How do Mexicanas in the United States Perceive the police in Mexico?

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Abstract: As an exploratory study, we examined policing in Mexico through the views of Mexicanas in the United States to understand better the relationships between the police and racial/ethnic minority communities in the United States. By understanding and knowing the perception and direct interaction with the police in their home countries, the U.S. police can better understand the attitudes of racial/ethnic minorities, particularly those foreign-born or of immigrant descent residents, toward the police. Besides, mutual understanding between the U.S. police and racial/ethnic minorities may assist in building better police-community relationships. For that reason, we conducted a semi-structured interviews with seventeen Mexicanas who resided in a Deep South state in the United States and explored their experiences and concerns with policing in Mexico. We found that government corruption and police politicization were the number one concern, and the widely accepted culture of bribing and taking a bribe was perceived as a common custom rule in Mexico. With consideration that such experiences are important to understand the relationships between the U.S. police and Mexicanas, policy implications and study limitations were further discussed in the current study.
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Police procedural justice, to treat the people fairly and professionally, is one of the fundamental elements to building a strong bond between the police and the public and increasing police legitimacy and trust in the police (Chenane et al., 2020; O'Brien et al., 2020; Weisburd et al., 2022). The police in Latin American countries have been reformed in recent decades to move forward to community-oriented policing with an emphasis on human rights protection (Frühling, 2009; Husain, 2009; Müller, 2010; Uildriks, 2009a, 2009b). However, police abuse, brutality, corruption, and citizen distrust of the police are still the number one obstacle to achieving these goals (Baek et al., 2021; Dammert, 2019; Esparza & Agues, 2020). In 2019, police use of excessive and reckless force against anti-government demonstrators in five Latin American countries–Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Colombia, and Haiti resulted in unlawful killings and numerous injuries to both sides (see Muñoz & Pappier, 2020). For example, during the national strike on November 22, 2019, in Bogotá and Cali, Colombia, there were about 800 attempted violations against the Public Force, 76 transportation stations and 69 buses were vandalized, 5 police facilities were attacked and destroyed, and about 300 police officers were injured ("The balance left by the curfew in Bogotá and Cali," 2019).

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Mexico is not an exception. Kloppe-Santamaria (2018) reported in 2017 that there were more than 25,000 murders (about 69 per day) in Mexico, mainly caused by Mexican drug cartels. This number is two times higher than the homicides in 2007 (see Correa-Cabrera, 2018). Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2020) reported multiple protests across Mexico against Mexican police's unlawful killings of unarmed citizens, beatings, arbitrary detentions and expulsions, and other excessive force used by the police against multiple protesters, bystanders, and/or other citizens. Experts state that the security crisis in Mexico mainly results from political and structural issues such as decentralized government systems, failures of adequate responses and practices in criminal justice systems, and widespread corruption (Correa-Cabrera, 2018; Dammert, 2019; Forne, 2016; Godoy, 2006; HRW, 2020; Kloppe-Santamaria, 2018; Uildriks, 2009a).

Policing literature in the United States highlights conflicts between the police and racial/ethnic minority communities, particularly police-biased practices toward Latin American immigrants and their descendants, and how to build trustful police-community relations with culturally diverse communities (Foxen, 2017; Mucchetti, 2005; Rengifo et al., 2017; Vera Sanchez & Rosenbaum, 2011; Wu et al., 2017). Although building a good relationship starts with understanding and respecting each other's differences, it is barely known to the U.S. police what kinds of experiences immigrants have had with their home-country police and if their perception of the police impacts their relationship with the U.S. police (Ammar et al., 2005; Brown, 2020; Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004; Police Executive Research Forum, 2020).

In this sense, it is critical to understand culturally diverse racial/ethnic groups' experiences with their home-country police and their hardship in home countries in order to build better police-community relations in the United States. According to the 2020 Census, 18.9% of the US population is Hispanic, and among this group, Mexicans make up the largest subgroup, with 61.6 % (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). Although the practices and procedural justice of each police force in Latin American countries are different, understanding the largest immigrant subgroup's experiences with the police in their home country may support better relations between the US police and Hispanic communities. This could also help US police forces devise a more culturally sensitive approach towards Latin immigrant communities. Some studies have found that the experiences of Mexican immigrants with their home-country police influence their perception of the police force in the USA (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004) and that Latino immigrants hold more favorable opinions of the US police than non-immigrant Latinos (Cheuprakobit & Bartsch, 1999; Cheurprakobit, 2000; Correia, 2010; Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). More specifically, immigrant Latinas seem to hold more favorable views of the U.S. police than immigrant Latinos (Correia, 2010; Rengifo et al., 2017).

In this regard, the current study examined the experience and perception of the police in Mexico among seventeen Mexicanas in the United States and investigated if their views are similar to the people in Mexico as an exploratory study. Besides, the current study aims to understand better if Mexicanas experiences and perceptions of the Mexican police force affect their views of or interaction with the U.S. police.

Literature Review

A Brief Review of Policing in Latin American Countries

The police in Latin America have, historically, played an important role in supporting the oppressive and authoritarian regimes that have held power in the region for most of the postcolonial period (Osse & Cano, 2017; Pereira & Ungar, 2004). Regime changes in the 1980s and the 1990s

that led to the establishment of more democratic governments in most Latin American countries brought expectations that authoritarian police practices from the past would also be abandoned and police forces would democratize, becoming protectors of the public as a whole (not just the political regime and privileged classes). Unfortunately, such expectations were not met, and police politicization, militarization, and corruption continued. Despite reform efforts aimed at strengthening police ethics and human rights, accountability and transparency, and the police's ability to uphold the rule of law, police abuse and violence directed at marginalized elements of society, or the ones who challenged the state, largely continued (Berges Puyo, 2022; Husain, 2009; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Uildriks, 2009b). The latest push for police reform in Mexico under current Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador started in 2018 with the creation of a new force, the National Guard, that was presented as "incorruptible" but has since been accused of abuse similar to the Federal Police (Fisher & Abi-Habib, 2022).

