

A Risky Business? Moral authority and corporate mobilisation: the case of COPARMEX's anti-crime initiatives.

Maribel Blasco

ABSTRACT

The paper looks at initiatives taken by the Mexican Employers' Confederation (COPARMEX) aimed at promoting collaboration among civil society associations around the issue of public safety. Insecurity in the form of robbery, assault and kidnapping causes huge losses to business in Mexico. It is argued that business leaders are seeking to create consensus and form alliances among civil society around the topic of insecurity, both to combat crime but also as a strategy to strengthen links with civil society and improve the image of business, which has suffered due to the increasing resonance of anti-capital and anti-globalisation discourses in the region.

Introduction¹

The paper explores how the voluntary involvement by non-state actors in public functions can become a source of moral authority and an effective form of governance. In this connection, it explores how business interests represented by COPARMEX² are seeking to profile themselves as leaders in the struggle to assure public safety in a context where Mexican State is failing to do so, despite its constitutional mandate to protect its citizens.³ COPARMEX has adopted public safety as an integral part of its tasks and platform, a fact that it has been energetically disseminating in the media. The paper looks at COPARMEX initiatives: the Citizenship Council for Public Security and Citizenship Participation (CCSPJP)⁴ and the Citizens' Institute for Studies on Insecurity (ICESI), which are part of the organisation's efforts to mobilise and reinforce societal consensus over crime and insecurity by providing both information and opportunities for citizen participation.

Following Chalmers (et al. 1997), it is suggested that COPARMEX's public safety initiatives exemplify a recent type of social mobilisation in Latin America that has taken the form of *associative networks* that seek to mobilise consensus over and encourage affiliation to a given issue among different social groups, bridging both institutional and class divisions. It is argued that these networks can be used to create a platform for certain groups to assume a social and moral leadership position from which to effect changes both in state priorities and in social values and political preferences. The paper draws on theories of risk, governance and social mobilisation to shed light upon how 'languages of risk' can be strategically deployed to frame an issue in such a way as to generate a consensus that can serve as a platform for extending broader social agendas in this way (Dean 1999: 147). COPARMEX's efforts to claim a leadership role in the struggle against insecurity potentially offers a number of gains: pushing crime, an issue that has a particularly pernicious impact on business, higher up the public agenda, whilst at the same time providing opportunities to disseminate particular values and definitions of good, active

¹ The investigation is being carried out within the framework of a broader research project called 'Consensus, Affiliation and Social Change', involving researchers from Guadalajara University (Mexico) and Toulouse University (France). The paper is based on data from interviews with COPARMEX/CCSPJP staff in Mexico City and Morelos; as well as newspaper articles and information on the CCSPJP and ICESI from www.coparmex.org.mx.

² COPARMEX is not specific to any one sector or industry, so the organization may thus be said to be broadly representative of Mexican business interests (Puga 1993). Notwithstanding, it forms part of what Luna (1996: 111) calls the liberal conservative current in the business community.

³ Under Article 21 of the Mexican Constitution the State at its different levels (federal, state and municipality) is responsible for public safety.

⁴ In Spanish: Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal.

entrepreneurial citizenship; establishing business in the role of moral leaders; and thereby also improving its public image. The latter is seen as especially necessary in view of the current proliferation of increasingly vociferous movements coalescing around a broadly anti-capital agenda, with potentially damaging implications for a business sector that is seeking greater influence in social and political affairs.

The paper seeks to raise questions about initiatives where private organisations 'voluntarily' engage in public functions or aspects of them, as COPARMEX is doing in the matter of security. Whilst such initiatives may bestow a certain moral authority upon private organisations, the latter are not obliged to assume the accountability that typically accompanies these functions when they are performed by the public authorities. This phenomenon has important implications for governance in the current context of political change in Mexico. Whilst COPARMEX's initiatives may from certain perspectives be understood as a sign of a healthy and growing pluralism resulting from political opening and the redistribution of public authority, they might also be interpreted as an attempt by powerful elites to mobilise the citizenry around their own political agendas.

Crime and its uses

"Public safety is the most urgent desire and demand of Mexican society. That is why the business people affiliated to COPARMEX have fought for a permanent, modern and comprehensive state policy on the matter" (CCSPJP)

Crime and public insecurity are key concerns in Latin America today, although surprisingly little academic research has yet been carried out on these topics (Dammert and Malone 2003). With former threats posed by state terrorism, guerilla warfare and territorial conflicts now minimal, security problems in the region now revolve around the increasing violence, crime and drug traffic (Iglesias 2002; Tedesco 2000). Governments are increasingly impotent in the face of rising urban crime levels and are openly calling for social participation in combating this problem (Gaviria and Pagés 1999; Dammer and Malone 2003).⁵ Public confidence in the authorities' ability to deal with crime and bring miscreants to justice is also low (Tedesco 2000).⁶ It is estimated that a mere two out of ten crimes⁷ are reported to the authorities, although it is notoriously difficult to measure the extent of the so-called 'black figure' (*cifra negra*) of crimes that go unreported.

