermore, Mexico's indigenous people are a minority within a minority. They are poor, rural, and many do not speak Spanish. Their remote locations, lack of state infrastructure, and cultural otherness make indigenous communities more inclined to autonomous self-organization. Indigenous populations tend to occupy the fringes; their cultural survival often depends on it. Cartels, too, seek refuge from state control, although for criminal, not cultural reasons. Indigenous communities, which rely less on the state to begin with, could reasonably be the first to react, proactively, to failure of the state to maintain order. Does indigenous marginalization from the federal state and the resulting social capital explain why the self-defense groups emerge where they do?

II. Literature Review

There is an argument to be made for classifying the Mexican drug war as a civil war. A common political science definition of a civil war is "an internal conflict with at least 1,000 combat-related deaths per year."² This criterion is widely replicated throughout the literature in political science. According to data compiled by Diego Valle-Jones, drug-war related homicides surpassed the 1,000 mark in December 2009³ and have stayed above that threshold since. As these are combat-related deaths, the civil war literature provides a helpful existing explanatory framework for understanding the emergence of Mexico's self-defense forces. The following section will review the existing literature and assess its relevance to indigenous Mexico.

² Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4, (2004): 565.

³ Diego Valle-Jones, "Interactive Map of the Drug War in Mexico," [diegovalle.net](http://www.diegovalle.net), Accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.diegovalle.net/narcomap>.

Mexico's current crisis is most simply understood as a civil war fought between the state government and Mexico's drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), but the evolving picture defies simplicity. When former President Felipe Calderón cracked down on drug trafficking organizations in 2006, there were seven main DTOs: the Tijuana/Arellano Felix organization (AFO), the Sinaloa cartel, the Juárez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes organization (CFO), and the Gulf cartel. Since then, these seven groups have fractured into an unknowably larger number, allowing the drug trade to survive in a form more suited to guerrilla-style confrontations. In the chaos, more regional DTOs have emerged to cash in on the profitable trade, further destabilizing the system of cartel territory. As the conflict went on, it became harder for the state to identify and locate its targets, and harder for the cartels to do the same for its rivals. If the war is just a crackdown on drug traffic, what distinguishes it from especially bloody law enforcement? The dichotomous distinction between State and Criminal is somewhat false. Mexico's drug cartels have become entrenched and powerful in an atmosphere of state collusion and tacit tolerance. The cartels wield fear and violence, administer taxes, and empower themselves with authority over life and death with a state-like assurance, but without the state's limitations of legality, morality, or transparency. Although the cartels are, from the perspective of the state, something of a rebel army, they have been apart of the established order in Mexico for decades.

The self-defense forces opened up a third front on this civil war. Self-defense group members were—like the cartels—rebels but—like the state—fighting the cartels. Civilians were not only arming themselves with weapons in a state where private ownership of firearms is highly restricted, but going out and turning them on local

officials and cartel members alike. Again, to think these self-defense groups are wholly distinct from the state and the politics of drug trafficking would be naïve. Cartels often compel farmers to produce marijuana or opium poppy, in exchange for protection. Would-be self-defense group members are drawn from this same pool of farmers. Once the self-defense groups became a recognized phenomenon, the national cartels surely recognized the value of these groups to eliminate regional rivals. The self-defense groups, despite their purer motives, pursue their goals with the same violence as cartels.

The literature explains the eruption of civil wars as a combination of motive and opportunity. Motives can come in the form of perceived or objective grievances, usually against a political system, economic condition, or ethnic group. Opportunities refer to atypical conditions that favor rebellion, such as lower financial costs or greater financing for armed rebellion. Though I have divided the literature review between these two categories, I recognize that they are by no means discrete. Both motive and opportunity continuously influence the other. Opportunity makes motives more pronounced. Without a preexisting motive, opportunities tend to go unnoticed.

Motives for rebellion generally come in the form of ethnic conflict, political marginalization, or economic inequality. The ethnic conflict school claims that violence between ethnic groups results from historical antagonism. Scholars in this tradition predict that greater levels of ethnic diversity will be more likely to lead to civil war. Toft (2002) studies ethnic violence, but finds that settlement patterns—not ancient hatreds—determine a group’s readiness to be mobilized by rebellion. Settlement patterns refer to where groups live and whether they are a minority or a majority. “Territory is often a

defining attribute of a group's identity,"⁴ especially when that territory is a homeland. So, where ethnic motives do exist, the territorial distribution of the groups predicts rebellion stronger than the hatred itself.

Mexico's indigenous populations have an ethnic component and experience greater levels of marginalization and poverty than the national average. Though the indigenous body is fractured into 62 different language groups, they have no developed persisting ancient hatreds against each other. This is likely due to the fact that the indigenous identity is more marginalized than the specific Yaqui or Zapotec identity. The indigenous groups have more formidable adversary than each other: the state.

Unusually weak political rights or unusually high inequality often crop up along ethnic lines. Easterly and Levine (1997) argue that political marginalization and institutionalized economic inequality are the mechanisms that generate grievance. Here, ethnicity is only an indirect cause of civil war. Fearon and Laitin (2003) also hypothesize that income inequality and policies of discrimination should be associated with higher risk for civil war. Additionally, since certain regime types provide checks on inequality and discrimination, Fearon and Laitin (2003) also predict that measures of political democracy will be associated with lower risks for conflict.

Collier and Hoeffler (2004) claim that economic-motives are better predictors of civil war than grievance-motives. Greed is universal, according to Hirshleifer's Machiavelli Theorem: "no one will ever pass up an opportunity to gain a one-sided

⁴ Monica D. Toft, "Indivisible territory, geographic concentration, and ethnic war." *Security Studies* 12, no. 2 (2002), 86.

advantage by exploiting another party.”⁵ In the context of indigenous communities that are objectively lacking in state support, this tendency to grab opportunity is not greedy. This is, instead, gain: they are seeking an equitable share as guaranteed by the constitution.

Rebellion extracts costs. Opportunity exists where the costs of rebellion are suddenly reduced, or the hypothetical profits are suddenly greater. State failure, defined by Weber as loss of “the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force,”⁶ is an opportunity. Popular dissatisfaction with the regime greases the wheels for the two other opportunities: finance and recruitment.

Without some form of financial backing, grievance-motives cannot be borne out to the extent that they produce civil war. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) lay out three common sources for rebel finance: natural resources, donations, and hostile governments. There is only middling support for each of these considerations in predicting the break out of civil conflict. For instance, Klare (2001) argues that resources, for example the extortion of cocaine in Columbia, predict the geography of conflict. Collier and Hoeffler point out, however, that states with resource-based economies, like Russia and Saudi Arabia, can result in greater state control over financing, not less. Opportunities that arise in the form of “atypically low cost”⁷ are probably more influential than atypically high financing.

⁵ Jack Hirshleifer, *The Dark Side of Force: Economic Foundations of Conflict Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10-1.

⁶ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

⁷ Collier and Hoeffler, "Greed," 569.

Mexico is the ninth largest producer of oil in the world. Pemex, the state-owned oil company, had never commercially maximized the economic potential of its oil reserves due to its 76-year monopoly. In 2013, however, Mexico's Congress approved an energy reform bill that allows for privatization. The effect of Mexico's oil privatization on rebellion financing could go several ways. For the state economy, this means a boost to the industry and the economy. For indigenous communities located on or near oil-rich land, this could mean yet another threat to their territory. Now that foreign investment is open, hostile governments, or would-be rebel financiers, may be less likely to support uprising over defense of a profitable oil field.

Where opportunity costs are lower, rebellion is more likely. Where unemployment is high, the income foregone by rebelling is low and the loss of productive labor is minimal. The individual's calculation of opportunity cost is essential to recruitment. Unlike states, rebel movements do not have standing armies to call upon. Walter's (2004) work on recurring civil war stresses the importance of factors related to rebel recruitment. She claims that recruitment is more likely where individuals are severely dissatisfied and perceive violence as the only available tool for improvement.⁸ Recruitment capitalizes on the motives of economic inequality or political marginalization, but becomes appealing once the status quo is "perceived to be worse than the possibility of death in combat."⁹ Collier & Hoeffler (2004), again, would contend that greed, not the hope for improvement of intolerably low living standards produces recruitment. The opportunity cost of rebellion in Mexico is quite low. Foregone

⁸ Barbara F. Walter, "Does Conflict Beget Conflict? Explaining Recurring Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 374.