Many of the coercive police structures and practices born during authoritarianism continued to be perpetuated under democratic regimes due to political accommodation and public pressure for punitive policing (mano dura/iron fist) in the face of rising crime (Dobrin et al., 2021; Gonzalez, 2020). While political and military reform became part of power transition negotiations during regime changes in the region, police reform was not considered at the time, setting the stage for future failure (Gonzalez, 2020; Pereira & Ungar, 2004). Police forces in Latin American countries remained largely isolated from the public and unaccountable to it due to the remaining strength of the institution to resist change and its isolation and lack of effective oversight mechanisms (Gonzalez, 2020; Pereira & Ungar, 2004). Persisting police violence, corruption, and unaccountability have led to low levels of police legitimacy and trust and a broken relationship between the public and the police (Uildriks & Peon, 2010).

General Portrayals of Policing in Mexico

Police forces in Mexico have been perceived as violent, corrupt, unaccountable, and ineffective, which led to high levels of police distrust among citizens and an unwillingness for police cooperation that fed back into a loop of high crime (Esparza, 2020; Sabet, 2010, 2013; Uildriks, 2009b).

Corruption

The use of excessive police force is closely connected with police corruption. According to Forne (2016), the historical use of the police for political ends in Mexico's corrupt political system has led to the intertwining of corruption and police abuse. "Political policing," the phenomena of police forces in most Latin American countries serving the political elite and the privileged classes rather than society as a whole, ensures police forces are free from scrutiny about the abuse of power and excessive use of force as long as they protect political and economic elites (Uildriks, 2009b).

In Mexico, where the police are considered one of the most corrupt institutions (Romero et al., 2018), police officers openly talked about their institution's endemic corruption: "The uniform is used to get rich: 95 percent of the policemen come in with the idea that they will get rich," disclosed one Mexican police officer (Azaola, 2009, p.156). While corruption may be endemic in Mexico, citizens expect law enforcement officers to show integrity (police honesty and treatment towards citizens according to the law). Esparza and Aguez (2020) found that corruption significantly undermined Mexicans' public trust in police and the public's perception of police effectiveness. According to Sabet (2013), citizens' perception of police corruption better predicted

citizen dissatisfaction than perceptions of insecurity. He argued that police requests for bribes turned into evidence that law enforcement officials could not be trusted, which, in turn, led to low levels of citizen-police cooperation and police inefficiency (Sabet, 2013). Perea (2016) also found that Mexicans considered decreasing police corruption and improving police accountability the most important variables for improving security. Police corruption leads to distrust and insecurity because it also facilitates relations between the police and criminal gangs (Davis, 2006; Prado et al., 2012; Bailey & Taylor, 2009). Police officers in Mexico are often part of illegal enterprises. Uildriks (2009b) saw the close relations between the police and crime and drug cartels in Mexico as the reason police reform efforts in Mexico City failed in the 1990s.

Politicization and criminalization of the police are not the only causes of corruption in the force. Corruption affects every facet of life and is frequently seen as a cultural trait that permeates Mexico's society as a whole. Everyone, from citizens to statesmen at the very top, participates and condones it. When those running the state are seen as corrupt and not following the law, it is difficult for their subordinates (such as policemen) to avoid the trap of corruption (Azaola, 2009; Sabet, 2010; Uildriks, 2009a). The need for more financial resources, including but not limited to low police salaries, corruption among instructors in police academies, and the need to pay for their own uniforms and equipment (including bullets), creates a unique police climate in which officers consider asking for and accepting bribes as a custom rule (Azaola, 2009). This mentality permeates the whole police institution, where subordinates are expected to share money from bribes with superiors who help secure jobs and benefits and often demand "quotas" (Azaola, 2009).

Integrity extends beyond individuals, so corruption and integrity are problems of organizations and are highly related to the occupational culture (Klockars et al., 2006). Thus, the cultural climate to discipline "officers who violate agency standards of integrity" would be one of the most effective gears to prevent officer misconduct (Klockars et al., 2006, p. 9). In the case of Mexico, the rotten apples and barrels theories can better explain the corruption culture in police organizations. As many existing studies have demonstrated, police corruption in Mexico is not the rotten apple issue at all. Rather, it has been caused and settled down as organizational culture or a custom rule that affects officer integrity, *rotten barrels* (Azaola, 2009; Uildriks &Peon, 2010). Besides, environmental forces outside police agencies, such as community norms and values, influence police integrity and accountability, *rotten orchards* (R. Stark, 1987; see also Lim & Sloan, 2016; Punch, 2003).

Use of Excessive Force

Sabet (2010) examined the public's contact with the police in Mexico City and found that 51.7% of respondents who had contact with the police in 2006 reported some form of abuse or mistreatment by the police. One explanation for the high rate of abuse by police forces in Mexico could be related to their embrace of punitive policing or mano dura policies. Such policies came to counterbalance high crime rates and a weak justice system in many Latin American countries (Godoy, 2006; Uildriks, 2009a). In a mano dura approach, officers could shoot criminals without any fear of suffering consequences. There has been a widely shared perception, both by the public and police officers in Mexico, that the police are more effective when using the mano dura approach (Abdenur, 2019; Masullo & Morisi, 2018; Uildriks, 2009b; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). Bayley (2002), however, found that such policies are not very effective in combating crime and are often counterproductive because police brutality deters citizens from collaborating with the police and seeking protection.

The mano dura approach is, in many ways, a familiar fallback option for police forces in Latin America because of its similarity to authoritarian police practices in the region (Dammert, 2019; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Ungar, 2009). Punitive policing in Mexico has been historically conditioned and the result of many years of authoritarianism and a one-party system that created a police force loyal to ruling elites who sought to control state power through the application of violence. Police forces in Mexico were used for everyday repression and to undermine the opposition, and this close relationship between Mexico's ruling classes and the police allowed for significant levels of police impunity and autonomy in exchange for supporting the government (Dammert, 2019; Forne, 2016).

Due to such history, policing institutions in Mexico developed a tolerance for impunity that the slow democratization of the state has not been able to alleviate (Davis, 2006; Sabet, 2010; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). In 2021, just in Mexico City, there were 1,900 reports of police abuse, such as illegal arrests, torture, and death threats, after Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum declared in June 2020 that excessive use of police force practices had been eliminated (Fisher & Abi-Habib, 2022). Mexico City's Human Rights Commission published a 2021 report that cited cases of police officers beating up citizens, extorting cash, and planting drugs on detainees (Comision de Derechos Humanos de la Cuidad de Mexico, 2021). Police abuse is a continuous problem for Mexico's police force.