In Mexico alone in 2001, 4.2 million people were victims of crime, with costs and damages of 49 billion pesos, or 0.85% of GDP (*The Economist*, 19 October 2002). There, as in other Latin American countries, citizens are increasingly taking measures to protect themselves, with barbed wire, 'gated communities'⁸, privately-hired security and bodyguards, armoured cars and a whole array of security goods and services a common sight in wealthier urban neighbourhoods (Caldeira 2000; Amerlinck 1999; Bislev *et al.*; Bislev 2003). Urban violence is seen as a broader symptom of the state's incapacity to maintain law and order, run an effective judiciary and assure democratic governability (Tedesco 2000: 540), with the result that private individuals are increasingly taking the matter of their personal safety into their own hands.

⁵ Government initiatives to encourage social participation in combating crime have been taken in several Latin American countries. An example is Honduras' Cero Tolerancia public safety programme, based on the highly effective Zero Tolerance anti-crime campaign launched by Rudy Giuliani, mayor of New York, in the mid-90's. The Honduran initiative included the hiring of 4000 new police officers, more stringent internal controls and strengthening of the police force and judiciary, and a community policing programme. (<http://www.revistazo.com/may/titul3.html#top>).

⁶ With the exception of Chile (Dammert and Malone 2003: 86).

⁷ According to ICESI figures. In the first half of 2002, 82% of all crimes went unreported (<http://www.icesi.org.mx/index.cfm?Nid=184>).

⁸ Fenced-off residential communities, often manned by guards at the entrance (Bislev 2003).

In 1998 the former Mexican president, Ernesto Zedillo, publically acknowledged that law enforcement was inadequate, in part due to inefficiency and corruption in the police force and the judiciary, and launched an appeal to the nation for a National Crusade against Crime and Delinquency⁹ with the intention of encouraging society to join forces with the government in combating crime. Since then, citizen anti-crime initiatives such as *México Unido Contra La Delincuencia* (Mexico United Against Crime), *Vecino Vigilante* (Neighbourhood Watch) and the *Ojo Ciudadano* (Citizen Eye) programme have been organised nationwide, with participants ranging from individuals to groups such as neighbourhood organisations, trade unions, business and professional associations. For its part, the PAN government that took over from Zedillo in 2000 has energetically continued the effort to promote a change of security paradigm from the former model characterised by police response to crimes already committed, the political manipulation of justice, and corruption; to a new model based on crime prevention, citizen participation and the inculcation of a law-abiding culture (*cultura de legalidad*) (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2001-2006*).

This new approach has opened up spaces for non-state groups to organise and respond to social demands for greater public safety. In this context, and following a public call by President Vicente Fox¹⁰ for greater participation by the public in combating crime, the Mexican Employers' Confederation (COPARMEX) launched its own anti-crime initiative, the CCSPJP, in 2001. The CCSPJP headquarters is based at COPARMEX's offices in Mexico City, and it will eventually operate in all states. It functions as an autonomous organisation with representatives from a broad range of social organisations including representatives of parents' associations (*Asociación Nacional de Padres de Familia*), higher education institutions, teachers, women's groups, and other civic associations.¹¹ Its aims are: to provide information and advice on crime and prevention; promote public participation in crime prevention; evaluate public performance in the matter of public safety, improve attention to crime victims, foment rapprochement between the police and the community, consult with civil society institutions on legal reform, and engage in dialogue with the authorities on matters of public safety. The CCSPJP was created alongside a new, independent multidisciplinary research institute, ICESI, whose task is to compile reliable crime statistics, disseminate them to the population, and to support the work of the CCSPJP. ICESI is a civil association formed by Business Coordinating Council (CCE), COPARMEX, the CCSPJP, the Monterrey Technological Institute (ITESM), the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the *Este País* Foundation.