⁹ *Ibid.*

income in Mexico is low, because of high unemployment and underemployment. Drug war violence is already pervasive. Rebellion against the cartel system would not be choosing violence—that is not a choice for the average citizen—but a choice to defend oneself against it.

Geographic factors are also a reoccurring theme in the literature. A given territory's terrain is fixed. While it is not a dynamic variable like motives and opportunities, terrain is an especially important determinant. Statistics from Collier and Hoeffler (2004) show that in conflict 25 percent of the terrain is mountainous, versus only 15 percent in regions at peace.¹⁰ Fearon and Laitin (2003) support this thesis. They argue that rough terrain as well as areas “poorly served by roads, at a distance from the centers of state power”¹¹ favor insurgency. For Fearon and Laitin, factors that favor insurgency are key predictors for civil conflict. In civil conflicts involving more than two rebel groups, however, the terrain can provide mutual opportunity for adversaries, thus complicating its impact. Nevertheless, rough terrain provides an edge for rebels.

Indigenous communities may be prone to rebellion due to their geographic location. Indigenous communities tend to live in distant rural areas the state cannot properly service with infrastructure or defend with law enforcement. Normally, in a traditional civil war, this would favor rebel violence against the state. In Mexico, where there is a three-sided civil conflict involving the state, the cartels, and the citizens, rural areas favor both the cartels and the rebels. Since the rebels are defending themselves

¹⁰ Collier and Hoeffler, “Greed,” 570.

¹¹ James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003), 80.

against the cartels, and not attempting the overthrow of state authorities, the effect of geography is minimal in predicting the self-defense phenomenon.

In the case of Mexico, the grievance-motives of ethnicity, political marginalization, and economic inequality intersect most drastically for indigenous communities. The existing literature points to the role of indigenous communities in producing rebellion. The following theory provides an explanation for how indigenous marginalization can produce rebellion, with social capital as an intervening variable.

III. Theory

Social capital exists in Mexico's indigenous communities. Social capital is by nature intangible, but it is inherent in indigenous self-expression, cultural survival, and the recent emergence of an indigenous human rights discourse. From the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to the Zapatista Uprising in 1994, indigenous people have mobilized their social capital to political ends. The land reforms and rights reassurances that followed these indigenous calls to arms encapsulate the Mexican state's failure of will or policy to properly address systematic inequality. The marginalization and de facto autonomy of indigenous communities experience has resulted in the improbable thickening of social capital. Flexing and mobilizing their social capital over the last century, Mexico's indigenous communities have proven their ability to grow in hostility. The following theory presents the history of indigenous Mexico and its intersections with the state, with social capital as the intervening link between collective identity and its politicization.

Collective Identity

Collective action, though a necessary component of human society, is notoriously difficult to foment. Collectives deal in social capital. Social capital is defined as social

networks bound together by norms of reciprocity.¹² In spite of the individual's contradictory multitude of identities and self-interests, social capital develops, collectives emerge. Norms of reciprocity underpin group behavior, whether that group is a paramilitary or the PTA. Only deviant collective action requires that these norms of reciprocity to be greater than the norms handed down by society at large.

Putnam (2000) categorizes social capital in two ways: bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is “inward looking and tend[s] to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups.”¹³ Bonding social capital, while it inspires deep and loyal connections among groups, can reinforce narrow identities at the expense of broader social cooperation. Bridging social capital, however, is “outward looking and encompass[es] people across diverse social cleavages.”¹⁴ Groups with thick bonding social capital cooperate because of shared identities and interests; groups characterized by bridging social capital cooperate in spite of diversity. These categories are not strictly dichotomous. Bonding and bridging social capital can exist simultaneously or independently, depending on the situation.

Social capital, like any form of capital, implies a direction, a potential energy waiting to be borne-out. Putnam (2000) warns of social capital's so-called dark side; he writes, while “networks and the associated norms are generally good for those inside the network, the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive.”¹⁵ The social capital between soldiers in a rebel army or Mexico's *autodefensas* is of the dark variety.

¹² Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

But what causes social capital to go dark? When a group is motivated to act out against the power structure, the structure has failed the group in some fundamental way. The social contract has been violated. This can happen a number of ways. Some are broad and affect whole nations, like the state's loss of a monopoly on the use of legitimate force or deterioration of the rule of law. Trust in official institutions is low, so interpersonal trust becomes more potent in response. Institutional failure alone is not enough. The civil war literature contends that grievance-motives often occur due to political marginalization and economic inequality. These political and economic grievances are often historically perpetuated along ethnic lines. Generalized distrust in the state cements into grievance in cases of intersectionality, where political, economic, and ethnic oppressions overlap.

Indigenous people suffer these intersections of oppression as a function of geography. Indigenous communities, by definition, are bound to their location and ethnically bound to each other. Place-based social capital is stronger than function-based social capital. Place-based social capital is characterized by “dense, multi-stranded, well-exercised bonds,” while function-based social capital is “thin, single-stranded, surf-by interactions.”¹⁶ There can be no more quintessential example of a place-based social network than an indigenous community. Indigenous social capital, partially ethnic, partially territorial, partially political, partially economic, is reproduced over decades. In a post-colonial world, where racial hierarchies are obsolete within liberal democratic paradigms, this collective identity persists under immense pressure to assimilate or

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

disappear. As such, indigenous communities ought to have both dense social capital and long-standing grievance-motives: they are at high risk for social rebellion.

Tierra y Libertad

The indigenous identity across Latin America has become increasingly politicized over the past few decades. There are over 11 million indigenous people living in Mexico, approximately 10 percent of the population.¹⁷ “Indigenous” was obviously not a politically distinct category until colonization. While the truest origin of the politicization of indigenous identity would be Spain’s colonization of Mexico in 1519, the relevant history begins with the 1910 Mexican Revolution.

Even today, political legitimacy derives from association with the Mexican Revolution. The most continuously powerful political party throughout the twentieth century, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which holds the presidency to this day, bears its revolutionary credentials in its name. The revolution—and the political restructuring that followed—forever linked the government to the peasant, “by whom and on whose behalf the revolution was fought.”¹⁸ The revolution was incited by the poor harvest of 1908-9, which outstripped the wages of the rural poor, who at that time formed the bulk of the population. Peasants mobilized to upend the feudal system, believing that the wealth of the land ought to be returned to those who worked it. This ideology is summed up by the rallying cry of revolutionary leaders such as Emilio Zapata and Francisco “Pancho” Villa: *Tierra y Libertad* (“Land and Liberty”). The heirs of these

¹⁷ This is one of the lower estimates floating around, but it’s taken from the same data set I reference later on in my analysis, so I’ve chosen it for consistency. Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI). “Catalogo de localidades indígenas 2010.”

¹⁸ Courtney Jung, “Politics of Indigenous Identity: Neoliberalism, Cultural Rights, and the Mexican Zapatistas,” *Social Research* 70, no. 2 (2003), 438.

peasant identifiers—the rural, the poor—have largely, though not exclusively, been indigenous communities. The two conditions are strongly correlated. The peasant and indigenous identities are inextricably linked. Further, modern Mexican identity on the whole is strongly tied to the land and the historic rights of peasant farmer.