High crime rates and an acceptance of a 'mano dura' approach have also led to the militarization of public safety by "constabulizing" the armed forces and allowing them to play a role in law enforcement, leading to increased levels of violence in policing (Abdenur, 2019; Flores-Marcias & Zarkin, 2021; HRW, 2023). Since the armed forces are not trained to work with civilians, the militarization of law enforcement in Mexico has led to an increase in the use of excessive force and violence (Ungar, 2009; U.S. Department of State, 2021). Interestingly, however, while public confidence in the police in Mexico was 33.3% in 2021, the military was the most trusted governmental institution with 71% (Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental, 2022).

Impunity

Mexico has often failed to make its police forces accountable for corruption and the use of excessive force in a way that legitimizes the use of such tactics (Esparza & Aguez, 2020; Forne, 2016). Criminal investigations of police abuse have been rare, and investigations of officers' misconduct have usually been performed internally and rarely seriously punished (Prado, 2012; Uildriks, 2009b). Internal control mechanisms have often been corrupted and characterized by arbitrariness and non-integrity, and external oversight bodies have been rare (Esparza & Agues, 2020; Uildriks, 2009b). By 2016, there were still no official records of the use of police force by Mexican police, including no internal reports (Forne, 2016). Criminal sentences for the excessive use of police force in Mexico City were also nonexistent (Forne, 2016). According to Human Rights Watch (2020), there are no statistics for people killed by police in Mexico every year, and authorities often try to cover up or obstruct investigations into police abuses. Therefore, trust in the police is low, with 9 out of 10 Mexicans over the age of 18 believing that police corruption is frequent or very frequent, and statistics showing that in 2021 about 93.2% of crimes were not reported or an investigation was not started (Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental, 2022).

In Mexico, the state has been unable to position "the rule of law" as the principal that controls the agent (police) in the principal-agent relationship. According to Prado et al. (2012),

police forces in Latin America could be divided into two groups—*criminal police* and *autarkic police*—the first one having as its principal criminal and drug gangs (the case often in Mexico) and the second one having as its principal the police agency itself. Both types were found equally unaccountable to citizens, who are supposed to be the principals in a democratic principal-agent relationship with the police force (Prado et al., 2012).

Although reforms of Mexico's police forces have attempted to create and strengthen police oversight and accountability mechanisms since the 1990s, these have not been successful due to the force's politicization and criminalization (Dammert, 2019; Uildriks & Peon, 2010; Vargas, 2002). This has led to a lack of citizens' trust in the police in Mexico and a public perception that impunity in law enforcement is widespread. In a survey study in Mexico City conducted in 1991, Reames (2003) found that 90% of the respondents had "little" or "no" trust in the police. When the same survey was conducted in Mexico City 17 years later, 70% of respondents continued to express no trust in police forces (Perea, 2016). That is, there has been no significant improvement in police trust in Mexico City. Baek et al. (2021) found that in Mexico, trust in the police was closely associated with public security. Uildriks and Peon (2010) describe this as a "Catch-22." The Mexican police need citizens' legitimacy and trust to be able to provide public security. However, they can't obtain the citizens' trust due to their inability to provide a meaningful public security service (Uildriks & Peon, 2010). The first step in solving this Catch-22 situation will be to decrease police politicization and strengthen police oversight and accountability mechanisms. This is an effort that heavily depends on the willingness and ability of political institutions in Mexico to address this issue. So far, they have proven unwilling to abandon political policing (Fisher & Abi-Habib, 2022; Uildriks & Peon, 2010).

Ineffectiveness

Mexico has suffered from some of the highest levels of violent crime in the world alongside an acutely ineffective criminal justice system (BBC, 2020; HRW, 2023). As already mentioned, this has been largely the result of corruption and politicization of the police force. However, it was also caused by poor police training and selection criteria. Municipal police officers, which are the most common police force in Mexico, often had only elementary education and short basic training (Esparza & Agues, 2020; Reames, 2003; Sabet, 2010). Other factors, such as low salaries, professional insecurity, bad working conditions, disregard for internal rules, low social trust, and citizens' refusal to cooperate, have also led to police dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness (Azaola, 2009; Uildriks & Peon, 2010).

Interviews with Mexican police officers revealed that most of them felt underappreciated by both their superiors and the public at large and suffered from low motivation, low morale, and apathy (Azaola, 2009). Such factors have made law enforcement officers in Mexico ineffective against crime and have discouraged citizens from reporting crimes, setting the stage for a vicious cycle of police ineffectiveness, citizen distrust, and high crime that has been difficult to break (Azaola, 2009; Correa, 2007; Sabet, 2010, 2013). An example of police ineffectiveness is that only about 18.5 % of reported crimes led to a completed investigation in Mexico, and only 3.3 % of Mexicans who had committed a crime stood before a judge (Pasara, 2009). Besides, only 22% of victims in Mexico reported crimes because they did not feel that reporting a crime would lead to a successful resolution and prosecution (Sabet, 2010). According to Human Rights Watch, this trend has continued until today. In 2021, around 90% of crimes in Mexico were not reported, and only one-third of reported crimes were investigated, with only about 1% of all crimes being resolved (HRW, 2023). Considering such data, it is not surprising that scholars have found a negative

association between crime victimization and police trust in Mexico (Esparza & Aguez, 2020) and a strong correlation between an increase in neighborhood crime and negative public perceptions of the police (Perea, 2016).

While many attempts at police reform in Mexico have been initiated due to rising crime, police corruption scandals, police brutality, and low levels of police trust, reform efforts have not been very successful in achieving this most important requirement for reforms - the re-establishment of trust in the police (Baek et al., 2021; Frühling, 2009; Sabet, 2010; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). The greatest challenge for most police forces in Latin America in general, and Mexico in particular, would be to "overcome the public's profound suspicion that they [police forces] are in essence *incapable* of providing any relevant service to society, notably in the domain of public security" (Uildriks, 2009a, p.7).

Methods

Data Collection and Participants

The Hispanic/Latino population in Alabama has grown from 1.7% in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2001) to 4.9% in 2010 (U.S. Census, n.d.). A recent study reported that the Mexican American population in Alabama is about 2.55%, based on the 2018 American Community Survey (Bass, 2023). Since 2000, Hispanic or Latino populations, particularly the Mexican community, have experienced rapid growth in certain counties of Alabama, with increases ranging from approximately 150% to 300%, according to the U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). This demographic shift has prompted concerns regarding their interactions with local police. We recruited participants in those areas to conduct semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring their contact experiences with the police and their perceptions of police procedural justice and legitimacy in their home countries. This approach was taken to gain insight into their views and interactions with law enforcement in the United States. As immigrant women from Asia and Europe, not of Hispanic origin, with one studying Hispanic immigration to the South and the other concentrating on police procedural justice, we were interested in learning more about the experiences of Mexicanas with the U.S. police and the police in their home country. Given our diverse perceptions of our respective home-country police, we were curious to understand why many Hispanic community members hold negative perceptions of the police force in their home countries.

To recruit voluntary participants, we employed the purposive sampling method. This approach is suitable for non-probability sampling, enabling the selection of participants who represent a specific group or population (Patton, 2002). We collaborated with various organizations serving Latin-American communities in Alabama to recruit voluntary participants. The Executive Director of each organization facilitated meetings with interested individuals. We also posted study flyers at these organizations, allowing participants to contact us directly. After obtaining approval from the Office of Institutional Review Board, we distributed an informed consent form outlining the study purpose, confidentiality, anonymity, participants' rights, and the contact information of the principal investigators and the Office of IRB. However, to protect participants' legal residency and anonymity, we did not collect signed consent forms. To promote participation, we offered a $20 incentive upon completion of the approximately one-hour interview, which was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All audio recordings and transcripts were labeled to indicate the source and archived with corresponding dates.

Each semi-structured interview was conducted in a private room or conference room in the social service organization where participants were recruited. Due to the program schedule of the social service organizations, most of the participants were moms available during regular working hours. We interviewed a total of nineteen Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. Due to the unbalanced gender rate, two interviews with Mexicanos were removed from the analysis, and we focused on the seventeen interviews with Mexicanas. Due to the different levels of English proficiency among Mexicana immigrants, two trained bilingual researchers conducted the interviews either in Spanish or English from May to August 2016. The thirteen interviews conducted in Spanish were professionally translated into English, and the translated transcripts were reviewed by a professional bilingual person. An alias was used to protect participants' confidentiality.

Out of the seventeen participants, fifteen were zero-generation immigrants, while two were born in the USA, raised in Mexico, and later returned to the USA. On average, participants were about 37 years old, with ages ranging from 21 to 72. Their total duration of residence in the United States varied from 3 to 21 years, with an average of 13.3 years. Most of them were engaged in roles such as housewives or day laborers. Educational levels ranged from 6th grade to master's degree, and a significant portion were either married or in a relationship (about 70%). None of their family members, relatives, friends, or acquaintances were employed in the criminal justice field. All participants had direct contact experiences with both US police and Mexican police.

Analytical Procedures

Both researchers read through the entire data set to familiarize themselves with all the information before beginning the analysis. To analyze the interview transcripts, a conceptual analysis was employed to identify the existence and frequency of concepts in the interview content. This analysis is a type of content analysis that is frequently used to quantify and count the occurrence of concepts to systematically and objectively describe phenomena (Patton, 2002; Schreier, 2012). The general inductive analysis approach was employed to develop a simple, systematic set of interview data analysis procedures. "The inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). This approach produces brief but reliable and valid findings from a high volume of raw text data by linking the research objectives with the summary findings (Thomas, 2006). Following the procedures, we cleaned the raw electronic text files by formatting them into a consistent format and each researcher independently reviewed them to create coding themes. Individual extracts of data were coded in as many different themes as they fit. Weekly research meetings were held throughout the coding and data analysis processes to deliberate on coding and themes, aiming to reach a consensus. Subsequently, the data was categorized by theme and scrutinized to uphold the reliability of the coding. Both researchers collaborated to establish agreement on the themes, finalizing them only after thoroughly reviewing all data to ensure credibility during the weekly sessions. Our agreement was achieved on the titles and arrangement of themes to ensure a comprehensive representation and meaningful presentation of all data during the weekly meetings after conducting member checking. The titles of themes were crafted to echo the participants' own words. The main themes are delineated in the subsequent section, Findings. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were employed when quoting their interviews.

Findings

In Mexico, the Police are Corrupt

We asked the participants about the police in Mexico and counted the words they used to describe their perception of and experience with Mexican police. Table 1 shows how many participants used a particular word to describe the police in Mexico. All of the participants described the police in Mexico as "corrupt." When we counted the frequency of the word used in the seventeen interviews, it appeared forty-two times. That is, each participant used the word "corrupt" at least twice. Some related words, "money" 29 times, "pay" or "paid" 20 times, and "bribe" 5 times, were also used to explain police corruption in Mexico across the seventeen interviews. Besides, other than the word "corrupt," the top three of the most frequently used words describing the police in Mexico were "bad," "worse," and "worst"; the three words have been used a total of twenty-eight times across all interviews. Approximately ninety-four percent of the participants described the police in Mexico as not helpful, and eighty-eight percent felt fear and insecurity in Mexico.

Table 1
Word Counts Used by the Participants to Describe the Police in Mexico

Words	Number of the Participants (%)
Corrupt	17 (100%)
Unhelpful/Ineffective	16 (94.1%)
Fear/Insecure	15 (88.2%)
Distrust	14 (82.3%)
Above the Law/Abuse Power	11 (64.7%)
Unprofessional	8 (47.0%)
Violent	5 (29.4%)
Disrespect	4 (23.5%)

Gabriela (37 years old and 10 years in the USA) called the Mexican police, an organization based on bribery. According to her, even a person who drives without a license would not have any trouble with the police if s/he had cash for the police officer. The majority of the participants said that cash is closer than laws.

> If the police stop you, it is because they want money. You already know
> it. No one asks or says anything anymore. People just take out the money
> and give it to them, so that they would let you go (Julia, 43 years old and
> residing 18 years in the USA).

> If you make a traffic violation, they [the police] do not give you a ticket.
> There [in Mexico], you have to pay the police, "*Give me this amount, and*

I will let you go." This is what they say, and all the money is for the policeman (Elisa, 32 years old and residing 14 years in the USA).

One participant perceived that every single cop in Mexico was corrupt. "All they want is money" (Mariana, 37 years old and 19 years in the USA). That is, the perception of police corruption in Mexico seems widespread and robust. Isla (30 years old and residing 13 years in the USA) gave an example of how the police misled a case and stood against citizens:

In Mexico, there is this law that if you get robbed, and you're able to capture the person and hold him with others until the police come, it's not a problem. It's called alternative justice… But what happens, due to corruption, a lot of these burglars, a lot of these persons that commit crimes, are infiltrated by the police. So, what happens is that if you're holding that person, they [police] will charge you or try to charge you with kidnapping. Because even though it's in the law that you can have that person detained in public with other citizens, they'll tell you that you were keeping him [away] from his liberty [illegal detention].