The Mexican Constitution of 1917, which marked the end of the revolution, explicitly upholds indigenous rights. Article 2 exclusively pertains to indigenous communities, defined as those that “constitute a social, economic, and cultural unit, are situated in a territory, and have their own authorities in accordance with their traditions and customs.”¹⁹ Article 2 guarantees self-determination and equal opportunity. It is telling how close to the beginning this reassurance comes in the document, up front, right after the general guarantees of equality protected in Article 1. Then, acknowledging that “hardship and lack of development”²⁰ permeates indigenous communities, Article 2 goes on to detail nine areas where the authorities plan on improving: (1) quality of life; (2) levels of schooling; (3) access to health care; (4) improvement of basic social services and infrastructure; (5) incorporation of women; (6) communications; (7) creation of jobs; (8) protection of indigenous migrants; and (9) democratization. We know that laws such as this, which guarantee equality, typically only arise in response to glaring inequality. So, we also know that these legal protections would not exist to affirm the equality of indigenous people, and then go on to enumerate the many ways the central government can improve its policy with regards to their communities, unless they were already

¹⁹ Constitute Project, "Mexico's Constitution of 1917 with Amendments through 2007,"

3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

severely disadvantaged. Indigenous peasants were the spark plug of the revolution and therefore dictated the constitutional framework that endures to this day.

Usos y Costumbres

The Zapatista Uprising, named after the Mexican Revolutionary leader Emilio Zapata, is the most recent and explicitly indigenous military movement to take place in Mexico. The movement was made possible by bridging social capital, formed atop indigenous bonding social capital. The Uprising began in the state of Chiapas on January 1, 1994, the same day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. NAFTA's central aim was to remove trade barriers and tariffs between Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Under the idealistic logic of free trade, with full employment, NAFTA would incentivize noncompetitive producers to move into other sectors, maximizing productivity. The Mexican reality is high unemployment and underemployment. In this situation, Jung explains, "farmers who are forced out of agriculture are unable to move to another sector."²¹ The indigenous population of Chiapas stood up against an encroaching globalism that claimed to do universal good but did damage to them as individuals. The indigenous identity is fundamentally at odds with the goals of the Mexican government that wants to modernize along with its neighbors: "demands for collective rights are in tension with the commitments of liberal democracies to individual rights."²² NAFTA, however, comparatively disadvantaged most Mexican producers against their American and Canadian counterparts; and thus we see rebellion in Chiapas.

²¹ Jung, "Politics," 439.

²² *Ibid.*, 433.

The Zapatista Uprising, similar to the *fuerzas autodefensas*, was geographically contained. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation Army (EZLN) was rebelling against more than free trade. The EZLN also formed in response to the amendments made in 1992 to Article 27 of the constitution made in 1992. Article 27 had embodied Mexico's historic commitment to land reform. It mandated the state redistribute land more equitably in the form of *ejidos*. *Ejidos* are plots of communal property that cannot be bought and sold. Communal land ownership is a central element of indigenous culture. As such some of these land parcels were designated *comunidades agrarias*, which were reserved exclusively for indigenous communities. In Chiapas, where *ejidos* make up 54 percent of exploitable land,²³ the amendment of Article 27 drastically upended everyday life. Indigenous people make up 32 percent of the total state population in Chiapas.²⁴ Traditional indigenous life was under fire.

The Zapatistas first emerged from the Lacandón Jungle. Their first declaration explicitly addressed the indigenous plight: "We are the product of 500 years of struggle." In Lacandón, however, where Zapatista support emanates, as Jung writes, "indigenous traditions and language communities have not been intact since the mid-twentieth century."²⁵ Indigenous identity, like all identity, is fluid and complex. Due to the contentious history between indigenous people and the Mexican government, pivoting on land reform, this identity has become highly malleable. In this picture, it is easy to conflate the indigenous, peasant, and "communist" identities. The EZLN alone has been characterized as all three.

²³ Deborah J. Yashar, "Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1998), 35.

²⁴ CDI, "Catalogo 2010."

²⁵ Jung, "Politics," 457.

The Zapatista Uprising opened the door to formal negotiations for indigenous rights. These negotiations culminated in the San Andrés Peace Accords, signed in 1996. While they granted autonomy in letter to the indigenous people of Mexico, they failed to come to any real resolutions on land reform, the entire purpose for the uprising. The Accords helped to legitimize the indigenous discourse globally, but epitomize its failed promise. The Accords' vague wording, specifically rampant use of the phrase *usos y costumbres* (referring to indigenous "customs and traditions"), was superficially respectful but ultimately mocking. The document shills autonomy as if it were introducing a new idea, when in fact indigenous people had been experiencing for a "de facto autonomy of neglect"²⁶ for 500 years. There has been a spike in reverence for indigenous issues, thanks to the rising influence of International Organizations like the United Nations.²⁷ The most notable contribution of the San Andrés Peace Accords, however, has been its source of yet another indigenous grievance.

Back to the Land

Mexico's post-NAFTA agricultural policy has conformed to the theme of indigenous neglect. Government farm subsidies have risen since 2001, ostensibly in response to critiques that NAFTA disadvantages small producers. Scholars have argued that this spending has been mishandled, however, and instead of counteracting global disadvantages is in fact "subsidizing inequality."²⁸ The most progressive arm of this spending spree has been Procampo, Mexico's single largest agricultural program.

²⁶ Jung, "Politics," 435.

²⁷ In 2000, for example, The United Nations established a UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

²⁸ Jonathan Fox and Libby Haight, "Subsidizing Inequality: Mexican Corn Policy Since NAFTA," Woodrow Center For International Studies (2010).

Mexico's farm policy, on the whole, is "sharply biased against low-income producers."²⁹ Procampo was designed to target smallholders, specifically "non-irrigated corn growers with fewer than 5 hectares."³⁰ Indigenous smallholders are prime recipients for Procampo investment, then, as they account for one quarter of Mexico's farms.³¹ Little of this so-called progressive spending is reaching indigenous municipalities, only 12.4 percent.³² In all likelihood, 12.4% is actually an overestimate, because the definition of "indigenous municipality" is that only 40% of the population identify as indigenous. These municipalities are actually majority non-indigenous, and those farmers have more land. So, it is probable that this spending is reaching towns and villages where indigenous people live, but not the indigenous farmers themselves. Even Mexico's most pro-poor spending program is doing a poor job of reaching the truly poor.

The underlying land-based grievances that ignited indigenous social capital and compelled communities to violent rebellion persist, and continue to be perpetuated, even as policymakers attempt to address them. As such, conditions that were necessary to producing social movements like the Zapatista Uprising can still be found in contemporary indigenous communities. This politicized indigenous identity has not, as the history demonstrates, developed in response to direct threats against uniquely indigenous *usos y costumbres*. Indigenous languages and cultural behaviors do not incite political or economic marginalization. Actually, Jung writes, the "indigenous identity develops political resonance only to the extent that it is employed by the state itself as a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³² *Ibid.*

marker of inclusion or exclusion.”³³ Social capital is the link between political expression and indigenous communities. The indigenous identity has only become overtly politicized where movements have been able to draw upon preexisting indigenous networks.³⁴ Indigenous social capital, reproduced over generations through Putnam’s virtuous cycles, provides the organizational scaffolding for social movements to occur. Due to the unequal treatment of indigenous municipalities, there are grievances that turn this social capital dark. Therefore, organized rebellion is more likely in Mexico’s indigenous communities.

Hypotheses

(H1) Mexican states with an above average percentage indigenous population will be more likely to form self-defense groups due to thick social capital present in indigenous communities.

(H2) High marginalization results in the “the autonomy of neglect,” which in turn generates social capital due to the impulse for cultural survival.

(H3) Highly marginalized indigenous communities will be more likely to form self-defense groups.

IV. Methods

Mexico has 32 federal entities: 31 states and one federal district. 17 states have self-defense groups and 15 do not. I use these states as my unit of analysis for the case studies because it is the simplest way to breakdown the country’s geography and gather patterns. My aim was to cover as many relevant cases as possible.

³³ Jung, “Politics,” 436.

³⁴ Yashar, “Contesting,” 24.