A critical point in Isla's description is that criminals join the police force in Mexico. We could not verify the information given, but we could be sure that people in Mexico believe that it is. The police might not be ex-criminals, but taking bribes or asking citizens for cash in exchange for traffic violation tickets is a criminally charged offense. Bribery of public officials in order to influence them to carry out official duties is a serious white-collar crime and not only the recipients but also givers are punished in the United States (see McDonnell v. the United States, 2016) and in most other countries. Interestingly, our participants did not consider their behavior, bribing police officers, as a criminal offense but as a norm or custom that they must accept due to the widespread prevalence of police misbehaviors in Mexico.

Multiple participants described that they would not call the police in Mexico when they needed help because the police would not respond unless the caller were an important person or the call was about a felony crime. One participant said, "I feel that when crimes are being reported the police are not helping very much. From what I hear, there are attempts to denounce crimes, but the police do not respond" (Abigail, 72 years old and residing 10 years in the USA).

No, no. Only in case the person is very important. Only if it were a person who matters, who is like … if it were a governor, you understand, right? If it were someone of this type, or if it were a person who is very famous or had a lot of money. If it were a common person, no (Julia, 43 years old and residing 18 years in the USA).

Isla (30 years old and residing 13 years in the USA) shook her head and told us that the police would respond to a call if the person said s/he killed someone. She confirmed that any layperson in Mexico would not seek, or does not expect, any help from the police for misdemeanor cases or even any information. Other participants also stated similar situations in Mexico. It seemed like there was a general rule of thumb among Mexican people not to call the police if they do not have political and economic power or if their loss is not worth trying to work with an ineffective police force. That is, why bother the police if they do not investigate the case and if you know that you will not get any help from the police? Most participants considered that reporting a crime or seeking help from the police in Mexico to be a waste of their time and effort.

"Oh god, are you…are you sure you want to report it? It's going to take ages. … you have to go downtown to this building [Police HQ or station] and then you're going to have to wait like three hours…you're not going to get your stuff back. Let me tell you. You're not going to get your stuff

back. Are you sure you want to waste your time?" That's what the police will tell you. They will talk you out of reporting. So, that's the thing. The police blame you [the police blame the victim first] and the hesitation for you to go report (Isla, 30 years old and residing 13 years in the USA).

In Mexico, I Felt Insecure and Feared the Police

Some participants argued that the police in their home country are violent, not just corrupt. Roma (57 years old and residing 10 years in the USA) described the police in Mexico as 'the worst' because they are corrupt due to the police's low income and their use of unnecessary force against citizens. According to Chloe (32 years old and residing 10 years in the USA), Mexican police are very violent, with no mercy and compassion toward citizens. Chloe even stated that the violence of her home country's police is not comparable to the US police because they do not care much about who the citizens are: "No. In Mexico, they [the police] did not care. If they [the police] saw kids or elderly people, they [the police] fire." What she described was a police force in Mexico that would use a weapon against vulnerable populations without consideration: that is, the police use unnecessary force against minors and elderly people. She said police violence in Mexico is worse than what other people can imagine.

> Mexican police work … as [if]…they don't have compassion for the people. For example, if you have done something, they [the police] will come and start beating you up. They do not try to talk to you or have a conversation but come hitting and beating you (Chloe, 32 years old and residing 10 years in the USA).

Zoe (41 years old and residing 15 years in the USA) and other participants described police collusion with drug cartels in Mexico. Because drug cartels, or drug dealers, often control the police, they would not act against criminal elements. As a result, citizens feel insecure living in Mexico and do not trust or respect the police. Abigail (72 years old and residing 10 years in the USA) also said:

> There is a lot of corruption. When I was living in Mexico, the police were in cahoots with the bad people in Mexico. And now even more, because in my country, Mexico, where I come from, there is a lot of crime. There are a lot of assassinations. There are a lot of Narcos there. Right now, it is very ugly in Mexico. Very, very ugly. So, for me, the police are sold to the bad guys. There, we are not secure.

Due to police violence and corruption, all the participants agreed that they had to find a way to protect themselves, their families, and their properties in their home country. Even some participants believed that the Mexican government and the police are associated with many drug cartels. So, there is no trust, no respect, and no confidence in the police, and people fear the police in Mexico.

> So over there in Mexico, the police are perceived as like *rats*, you know, people that are there to take money from you. They [the police] are not there to protect you. They [the police] are more there to hurt you. […] There is no respect for police officers over there. There is no respect for authority (Ava, 29 years old and residing 19 years in the USA).

In Mexico, Police are Above the Laws

In the same vein as corruption, participants characterized Mexican police as one above the laws and unprofessional. Since many police officers in Latin-American countries come from working-class backgrounds with no higher education and are not well professionally trained when they put on the police uniform, they see themselves as being above the law or as being above others (e.g., the public) (Esparza & Agues; Reames, 2003; Sabet, 2010; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). It is like giving novices power and authority to display themselves as one of higher status. That is, conditioning them to consider themselves as being able to abuse given power and legal authority against citizens leads to corruption. One participant said, "The police in Mexico believe that they have a lot of power because they can walk around with their guns" (Roma, 57 years old and residing 10 years in the USA).

> Mexican police are very arrogant. They think very highly of themselves because they have this position. Like the whole world, we, have to give them respect, like we should not dare to raise our voices or anything. Yes, they are very arrogant (Julia, 43 years old and residing 18 years in the USA).

The second quote may not apply to all Latin American countries. However, we believe that 'they can walk around with guns' is a metaphor for the police's legal authority to carry a gun and symbolizes police power. Many participants depicted that the police in Mexico do not provide fair justice to the public but prefer to go on sidetracks (e.g., bribes). That is, they abuse police discretion to rule the streets and residents.

> If you don't have a license plate, if you don't have a driver's license or something … money, money, money. Everything is fixed with money. They [Mexican police] are also very rude. They do not respect people. They abuse their authority (Julieta, 43 years old and residing 18 years in the USA).

Julia stated that every aspect of policing in her home country is very bad because the police lie to citizens, seek monetary bribes, and rule the streets with their power and authority. Isla (30 years old and residing 13 years in the USA) and Mariana (37 years old and residing 19 years in the USA) blamed poor and insufficient policing training and low recruitment standards for police corruption and misbehavior compared with the police in the United States.

> I think that [in the U.S.] the fact that being a police officer is a career. That you actually go to an academy, and you get prepared. It is a big plus, and that helps a lot. They [U.S. police officers] have this base of knowledge and education, [but] in Latin American countries, a lot of them, don't. Some police go to, maybe, three months [of] training. That's all (Isla).

> Yes, the police here [in the United States] have more training. They are more prepared to react to anything. And they are more focused on protecting the community. And in Mexico, there is not even one of these things. No, they are not prepared, they don't love their work, they don't work because they want to protect the community. They work because, I believe, they want to extort more people in order to get money (Mariana).

Discussion

Law and order are a leading concern for Latin Americans who, in public opinion surveys, have consistently reported the highest levels of fear and insecurity in the world (Muggah & Tobon, 2018; Prado et al., 2012; Ray, 2015, 2016). The consensus perceptions coming from our respondents are of a Mexican police force that is not relatively well educated and trained, ineffective, and not trustworthy. Their views have been widely collaborated in existing research on police culture in Mexico (see Back et al., 2021; Dammert, 2019; Esparza & Agues, 2020; Flores-Marcias & Zarkin, 2021; Forne, 2016; Garduno, 2019; Prado et al., 2012; Sabet, 2010, 2013; Tello, 2012; Uildriks, 2009a, 2009b). Based on our findings, it seems that Mexicanas in the United States hold the same perceptions of the police as most citizens in Mexico. Although outside of the scope of this paper, it is important to mention that our interviewees saw the Mexican police in a worse light because they compared some aspects to the U.S. police. In the following section, we discuss the four major concerns our interviewees shared about the police in Mexico.

Corruption

Apart from being violent, ineffective, and unprofessional, all our participants described the police in Mexico as extremely corrupt. According to them, police officers often behaved more like criminals rather than law enforcement officials. Most of the corruption allegations mentioned by our participants were related to traffic stops. This is not surprising since the traffic police in Mexico are notorious for having the best opportunity for getting bribes (Azaola, 2009). While our participants connected corruption mostly with bribes extracted by rank-and-file police officers from citizens, corruption seems to permeate the whole police system and is part of a deeply ingrained culture. In interviews with police officers, Azaola (2009) found that rank-and-file officers followed long-established norms and the example of higher-ups who give jobs and benefits using corrupt or nepotistic methods. The Mexican example seems to be not simply rotten apples that spoil the barrel but a rotten orchard that spoils barrels and apples (see Lim & Sloan, 2016). According to Transparency International, Mexico has ranked the second lowest in corruption in Latin America since 2015. This corruption index explains why the participants in the current study unanimously spoke about police corruption and corrupt police officers, as well as why they considered bribing police officers an informal custom in Mexico.

In terms of the driving causes of police corruption, most of our participants considered police corruption to be the result of poor salaries. This observation contradicts Azaola's (2009) findings that Mexican police would still solicit bribes even if they received higher salaries. While our participants offered the most ostensible explanation, it seems police corruption in Mexico, and Latin America in general, has deeper causes and is driven not just by financial constraints. The Chilean police, for example, are known for their low levels of corruption despite receiving low salaries (Uildriks, 2009a).

Some of our participants hinted at deeper causes for corruption and saw it as a cultural trait that is a normally accepted part of life in Mexico. For example, while all our participants complained about bribes, they also participated in this system to *facilitate* their lives. While bribing the police is a white-collar crime in most countries (Batrancea et al., 2023), the people in Mexico consider it a normal way of life, like an easy and commonly acceptable way to resolve the trouble, as stated by our participants. This finding is consistent with claims that corruption is a cultural trait that permeates the whole of society in Mexico (Uildriks, 2009b). While corrupt practices are used

and accepted by Mexicans to facilitate everyday life, we can't expect police officers to abstain from soliciting bribes.

Apart from such 'predatory' corruption, where police officers took advantage of their position to get personal or group benefits (Forne, 2016), the participants in the current study also described police forces participating in 'strategic' corruption where police officers used threat, intimidation, or physical force to defend the interests of criminal elements that had contracted them (see Forne, 2016). Our participants mentioned that the Mexican police often work for drug cartels or other criminal elements, which was one of the causes of making them feel insecure in Mexico. Most of them also stated that the police would do nothing against criminals. Our respondents' perceptions are consistent with findings that police officers in Mexico's federal and municipal police work for drug cartels and criminal elements instead of enforcing the law (Carpenter, 2012; Montes, 2021; Prado et al., 2012; Uildriks, 2009b). Many of our participants believed that the police were working for the 'bad guys.' Their perceptions are consistent with the views of most Latin Americans. Surveys show that between 10 to 60 percent of the public in various Latin American countries believe that the police are involved in crime (United Nations Development Program, 2013). Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that Latin American immigrants in the U.S., including our participants, perceive their home country police as corrupt and violent and ultimately consider them criminals.

Use of Excessive Force

Our participants agreed that police forces in Mexico rely heavily on the use of violence. They saw the Mexican police as rough and aggressive and connected them with impunity and being above the law. Mexicanas frequently mentioned that they felt insecure in Mexico and that they feared the police, the very force that was supposed to protect them. Some respondents compared the use of force by the U.S. police with that of the Mexican police and concluded that the situation in Mexico was much more dire than in the U.S. Some even mentioned that Mexican police would 'disappear you,' referring to 'enforced disappearance' involving state security forces; a practice used during the 'dirty war' period of authoritarian rule to silence opposition and used by police and military officials in Mexico today to obtain confessions, information, or assist organized crime groups (Congressional Research Service, 2022; Wilkinson, 2018).

Police forces in Mexico are notorious for human rights abuses and the use of excessive force (Comision de Derechos Humanos de la Cuidad de Mexico, 2021; Fisher & Abi-Habib, 2022; Forne, 2016; Sabet, 2010), especially against communities of color or the economically disadvantaged (Dammert, 2019; Felbab-Brown, 2020; Forne, 2016; Uildriks, 2009b). Most of our interviewees came from such economically disadvantaged classes that left Mexico to look for better economic opportunities in the U.S. This could explain why most of our interviewees held very negative perceptions of the police in Mexico. Their relative deprivation experiences and observations of unfair procedural justice by the police in Mexico, as well as security and safety deprivation, may have motivated their immigration to the United States (Quinn, 2006; Stark & Taylor, 1989). A few mentioned violence and insecurity as a reason for immigrating. They wanted a safer life for themselves and their children.