In the case selection process, I focused on the cluster of self-defense groups in the south. Determining whether self-defense groups, the dependent variable, operate or not in a state was straightforward. Mexico's indigenous population is by nature dispersed, so deciding what constituted "low" indigenous presence was more complicated. I found the average indigenous population across the states: 10.44 percent. The indigenous populations of each Mexican state can be found in Table 1 below. The cases are organized according to presence of the independent variable.

I eliminated cases that were both outside the cluster region and below average indigenous population. This eliminated 11 states: Aguascalientes, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Coahuila de Zaragoza, Chihuahua, Distrito Federal, Durango, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas. I recognize that it would be ideal to discuss the indigenous marginalization and social capital of every Mexican state, but seeing as these states are less populated on the whole, have small indigenous populations, and are far removed from the break out of the phenomenon at hand, their relevance is constrained.

Groups within the cluster region, but with a less than 10.44% indigenous population, I kept as deviant cases. There are four cases that defy the cluster: Colima, Guanajuato, Tlaxcala, and Querétaro.

States with self-defense groups that have an above average indigenous population, I kept. These are the "most-likely" cases (10): Campeche, Chiapas, Hidalgo, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, and Yucatán.

States with self-defense groups but with a less than average indigenous population I kept. These are the least-likely cases (7): Jalisco, México, Michoacán, Morelos, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Tabasco.

All states with incidents of self-defense groups are represented to some degree, with the greatest emphasis on my two key cases: Guerrero and Michoacán. I classified these as “key cases” because they are where the breakout of this phenomenon occurred and, as the movement went on, centers of the most activity. The assumption is that the locations with the first and most active self-defense groups will render the most causal insight.

With the cases, I am able to dig deeper into the nature of the indigenous communities. I trace the development of indigenous social capital vis-à-vis rival explanations. Indigenous culture is hard to quantify. I recognize that the percentage of a population that is indigenous is not the only or truest indicator of the “indigenesness” of a given location. All else being equal, however, I assume that states with high numbers of indigenous residents have stronger ties that bind. My information comes from the most up to date and thorough database available through the Mexican government-funded National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI), the 2010 Catalog of Indigenous Localities. The CDI considers an indigenous population as made up of “all persons belonging to an indigenous home, where the head or spouse of the household and/or any of the ancestors (parent, stepparent, grandparent, great great grandparent are declared indigenous language speakers.”³⁵

I measure indigenous marginalization using the CDI’s 2010 Catalog. The database includes a grade of marginalization on an ordinal scale of very low, low, medium, high, and very high. Marginalization, due to limitations of the database, can only be measured at the municipal and locality level, not on the state level. The CDI’s

³⁵ CDI, “Catalogo 2010.”

grade of marginalization is calculated based on nine different indicators. These are: (1) percentage of population aged 15 years or more illiterate; (2) percentage of population aged 15 years or more without complete primary education; (3) percentage of occupants in private dwellings without piped water; (4) percentage of occupants in private dwellings without drain or toilet; (5) percentage of occupants in private dwellings without power; (6) percentage of occupants in private dwellings with dirt floors; (7) percentage of occupants in private dwellings with some level of overcrowding; (8) percentage of population in towns with less than five thousand inhabitants; and (9) percentage of employed population with two minimum wage workers in the household.

A conventional explanation for the emergence of self-defense groups was increasing levels of extortion leading up the breakouts of 2012-2013. I consider this a scope condition, not a causal explanation. A scope condition here is necessary in creating a context where rebellion seems favorable, but is not a sufficient causal explanation. Nevertheless, I use Figures of Intentional Homicide, Abduction, Extortion, and Vehicular Robbery, 1997-2015 to assess the strength of this explanation versus my own [see Table 2].

In the theory chapter, social capital is the theoretical link between marginalization and indigenous communities. Social capital intervenes between the independent and dependent variables. I do not have access to the kind of granular data that would indicate social capital in indigenous communities. Further, social capital is by nature intangible and hard to observe or measure. As such, I do not demonstrate social capital quantitatively, but I theoretically assume it operates where there is social rebellion.

The main source for case research has been the media, which presents several limitations. I am constrained by the availability and depth of other people's reporting. The violence in Mexico creates a particularly hostile environment for journalists. I am further limited by my own Spanish language skills, which are intermediate. For case specifics, I draw mainly from online archives of Mexico's most widely respected newspaper, *El Universal*, from January 2013 to February 2015 or local papers, such as Guerrero's *El Sur*.

Table 1. Mexico's Indigenous Population by State

State	State Population	Indigenous Pop.	Indigenous %	Self-Defense?
Aguascalientes	1,184,996	6,426	0.57%	No
Baja California	3,155,070	89,663	2.80%	No
Baja California Sur	637,026	21,749	3%	No
Campeche	822,441	181,805	22%	Yes (Most-likely)
Chiapas	8,435	1,511,015	31.50%	Yes (Most-likely)
Chihuahua	3,406,465	158,527	4.60%	No
Coahuila de Zaragoza	2,748,391	14,638	0.53%	No
Chihuahua	650,555	8,435	1.30%	No (Cluster)
Distrito Federal	8,851,080	300,138	3.40%	No
Durango	1,632,934	44,722	2.70%	No
Guanajuato	5,486,372	34,639	0.63%	No (Cluster)
Guerrero	3,388,768	635,620	18.70%	Yes (Most-likely)
Hidalgo	2,665,018	575,161	21.60%	Yes (Most-likely)
Jalisco	7,350,682	96,373	1.30%	Yes (Least-likely)
México	15,175,862	935,690	6.50%	Yes (Least-likely)
Michoacán de Ocampo	4,351,037	213,478	5%	Yes (Least-likely)
Morelos	1,777,227	70,393	4%	Yes (Least-likely)
Nayarit	1,084,979	72,348	6.70%	No
Nuevo León	4,653,458	81,909	1.80%	No
Oaxaca	3,801,962	1,719,464	45%	Yes (Most-likely)
Puebla	5,779,829	1,018,397	17.60%	Yes (Most-likely)
Querétaro	1,827,937	56,664	3%	No (Cluster)
Quintana Roo	1,325,578	904,292	30.50%	Yes (Most-likely)
San Luis Potosí	2,585,518	361,653	14%	Yes (Most-likely)
Sinaloa	2,767,761	53,215	1.90%	Yes (Least-likely)
Sonora	2,662,480	130,448	5%	Yes (Least-likely)
Tabasco	2,238,603	120,635	5.40%	Yes (Least-likely)
Tamaulipas	3,268,554	59,713	1.80%	No
Tlaxcala	1,169,936	72,270	6.20%	No (Cluster)
Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave	7,643,194	1,037,424	14%	Yes (Most-likely)
Yucatán	1,955,577	985,549	50.40%	Yes (Most-likely)
Zacatecas	1,490,668	10,109	0.70%	No

Catalogo de localidades indigenas 2010, INEGI

Table 2. Reported Extortion by State (2006-2014)

State	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Aguascalientes	30	38	51	55	42	114	85	42	33
Baja California	329	216	322	437	506	356	401	349	291
Baja California Sur	70	45	56	87	61	50	78	123	38
Campeche	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	84	50
Chiapas	87	122	79	72	94	89	118	147	165
Chihuahua	62	39	264	409	173	238	171	161	20
Coahuila de Zaragoza	0	0	0	81	64	59	78	104	89
Colima	0	0	0	0	0	12	5	27	13
Distrito Federal	382	424	874	906	1,117	7,151	1,181	965	641
Durango	85	65	96	91	265	108	86	82	47
Guanajuato	120	116	186	340	262	221	523	468	32
Guerrero	36	44	57	69	53	85	133	174	159
Hidalgo	82	62	140	155	123	67	57	127	97
Jalisco	476	406	609	659	948	479	486	790	669
México	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,039	1,668	1,010
Michoacán de Ocampo	114	183	293	358	172	184	342	261	202
Morelos	436	194	245	644	612	228	260	400	357
Nayarit	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Nuevo León	82	36	40	57	50	61	196	285	377
Oaxaca	235	381	326	644	612	228	260	400	357
Puebla	0	0	0	0	0	3	454	258	179
Querétaro	43	35	34	37	35	27	40	25	5
Quintana Roo	22	40	107	112	150	147	229	204	260
San Luis Potosí	140	226	334	287	185	238	150	119	84
Sinaloa	51	48	65	74	102	145	129	114	119
Sonora	45	46	40	26	30	28	37	34	26
Tabasco	34	60	141	274	194	153	146	188	139
Tamaulipas	23	55	88	153	107	157	154	225	189
Tlaxcala	0	0	0	0	1	28	37	83	57
Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave	159	219	387	370	331	400	447	461	255
Yucatán	0	0	0	0	1	28	37	83	57
Zacatecas	13	22	35	16	26	45	63	65	68