Public opinion surveys in Latin America show that trust in the police depends on socioeconomic status, and low-income citizens hold more negative views of the police (Dammert, 2009; Frühling, 2009b). The responses of the participants in the current study align with such findings. They often made statements that the police would only help people if they were important or had money in Mexico. Most of them did not expect the police to help them fairly or investigate

their cases and find the culprits (94% stated that the Mexican police were not helpful), so they said they would not bother to go through the process of informing the police in the first place. Their statements match previous findings that the police in Mexico give priority to solving crimes that affect the wealthy, such as kidnappings, car thefts, and bank robberies, but neglect crimes, such as street crime and assaults, that affect the poorer parts of society (Uildriks, 2009b).

Not only is there a historical proclivity towards excessive use of force against disadvantaged elements in society in Mexico, but there is also a widespread understanding in Mexico that the police need to be tough to provide security and fight crime, '*mano dura*' (Abdenur, 2019, Marsullo & Morisi, 2018, Uildriks, 2009b, Uildriks & Peon, 2010). This has led to blurring "the distinction between civilian and military law enforcement" (Flores-Marcias & Zarkin, 2021, p. 519). Mexican police have increasingly militarized with the armed forces participating in police operations since 2006, and it recently created a National Guard police force mainly consisting of armed forces personnel and controlled by the Ministry of Defense (Abdenur, 2019; Flores-Marcias & Zarkin, 2021; Sheridan, 2022). While our interviewees did not talk about police militarization or the use of the armed forces for domestic security, they relayed their fear of the Mexican police's use of violence. Our participants reported that Mexican police frequently subject citizens to merciless and compassionless beatings, extending even to the most vulnerable groups like children and the elderly.

Impunity

Our interviewees expressed grave concerns about the behavior of Mexican police, who they described as acting as if they were exempt from the law. They characterized the police as feeling powerful and arrogant, not providing fair justice, and disregarding the rule of law. One interviewee stated, "If they want to beat you, they can. If they want to arrest you, they can." These statements hold significant relevance, given the findings that police officers in Mexico face minimal sanctions. In 2017 Mexico ranked fourth on the Global Impunity Index (GII) (Ortega & Lara, 2017). In 2020, Mexico saw a slight improvement in its impunity ranking, yet it still stood at tenth on the GII, trailing behind Honduras, Paraguay, and Guyana in the Americas region (Ortega & Lara, 2020).

Furthermore, our interviewees believed that there was no rule of law in Mexico. This perception appears to stem from politicization and corruption within the police force, which undermines mechanisms for police accountability and oversight (Davis, 2006; Esparza & Agues, 2020; Koen & Mathna, 2019; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Sabet, 2010; Uildriks, 2009b; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). To clarify, the recurring political practice and customs in Mexico involve newly elected local politicians appointing police commanders loyal to them, who subsequently advance officers loyal to or compliant with their agendas, which weakens police accountability and integrity (Esparza & Agues, 2020). One of our interviewees, who had previously served within the Mexican government, highlighted how politicization and corruption provided preferential treatment to government employees. She explained, "If you work for the government, you have an advantage [when dealing with the police]. […] It's unfair for the people, but in my case, it was good for me." (Isla, 30 years old and residing 13 years in the USA). In essence, the politicization of the police leads to a system where politicians and government officials receive preferential treatment from law enforcement. In return, they often turn a blind eye to police misconduct and grant promotions based on loyalty rather than competence.

Not only politicization but also corruption undermines accountability and oversight. Uildriks (2009b) claimed that in Mexico, Internal Affairs officers responsible for probing corruption or abuse of power allegations typically offered the subject under investigation a choice:

either face charges or provide payment. Senior police officers have been themselves implicated in corruption and other integrity violations, including arbitrary hiring, punishments, and dismissals (Uildriks, 2009b). These actions do not foster a culture within the rank-and-file police officers that prioritizes the rule of law (Uildriks, 2009b). Given these circumstances, it is understandable that our interviewees characterized the police forces in Mexico as failing to apply, enforce, and respect the law. They believed that the police in Mexico did not adhere to the rule of law as expected of them.

Ineffectiveness

The militarization and tough policing strategies contribute to increasingly negative perceptions of the police without resulting in a reduction in crime rates. Despite growing levels of crime and citizen insecurity in Mexico, crime investigation rates remain exceptionally low, with even few cases being brought before a judge and resulting in convictions (Abdenur, 2019; HRW, 2023; Pasara, 2009; Uildriks, 2009b). Our interviewees largely viewed the police as ineffective in fighting crime, with some recounting instances where the police initially blamed victims and attempted to dissuade them from reporting crimes. As stated by Sabet (2009), these are frequent and simplistic policing practices aimed at lowering crime statistics, often with the intent to misrepresent police effectiveness and mislead the public.

The participants in the current study explained the ineffectiveness of Mexican police officers in terms of low professionalism and disinterest in investigating crimes. This perception aligns with various studies on police forces in Mexico, which have highlighted low educational and training levels among the majority of rank-and-file officers (Esparza & Agues, 2020; Frühling, 2009c; Reames, 2003; Sabet, 2010). In Mexico, only 17 out of the 55 institutions with a police function had established minimum educational standards for joining the force, and around 55 % of Mexican police officers had not even completed primary school (Frühling, 2009c). Such low educational requirements to enter the police are accompanied by low salaries and poor working conditions that lead to officers' reluctance or inability to do their work (Azaola, 2009; Ungar, 2009). Considering that the level of police professionalism is positively correlated with public trust in the police (Esparza & Agues, 2020), it is unsurprising that most of our participants expressed low levels of trust in police forces in Mexico and had mostly disparaging comments about them. The views of the participants in the current study seem to mirror the perceptions of citizens in Mexico in general. In a recent study in Mexico, Esparza and Agues (2020) found that only about 8% of respondents trusted local police forces, and only 6% saw them as effective.

Police Reform Efforts

It seems that many of the concerns about their home-country police among Mexicana immigrants in the U.S. are the result of historically established authoritarian police practices. In autocratic regimes, the police maintain security and tranquility based on instilling fear and expecting collaboration by using brute force, while in democracies, police forces provide security in collaboration with the public and their consent (Uildriks, 2009a). To accomplish this goal, democratic police forces require public legitimacy, enabling them to foster the voluntary and non-repressive police-community interaction that facilitates their ability to provide security effectively (Uildriks, 2009a; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). Our results indicate that Mexicana immigrants do not perceive the existence of such legitimacy. From their perspective, Mexican police are not perceived as protectors of the 'common citizens.' instead of cooperating with Mexican police forces, they

actively avoid them due to their experiences and perceptions, which make them wary of engaging with the police.

There have been efforts to create community-policing programs in Mexico and establish a strong connection between the public and the police required for democratic police forces (Frühling, 2009c; Müller, 2010; Sabet, 2010; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). Müller (2010), however, found that community-policing programs in Mexico City were ineffective, and policing has largely continued as usual. While there have been improvements, these have often been limited (Sabet, 2009; Uildriks & Peon, 2010). Reformers have often prioritized improving selection criteria, education and training, and investment in equipment over strengthening oversight mechanisms that would target corruption and ties to organized crime (Sabet, 2009, 2013; Uildriks, 2009a), issues pointed out as most important by our interviewees. Police reforms are also a long-term aim that can often become a victim of changing political priorities and police forces' resistance to reforms (Uildriks & Peon, 2010). Even the value and benefits of improved education and training courses for police officers have been put in question with findings that police officers in Mexico were usually unable to remember anything about the courses they have participated in (Uildriks, 2009b).

Our findings show that despite police reform efforts, the police force has not been able to gain legitimacy in the eyes of Mexicanas, and they do not feel comfortable collaborating with the police in Mexico (even at the most basic level – reporting a crime). Until the police in Mexico gain the support and legitimacy of the people they serve, they will not be able to operate as intended in democratic societies and will need to continue to rely on fear and brute force rather than on voluntary community-police interactions.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

The current study shows that the perceptions of Mexicana immigrants and their descendants regarding the police forces in Mexico align closely with those of the general public in Mexico and researchers in the field. However, it is important to interpret our findings cautiously as they represent the viewpoints of immigrants and their descendants who have resided in the United States. Furthermore, their perceptions may reflect the state of police forces during the period they lived in Mexico. Many of the participants also mentioned receiving information about the police forces in Mexico from friends and family residing there, as well as from news media. Essentially, the more recent information they have about the police in Mexico may rely heavily on media coverage and the perceptions and experiences of their acquaintances back home, constituting indirect contact experiences with the police. Consequently, there might be a tendency toward police stereotyping in our participants' perceptions. Besides, the current study focused on the perspectives of Mexicanas, so Mexicanos' perceptions of the police in Mexico may differ. While we observed no differences between how the Mexicanas in the United States described the police force in Mexico and how the people in Mexico perceive their police, further investigation into potential variations in police perceptions by gender and across various Latin American countries would be intriguing. Particularly, future studies could delve into the impact of individuals' experiences with the home-country police force on their perceptions and interactions with U.S. police among Latin American immigrants. Such research would not only benefit law enforcement officers but also aid policymakers in comprehending cultural disparities and diverse expectations toward the U.S. police force, facilitating the development of evidence-based policing strategies.

Conclusion

Our participants' descriptions of the police forces in Mexico fit exactly within the parameters of what Yanilda Gonzalez (2020) calls authoritarian policing. Gonzalez (2020) stated that the primary function of democratic police forces is to protect citizens from crime, whereas, in Mexico, they prioritize serving the interests of leaders, reminiscent of police functions in authoritarian societies. While democratic police forces operate within the framework of the rule of law, Mexican police forces operate arbitrarily, akin to authoritarian policing practices. Additionally, while democratic police forces have robust external accountability mechanisms, such mechanisms are notably lacking in Mexico, mirroring characteristics of authoritarian police force.

Until the Mexican government implements far-reaching police reforms that target the issues raised by our interviewees, such as corruption, politicization, ineffectiveness, use of excessive force, and impunity, we anticipate minimal changes in the perception of the police among Mexican immigrants and their compatriots. Our findings indicate that Mexicanas in the USA share similar perceptions of the Mexican police as those residing in Mexico (Correa, 2007; Perea, 2016; Reames, 2003; Romero et al., 2018; Sabet, 2010, 2013). Based on these findings, it is apparent that the Mexican police cannot shift from authoritarian to democratic policing without obtaining the approval, collaboration, and trust of their population. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that police reform endeavors in the region have seen only modest achievements, hindered not solely by institutional resistance within the police force but also by the strategies adopted by politicians and the public in the region. On one point, politicians prioritize short-term electoral goals over sustained, substantive police reform efforts (Gonzalez, 2017), persisting in the politicization of law enforcement. Conversely, both politicians and the population in the region endorse mano-dura police practices to combat crime (Dammert, 2009; Pereira & Ungar, 2004; Uildriks, 2009a; Ungar, 2009; Uildriks & Peon, 2010), thereby perpetuating the use of authoritarian policing methods, including excessive force and arbitrary tactics by the police.

A significant obstacle to achieving successful police reform is the pervasive culture of corruption prevalent in the region, a concern highlighted by our interviewees. They perceived corruption as deeply entrenched within their society. Our interviewees identified corrupt practices as the root cause of numerous issues, including politicization, ineffectiveness, and impunity within law enforcement. Corruption extends beyond the police force and is perpetuated by politicians and the public alike. Effective police reforms in Mexico require eradicating corruption at all levels. Although some scholars associate corruption in Latin America with cultural factors (Uildriks, 2009b), the case of Chile, characterized by minimal corruption (Dammert, 2009; Frühling, 2009b; Ortiz-Espina & Roser, 2019), provides optimism that corrupt behaviors in Latin American societies are not immutable cultural traits and can indeed be surmounted.

Consequently, the findings of the current study serve to enhance the understanding of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the United States regarding immigrants from Latin American nations, notably Mexico, and the dynamics between the police and the public in their countries of origin. These results carry implications for how law enforcement officers in the United States interact with and build trust in immigrants from regions lacking established police procedural justice and professionalism. Continuous endeavors to comprehend immigrants' experiences with the police in their home countries and their practices are essential for fostering positive community relationships and forging local partnerships with immigrant populations.

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