Cifras de homicidio doloso, secuestro, extorsión y robo se vehículos 1997-2014, SESNP

V. Cases

The *autodefensas* are largely clustered together. The broad pattern to keep in mind throughout the cases is the breakout of self-defense groups in the southern coastal states and a subsequent spread outward. This chronology—the breakout cases to the dynamic cases—also corresponds to the two types of self-defense groups. The two types of self-defense groups differ in the scope conditions that created the opportunity for rebellion. Both types, however, are more likely to emerge where indigenous social capital pre-exists.

i. Break Out Cases (2)

Table 2. Indigenous Marginalization: Michoacán

Dispersed (Less than 40% indigenous) Presence (Roughly 40% indigenous) Indigenous (40% or more indigenous)

Municipality	Indigenous Presence	Marginalization
Aguililla	Dispersed	High/Very High
Apatzingán	Dispersed	High
Aquila	Indigenous	Very High
Buнавista	Dispersed	Medium
Churumuco	Dispersed	Very High
Coalcomán	Dispersed	Medium
La Huacana	Dispersed	High
Los Reyes	Indigenous Presence	High/Very High
Morelia	Indigenous Presence	Very Low
Parácuaro	Dispersed	High
Salvador Escalante	Dispersed	High
Tancítaro	Dispersed	High
Tepalcatepec	Dispersed	Medium
Uruapan	Indigenous Presence	Very Low
Zitácuaro	Indigenous Presence	High

Catalogo de localidades indigenas 2010, INEGI

Michoacán (Least-Likely)

Michoacán has thick social capital, partly due to its documented history as “a

bastion of defiance”³⁶ dating back to the Spanish conquests. Over the last century, the state has generally opposed Mexico’s dominant political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), in favor of the scrappier leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).³⁷

The first autodefensas emerged from the Tierra Caliente (“hot land”) region of Michoacán in January of 2013. As the name of the region suggests, it is desert. Tierra Caliente’s geography predicts violence on a number of levels. Indigenous populations are drawn to this location because it is on the fringes of state control; they can live autonomously. This dynamic also works in the reverse direction: it is likely there is less state control in this region because of the indigenous presence. Cartels are drawn to this region because its sparse patrol is ideal for drug production. Opium poppy is the region’s main export, which is resilient plant climate-wise as it can withstand the heat and low-precipitation.

Michoacán’s indigenous population does not appear to be the largest percentage-wise, but this is misleading. At over four million, Michoacán has one of Mexico’s highest state populations, thus diluting the indigenous influence. The indigenous-speaking population is above 200,000, a reoccurring threshold among the cases where self-defense groups occur.

Indigenous sentiment is strong in Michoacán because the identity is not fractured among different groups. The indigenous population is largely consolidated within the

³⁶ Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk, “Citizen Security in Michoacán,” In *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, ed. by David A. Shirk, Duncan Wood, and Eric L. Olson, (Washington D.C.: Wilson Institute, 2015) 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

Purépecha language group. Of the 14 municipalities where *autodefensas* were operating after one year³⁸ one was majority indigenous, four had indigenous presence, and nine has dispersed indigenous presence [see Table 2]. Dispersion, it seems, is the key element to marginalization.

The majority-indigenous communities are actually less marginalized than the indigenous people who float among non-indigenous communities. In the dispersed indigenous municipalities of Aguililla, Buenavista, Churumuco, Coalcomán, La Huacana, Parácuaro, Salvador Escalante, Tancítaro, and Tepalcatepec, all the localities, on average, had a “high” or “very high” grade of marginalization. Additionally, there is a lot of intangible, anecdotal support for the “indigenusness” of these communities. In Parácuaro (named after a Purépecha word), they annually celebrate the start of the Mexican Revolution on November 20.³⁹ The indigenous identity, it seems, can become politicized when indigenous people are a minority within their locality. The dispersed indigenous populations are doubly marginalized: first for being indigenous, second for being separated from their larger cohort. Dispersion generates marginalization, which in turn generates interpersonal trust between “others” leading to greater social capital.

The self-defense groups formed in reaction to rising levels of cartel violence. Extortion alone is not the cause for the emergence of these *autodefensas*, however, because we see rising extortion in cases with no presence of our dependent variable [see table]. The Knights Templar “Los Templarios” is Michoacán’s leading cartel and the

³⁸ Fernando Damián and Francisco G. Davish, "En Morelia ya hay grupos de autodefensa, dice Mora," *Milenio*, March 3, 2014 synthesized with information from Miguel G. Tinoco, "Autodefensas ingresan a municipio michoacano de Parácuaro," *Excelsior*, May 5, 2014.

³⁹ Asociación de Profesionistas Paracuarenses, Accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.paramich.org/>.

original autodefensas' primary opposition. The cartel has long demanded a share of the region's profitable lime and avocado production by demanding residents pay *derecho de piso* ("right to grounds") protection money. In 2013, however, cartel leaders "moved from illegally taxing agricultural output to actually exerting direct control over agricultural production."⁴⁰ Individual resistance to extortion was constrained under threat of violence and abduction. Hipólito Mora, a lime grower and leader of the Tierra Caliente *autodefensas*, estimates he was losing 70 to 80 percent of his profits per year due to cartel intrusions.⁴¹

Besides the rise in financial crime, there is reason to believe cartel brutality was getting worse. Personal experience with extortion, kidnapping, and general cartel violence is anecdotally correlated with overall recruitment and especially leadership. Luis Antonio Torres González, known as "El Americano," joined up after he was kidnapped in October 2012 and held for a 150,000 USD ransom.⁴² José Manuel Mireles Valverde, leader of the Tepalcatepec *autodefensas*, has publically stated that his group formed in response to cartel members' sexual abuse of their wives and daughters.⁴³

The unique power of the self-defense forces derives from their local legitimacy. Political scientist Daniel Zizumbo-Colunga argues that support for the groups is "fueled by the combination of low confidence in state law enforcement and high levels of

⁴⁰ Omar García-Ponce, and Andrés Lojous, "How does a drug cartel become a lime cartel?" *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2014.

⁴¹ Laura Castellanos, "Las extorsiones 'Templarias' en Tierra Caliente," *El Universal*, June 10, 2013.

⁴² Joshua Partlow, "A Mexican militia, battling Michoacan drug cartel, has American roots," *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2014.

⁴³ "Todo detonó cuando el narco abusó de nuestras esposas e hijas'," *Proceso*, July 26, 2013.

interpersonal trust.”⁴⁴ The strategic actions of the *autodefensas* include occupying municipal police stations and setting up checkpoints. By taking over police stations, they demonstrate their power and symbolically present themselves as the new order. With checkpoints, the groups can surveill the coming and goings of the community with an eye towards catching targeted cartel members. These roadblocks spin a weakness into strength. While the *autodefensas* may lack the personnel and weaponry required to overpower an entrenched criminal syndicate, they can still trap their targets by restricting local movement and simply waiting them out. Information sharing between locals, some group members and some not, is essential to the success of this strategy. All these measures require local support, or at the very least tolerance, for citizen-administered justice.

The *autodefensas*, however, have not relied on popular dissatisfaction with the cartels or the failure of law enforcement alone to maintain support. They have worked to disseminate the ethic of citizen justice. To build a support, many of these groups maintain public relations campaigns through social media, which allow them to craft and broadcast a socially legitimate identity. These leaders, unlike cartel leaders, are accessible. And unlike political leaders, they are usually forthcoming with their motives and strategic intentions, sitting for foreign and domestic interviews. The self-defense group leader’s community outreach strategy is proof of the strategic importance of social capital.

Over time, the recapture of Apatzingán, a Templar stronghold, became the top strategic concern of the self-defense groups. Takeover of the city required coordination between several groups and months of planning. The successful recapture of this city on

⁴⁴ Daniel Zizumbo-Colunga, "Explaining Support for Vigilante Justice in Mexico," *AmericasBarometer Insights* (2010).

February 8, 2014 has been, perhaps across the movement as a whole, the most impressive accomplishment of Mexico's *autodefensas*.⁴⁵ A maneuver of this caliber required bridging social capital to motivate groups from several different municipalities into collective action.

The state of Michoacán, due to the thick social capital present indigenous communities—especially the dispersed ones—was able to overcome collective action problems and successfully mobilize *fuerzas autodefensas*. Geography created an alignment of indigenous people and cartel members in Tierra Caliente, albeit for different reasons. Extortion here created an opportunity for rebellion, but it was not the underlying mechanism that explained its success. Leaders responded to an intolerable rise in cartel extortion and brutality, but they could only capitalize on pre-existing social structures.

Table 4. Indigenous Marginalization: Guerrero

Dispersed (Less than 40% indigenous) Presence (Roughly 40% indigenous) Indigenous (40% or more indigenous)

Municipality	Indigenous Presence	Marginalization
Apaxtla	Dispersed	High
Ayutla	Indigenous	Very High
Copala	Dispersed	High
Cuactopec	Dispersed	Very High
Florencia Villarreal	Dispersed	High
Juan R Escuerdo	Dispersed	High
Marquelia	Dispersed	High
Mártir de Cuilapan	Indigenous	Very High
Olinalá	Indigenous	Very High
San Luis Acatlán	Indigenous	Very High
San Marcos	Dispersed	Very High
Tecoanapa	Dispersed	Very High
Teloloapan	Dispersed	High
Tixtla	Indigenous Presence	High

Catálogo de localidades indígenas 2010, INEGI

⁴⁵ Heinle, "Citizen," 20.

Guerrero (Most-Likely)

Guerrero's geography is made up of desert⁴⁶ (Tierra Caliente), mountains (La Montaña), and coast (La Costa). Tierra Caliente, as stated, extends in Michoacán; this connection can help explain the importance of these two neighboring states. La Montaña is the oldest drug production zone in Guerrero.⁴⁷ As discussed in the literature review, atypical geography like desert and mountains are correlated with incidences of civil rebellion. This geography lends itself to weak state control that, like in Michoacán, favors both indigenous communities and cartels. Guerrero's main drug exports are marijuana and opium poppy: "Marijuana can be grown throughout the state but is most commonly planted in lower elevations, especially on the slopes of the Sierra Madre del Sur below 1,000 meters above sea level. Poppy is grown only in higher elevations, above 1,000 meters."⁴⁸

More so than in Michoacán, Guerrero's rough indicators of indigenous social capital predict rebellion. Guerrero has an indigenous population of 635,620 [see Table 1]. Guerrero's indigenous population is diverse, spanning 20 different languages. Of the 14 known municipalities where self-defense groups operate, four are over 40 percent indigenous [see Table 4]. Of the municipalities with indigenous presence (1) or a dispersed indigenous population (9), all have "high" or "very high" marginalization.

In Guerrero, the emerging groups labeled themselves as *policía comunitaria* as opposed to the more common *autodefensas* identifier. This is because Guerrero has a

⁴⁶ Parts of Tierra Caliente extend into Guerrero.

⁴⁷ "Guerrero, primer lugar en producción de drogas." *Proceso*, November 20, 2003 <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=257755>.

⁴⁸ Chris Kyle, "Violence and Insecurity in Guerrero," In *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, ed. by David A. Shirk, Duncan Wood, and Eric L. Olson, (Washington D.C.: Wilson Institute, 2015), 12.

precedent of community policing that predates the wave of self-defense groups. Two of these *policía comunitaria* groups remain active, and are intertwined with the proliferation of self-defense in recent years. In 1995, indigenous communities in Costa Chica and La Montaña jointly formed the *Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias y Policía Comunitaria* (CRAC-PC). Notably, this is the same time indigenous Zapatistas are organizing in close-by Chiapas. The CRAC-PC is explicitly indigenous: it “derived its legitimacy from the indigenous rights movement and related legal reforms in Mexico.”⁴⁹ In 2012, the *Coordinadora Regional de Seguridad y Justicia-Policía Ciudadana y Popular* (CRSJ-PCP) also formed in the La Montaña region. The CRSJ-PCP is more contained than the CRAC-PC, but invoked the same legal protections as the preceding community defense groups. Both groups were legally justified under Ley 701, a piece of state legislation that protects indigenous customs, signed by the governor in 2011.⁵⁰ CRAC-PC fought for Ley 701, and CRSJ-PCP formed after the preceding group had blazed the legal pathway. Prior to the self-defense movement in question, explicitly indigenous community defense groups were forming in Guerrero, and demanding legal protection.

The influence and power of Guerrero’s DTOs has shifted continuously since the mid-1990s. By January 2011, roughly one year before the wave of self-defense groups emerges, the state was divided between many small, competing groups. Some cooperated with larger DTOs, like Los Zetas, but even more have “no known loyalties, alliances, or

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰ Guerrero: Gobierno del Estado. "Ley Número 701 de Reconocimiento, Derechos y Cultura de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas del Estado de Guerrero." <http://i.guerrero.gob.mx/uploads/2012/07/24-Ley-701-RecDerCultura-Ind.pdf>.

affiliations.”⁵¹ The fracturing of these groups, and the highly competitive atmosphere it created by early 2011, leads to more and more shocking forms of violence. The more established, vertically integrated cartels rely less on extortion and kidnapping, which deeply impact the local community, than Guerrero’s DTOs do. Guerrero’s small, predatory distinctly changed the state’s pattern of violence in the year leading up to the self-defense phenomenon.

The *policía comunitaria* groups relevant to the self-defense phenomenon we are examining differ from their indigenous predecessors. Their histories, however, are intertwined. Guerrero’s first outbreak of self-defense violence happened in Olinalá in October 2012. This case is the genesis of self-defense that would proliferate throughout 2013 and dwindle in relevance by 2015. Olinalá is an indigenous municipality, with “very high” marginalization [see Table 4.] Hundreds of villagers banded together to find and detain local criminals, guilty of kidnapping and extortion, ostensibly in response to a taxi driver’s dead body found two days prior.⁵² The early Mexican media coverage of these events did not label these actions in terms of self-defense, community policing, or vigilantism, but revolt. Olinalá “activists,” as some reports called them, first targeting the two centers of local authority: the church and the police state. They suspended a feast celebration in the church at the center of town and disarmed 16 officers at the municipal police station.⁵³ Quickly (and later controversially), the CRAC-PC sought out the Olinalá leadership to invite them into their fold.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵² Sergio O. Arista, "Guerrero: revuelta en Olinalá por supuesto secuestro," *La Jornada*, October 28, 2012.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Another of Guerrero's community police grew out of a protest group formed in January of 2013, composed of "rural villagers in Costa Chica and La Montaña against electricity rate hikes."⁵⁴ This group, the *Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero* (UPOEG), created an offshoot policing group, the *Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana* (UPOEG-SSJC). UPOEG-SSJC, though it coordinated with the CRAC, differed from the previous groups. The UPOEG-SSJC does not claim Ley 701 authority: its "legitimacy derived from the common sense observation that there were no alternative means of providing security and from the widespread public support found within the communities from which they emerged."⁵⁵ The SSJC has no direct indigenous connection. Nevertheless, this police network is still a prime example of how self-defense groups are more likely to emerge from preexisting social infrastructure.

The actions and inciting motivations of these community police are consistent with what was seen in Michoacán's self-defense groups. In the Nahua community of Tixtla, villagers set up checkpoints with intent of arresting offenders of kidnapping, murder, extortion, assaults, and burglaries."⁵⁶ The villagers were responding to local upset following, again, finding the dead body of a kidnapped victim. This particular body was of a young woman whose family had paid the ransom. Cartel extortion, increasing in brutality, is also a reoccurring theme. Bruno Plácido Valerio, leader of the UPOEG, stated that groups Tecoanapa and Ayutla de los Libres were partially formed of farmers

⁵⁴ Kyle, "Violence," 44.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁶ "El secuestro y asesinato de un joven, extorsiones y robos, las causas del movimiento en Atliaca," *El Sur*, January 23, 2013.

being charged 500 pesos for each head of cattle.⁵⁷ There are also charges of sexual harassment, as is common across the cases, which provide anecdotal support for worsening cartel brutality and irreverence for local communities. Valerio also reports that criminals would pay students 50 pesos for information on “the names of pretty girls.”⁵⁸ The details about these municipalities are consistent with my theory. Ayutla (indigenous) and Tecoanapa (dispersed), both have “very high” marginalization [see Table 4]. Cartel abuses provoked group formation and membership, but marginalized communities with indigenous social capital are more apt to respond to these provocations.

Guerrero’s geography, much like Michoacán’s, made it similarly conducive to both drug production and indigenous life. Distinctively, however, Guerrero’s highly fractured and unincorporated cartel rivalries make violence more likely between groups and—more importantly in explaining the emerge of community self-defense—harder on the social fabric of the community. Pre-existing community police groups, which were explicitly indigenous and date back to the rise of an indigenous rights discourse in the 1990s, prove the relevance of indigenous social capital to the self-defense phenomena. While extortion, kidnapping, and rising brutality were evident, I classify them as scope conditions that made self-organization and defense compelling, but do not explain it. If this rising criminality did explain, we would see a more even distribution of self-defense groups across the country [see Table 2]. Indigenous social capital, in the case of Guerrero, encapsulated by the CRAC-PC and the CRSJ-PCP, is the most accurate predictor of why self-defense groups emerge where they do.

⁵⁷ "Los delincuentes extorsionan a los ganaderos y hostigan sexualmente a alumnas en Tecoanapa y Ayutla, dice la UPOEG," *El Sur*, January 8, 2013.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

ii. Most-Likely Cases (9)

Campeche, Chiapas, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, Yucatán

The above most-likely cases are “most-likely” to form self-defense groups because of their large indigenous populations. These eight states have an average indigenous population of 30 percent, significantly higher than Mexico’s overall average. In conformation with my theory, the spread of the self-defense group movement outside of the break out cases in Michoacán and Guerrero largely adheres to these. As the map illustrates, the cluster of self-defense groups that inspired this research significantly overlaps with the strong indigenous populations of these most-likely states.

The indigenous populations of these states have endured, partially owing to the diverse and rugged geography of southern Mexico. The block of Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán have indigenous populations that are predominantly Maya or descended from Mayas. So across the Yucatán peninsula there is wide geographical diversity, from rainforest to coast to mountain to savannah, as well as dispersed Maya ruins which, spurred on by tourist dollars, are the physical embodiment of the power and survival of these ancient identities. No one indigenous group dominates Oaxaca, which has the largest indigenous population in all of Mexico: there are four main ones, and a handful of other minorities (or double-minorities). Veracruz, too, is mixed in terms of indigenous population and geography. Hidalgo, mostly mountainous, can attribute the survival of its Otomi peoples to their rugged surroundings. Puebla represents a wide cross-section of indigenous people, but all are consolidated largely in the Sierra Norte and Sierra Negra mountain regions. Indigenous populations and atypical geography,

which are inextricably linked, explain the cluster of self-defense groups in southern Mexico.

In each case, villagers and farmers tired of extortion, kidnapping, and brutality set up roadblocks and occupy local centers of authority (town centers, churches, police stations). The extortion and kidnapping numbers for the most-likely states can be found in Table 2.

iii. Least-Likely Cases (6)

Jalisco, México, Morelos, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco

The six least-likely cases were “least-likely” to form self-defense groups due to their comparatively small indigenous populations. I argue that the presence of self-defense groups in four of these cases (Jalisco, México, Morelos, and Tabasco) can be explained by proximity to the larger, indigenous-driven cluster [see map]. Jalisco is adjacent to Michoacán; México is wedged in between Michoacán and Guerrero; Morelos is tiny so a great deal of its perimeter borders Guerrero; Tabasco is bordered by four states with “most-likely” indigenous populations.

Jalisco, notably, despite its small indigenous presence, has developed strong indigenous social capital in recent years. Huichol is the most prominent indigenous language in Jalisco. The Wirikuta mountain is the sacred homeland of the Huichol people. Per indigenous tradition, there is an annual pilgrimage to Wirikuta. Though the mountain is located in San Luis Potosí, the sacred journey to Wirikuta begins on the coast of Jalisco. The Huichol people truly believe the mountain is “alive.”⁵⁹ As such, Wirikuta became an official UNESCO site in 1988. Unluckily, this mountain is also rich in silver, and therefore of great economic interest to those outside of the Huichol community. The

⁵⁹ "Wirikuta: territorio sagrado por la Unesco, en peligro," *El Universal*, June 25, 2013.

Mexican government approved the request of a Canadian mining company for control over this site in 2009. In 2010, at the height of the self-defense movement, the Huichols formed the Regional Council of Wixáritari to fight the mine. We know pre-existing indigenous social capital was important in Guerrero. I argue that Jalisco's indigenous social capital, strengthened by its engagement with this recent mining threat, made up for its smaller numbers.

Sinaloa and Sonora are, on the surface, the most puzzling cases: they are outside the cluster and have small indigenous communities. Sinaloa and Sonora are 1.9 and 5 percent indigenous, respectively [see Table 1]. Based on the assumptions of my theory, these states should not have self-defense groups. The self-defense groups that emerged in these states were one-offs in that they came long after the wave, in 2014. They did not form their own self-defense groups, they joined up with *las Guardias Comunitarias de Autodefensa*,⁶⁰ a pre-existing group. Specifically, Yaqui and Mayo indigenous groups from Sinaloa and Sonora joined *Las Guardias*, uniting the self-defense groups of the gulf and southern regions of Mexico (including Guerrero, Michoacán, and Jalisco.) The Sinaloa and Sonora groups had specific aims: to recover 2000 hectares of land where wheat and corn is grown from organized crime.⁶¹ Seeing as similar goals had already accomplished by *autodefensas*, following their model was sensible. Sonora and Sinaloa do not have the sort of indigenous indicators we expect from states with self-defense groups, but that is because we do not see the sort of grassroots uprising we see in Michoacán or Guerrero. It takes less social capital on the ground to join a group than it

⁶⁰ Astrid Rivera, "Surgen en Sonora autodefensas," *El Universal*, March 27, 2014.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

does to start one. Their group formation followed trails blazed by other states, states with pre-existing indigenous social capital.

The least-likely cases, upon closer examination, have the common thread of rebellion that I laid out in the theory chapter: indigenous marginalization, as well as extortion, a scope condition.

iv. Defying the Cluster (4)

Colima, Guanajuato, Tlaxcala, Querétaro

Colima is a small state direct adjacent to Michoacán, a break out case, and Jalisco, a least-likely case. Given its geographical proximity to the cluster, Colima is in territory primed for the spread of this phenomenon. Yet, we do not see self-defense groups.

Firstly, this is due to the conception of Colima as a refuge for criminals, owing to reports that its governor, Mario Anguiano, is particularly corrupt.⁶² Allegedly, cartel leaders who fled Tierra Caliente during the break out of self-defense groups in nearby Michoacán sought refuge in Colima, and found themselves protected. Most famously among this cohort is Servando Gómez Martínez, known “La Tuta,” leader of the Knights Templar Cartel.

Secondly, there was a known incident in Colima that halted the formation of self-defense groups. In January 2014, a self-defense group from Aguila (Michoacán) tried to enter neighboring municipality of Tecoman (Colima), but were rejected by residents of the community. The government in the town of Cerro de Ortega “implemented checkpoints and tightened security in rural access roads Colima, trying to prevent armed

⁶² "Gobernador de Colima protege a "La Tuta," acusan autodefensas," *Vanguardia*, January 15, 2015.

entry to Colima Territory.”⁶³ The local communities wanted no part of the escalating violence in Michoacán, some of which involved self-defense groups. There is evidence of collective action here, albeit it manifested itself in a community versus community struggle, not against the cartels or the state.

In the case of Colima, reported instances of extortion were nonexistent up until 2010, went up only as high as 27 in 2014 [see Table 2]. It could be that the scope conditions of cartel intrusion were simply not met in Colima. Similarly, Tlaxcala and Querétaro’s extortion numbers were comparatively low or consistent throughout the 2006-2014 interval. Guanajuato, alternatively, did experience the spike in crime correlated with the emergence of self-defense groups, with 523 reported instances of extortion in 2013.

In Guanajuato, there were precursors to self-defense group formation, but these were false starts. In January 2014, community residents near San Luis de la Paz and San Miguel de Allende had a meeting with their regional Deputy Attorney, René Urrutia de la Vega, to discuss their concerns about rising extortion, kidnapping, and robbery.⁶⁴ The following February another meeting has been scheduled, but Urrutia de la Vega did not show. Protests followed, as did threats to self-organize. This community demonstrated good faith attempts to engage with state institutional structures, but were ultimately disappointed by their leadership.

Though Colima, Guanajuato, Tlaxcala, and Querétaro were within the cluster region where self-defense groups flared up between 2012 and 2014, for varying reason

⁶³ Alfredo Quiles, "Rechazan autodefensas en límites con Colima," *El Universal*, January 14, 2014.

⁶⁴ "Campesinos de Guanajuato amenazan con crear autodefensas," *Informador*, February 21, 2014.

the phenomenon never fully caught on in these states. Extortion, the conventional rival explanation, rose dramatically in Guanajuato. Extortion either rose slightly or maintained similar levels in the three other states. In Colima, Tlaxcala, and Querétaro, scope conditions for self-defense formation were not met.

What all four states have in common, however, is a low indigenous presence. Colima (1.3% indigenous), Guanajuato (0.63% indigenous), Tlaxcala (6.2% indigenous), and Queretaro (3% indigenous), all have indigenous populations well below the average for Mexican states, and even further below the average for states where self-defense groups operate. The lack of self-defense groups in these states proves how indigenous social capital is to explaining the *autodefensas* movement.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics

Average Indigenous Population Overall	Average Indigenous Population in States without Self-Defense Forces	Average Indigenous Population in States with Self-Defense Forces
10.44%	2.65%	16.49%

VI. Conclusion

Table 5 illustrates the strong correlation between indigenous populations and the emergence of self-defense groups. This supports **H1**, which stated that Mexican states with an above average percentage indigenous population would be more likely to form self-defense groups. In the theory chapter, I argued that indigenous marginalization generates a de facto autonomy of neglect. Indigenous communities have historically reciprocated bonds; these bonds would grow stronger throughout the process of autonomous development. Indigenous communities, then, have both thick bonding and

bridging social capital. This social capital would be the foundation for the self-defense groups, once scope conditions were met.

Mexico's indigenous communities have become increasingly politicized since the 1990s, when they experienced the Zapatista Uprising and the failed promises of the San Andrés Peace Accords that followed. Around the same time, there is an indigenous rights consciousness raising movement in the global community. The Mexican government's attempts to roll back the negatives impact of globalization on small farming communities, through farm subsidy programs like Procampo, evidence anti-indigenous bias and have failed to reach communities with the greatest need.

Modern political legitimacy is derived from association with the Mexican Revolution, which glorified the peasant identity and communal land rights, but in name only, not in spirit. Indigenous communities, which still occupy rural areas and practice communal farming, are the living remains of those revolutionary ideals, and yet suffer from marginalization, rural poverty, and on top of that, cartel violence.

While the self-defense groups that emerged in 2012 and 2013 in southern Mexico were not revolutionary, they were rebellious organizations that defied the status quo set by rent-seeking cartels and the state officials that tolerate them for a payout. In the key break out cases, we see the importance of long-term indigenous social capital in producing rebellion. Guerrero's self-defense groups grew out of community police groups formed in indigenous communities that had been going since the 1990s. In Michoacán, a least-likely case, we saw how dispersed indigenous communities can actually face higher marginalization, the indigenous identity is still Other, but without the benefit of a community. This supports **H2** and **H3**, which claimed that high

marginalization results in autonomy and thick social capital and that highly marginalized indigenous communities will be more likely to form self-defense groups, respectively. The indigenous identity and marginalization, however, does not have a linear relationship with rebel defense.

Of course, indigenous communities are not actually “rebellious” the way we imagine in most civil conflicts. Indigenous speakers are already outcast, a minority within a minority. Many in the rural ancestral areas territories do not develop bilingualism,⁶⁵ meaning they cannot speak Spanish. Autonomous living, and autonomous defense if the situation demands it, is for them necessary for survival.

Leading alternative explanations for the emergence of self-defense groups were not true explanations, but conflated with scope conditions. Scope conditions such as general insecurity throughout Mexico, rising crime that impacts the social fabric of communities (such as **extortion** and kidnapping), and cartel presence were necessary but not sufficient to produce self-defense groups. There was a mid-2011 jump in extortion across the board [see Table 2], not only in states where self-defense groups formed. Rough terrain and atypical **geography**, a common thread in the literature, favors marginalization and therefore the emergence of self-defense groups. Indigenous communities’ native lands are often in rugged locations alienated from instruments of state control. Geography plays a role in marginalization, but it alone cannot predict social rebellion. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the desert region connecting Michoacán and Guerrero, key break out cases, made these likely sites for the start of a self-defense movement.

⁶⁵ Margarita Hidalgo ed. *Mexican Indigenous Languages at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006) 217.

The self-defense movement, like many social movements, was eventually co-opted by larger institutional forces. President Peña Nieto created a pathway for official integration of the self-defense groups with the creation of a Rural Force in May 2014. Former self-defense group members could continue to operate if they identified themselves, registered their weapons, wore a uniform, and worked with the police. Unregistered arms after May 2014 were not to be permitted. Some people did join this somewhat toothless adaptation of a self-defense group, but most did not. Several of the movement's original leaders were incarcerated under murder charges. The pace of the groups' slowed, and the movement withered. The self-defense groups lived and died by the involvement of the state government. First, the state turned a blind eye to the groups' unexpected success, but eventually they stamped it out.

The brief victory of these righteous peasants, represented by indigenous farmers armed with machetes or a phalanx of villagers in cheap white t-shirts reading "GRUPO DE AUTODEFENSA", did not alter the large forces perpetuating the Mexican drug war. The self-defense movement was not about DEA agents secretly shuttling machine guns to Sinaloa members or the \$30 billion⁶⁶ annually brought in through the drug trade. It was about limes, avocados, and corn.

Indigenous communities, under threat severe enough to risk rebellion, have despite the 20th century history of marginalization and de facto neglect from the state, have managed not only cultural survival, but also cultural thriving. Against the opposing strain of globalization, they have re-opened a discourse about communal and small-owner land rights. In between 1970-2000, all indigenous languages increased the number of

⁶⁶ Brianna Lee, "Mexico's Drug War," *Council on Foreign Relation*, (March 5, 2014).

users.⁶⁷ The languages with the largest growth rates were located in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero⁶⁸: all most-likely cases with operating self-defense groups. Mexico's indigenous communities are growing, not dwindling. Indigenous life has thrived in and partially due to a political environment of hostility.

⁶⁷ Hidalgo, "Dawn," 226.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

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