Through the CCSPJP and ICESI, COPARMEX has made intense efforts to disseminate the notion that a national consensus exists about the need to combat crime. The organisation has vociferously called for government action and accountability in the matter of public safety and impunity, pointedly drawing attention to its ineffectualness in this matter. It has done this in part through very public gestures, such as the recent recruitment and payment (to the tune of 4.2 million dollars per year) of a consultancy company run by Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York famous for his 'zero tolerance' anti-crime tactics, to help solve the crime problem in Mexico City, a signal that it considered the public authorities incapable of dealing with the task themselves (see *The Economist* 19.10.02; *Televisa información* 16.10.02). CCSPJP documents explicitly state their intention to reinforce State action and accountability in the area of public safety by encouraging civic participation in the matter of crime prevention. The organization frames itself as a mouthpiece for the pre-existing and rightful demands of civil society:

⁹ Cruzada Nacional contra el Crimen y la Delincuencia

¹⁰ During the inauguration by Fox of a Social Alliance Against Crime at the National Forum on Public Security in March 2002.

¹¹ For instance, the recently-formed CCSPJP group in the state of Morelos includes 18 organisations from these different categories, with another 12 scheduled to join (Calvo Elmer 2002).

The mission of the CCSPJP is to achieve civic participation, in cooperation with the authorities, so that State policies in the matter of public safety and penal justice respond to the rights, demands and proposals of civil society (www.coparmex.org).

For its part, the Citizens' Institute for Studies on Insecurity (ICESI) supports CCSPJP activities by generating reliable, 'expert' information on the 'true' scale of crime and insecurity. ICESI documents state its principal aims as:

to gain reliable, true and objective statistical information enabling analysis of crime tendencies in our country, to disseminate its results to the population and to support government agencies in planning and evaluation of public safety programmes ... to offer certainty as to the reliability and technical rigour of the information generated, to provide indicators and indexes on social violence in order to secure the credibility and trust of society (www.icesi.org.mx)

Another of ICESI's stated aims is to gauge 'perceived levels of insecurity in the different arenas that people live in'. Officials¹² interviewed claimed that under-reporting of crime due to widespread lack of faith in the judicial system means that official crime statistics bear little relation either to 'real' crime rates, or to people's perceptions of insecurity, both of which are far higher than official statistics suggest. 'Everybody knows somebody who has been a victim of crime', as the CCSPJP's director in Mexico City put it.¹³ The careful measurement and zealous dissemination of both these indicators suggests that COPARMEX is concerned that neither crime figures nor disquiet about crime (irrespective of whether this reflects actual levels of risk) should be *under-estimated*.

The dispersion of public authority: association and consensus

Whilst it is certainly true that crime is on the increase in Mexico,¹⁴ it could also be argued that compared with over half the entire population living below the poverty line (Cortés Cáceres *et al.* 2002) the 4.2 million affected by crime during 2001 is a relatively small figure. Moreover, studies show that crime is statistically more likely to strike a smallish sector of better-off urban dwellers (Gaviria and Pagés 1999). As a recent newspaper report stated: 'When we ask ourselves today what is the most serious problem in the country, the huge majority would say poverty, because that is the cause of all the other problems: violence, ignorance, insecurity, social malaise, lack of adequate public services, etc.' (Calderón 2002a). Is COPARMEX, then, exaggerating the risk that crime and insecurity pose to Mexican society, and if so why?

This question is dealt with in the paper by conceptualizing risk as a governmental strategy that constructs threats in particular ways that enable the deployment of particular measures and technologies, e.g. the citizen anti-crime networks and statistical compilation of anti-crime statistics under discussion here. Theories of governance have illuminated contemporary changes in the meaning and forms of government, citizenship and democratic politics. Governance may be defined as the process whereby it becomes 'possible to govern human beings in ways that are compatible with the principles of liberalism and democracy' (Rose 1999: vii). In the governance perspective, power in the modern, liberal state is not concentrated in one public authority, but is exercised through a plethora of institutions whose projects must be 'harnessed' to those of the State through processes of conviction and voluntary self-discipline rather than coercion (Lupton 1999: 4). Legitimate government is achieved through 'degovernmentalising' the State and 'de-

¹² CCSPJP representatives at COPARMEX in Mexico City.

¹³ Interview with Lic. Gabriel Funes, CCSPJP Director, COPARMEX Nacional, August 2002.

¹⁴ As they are in Latin America as a whole. Some commentators (e.g. Tedesco 2000) consider that this is due to the new social relations generated by neoliberalism.

statising practices of government' (Rose 1996: 41). Individual behaviour and decisions are, in turn, guided by information and expertise, which are no longer the exclusive prerogative of the political authorities but become a commodity in a market governed by competition, accountability and consumer demand. In such a context, individual citizens become 'subjects of choices ... to be governed through their freedom ...' (Rose 1996: 41). The redefinition of citizenship as contingent upon individual decisions is not morally neutral, however. The 'good citizen' cannot opt out, or behave passively, but must actively assume responsibility for his own life, health, wellbeing and safety and, by extension, for that of the community as a whole.

Discourses of co-responsibility, participation and self-help play a key role in defining ethical parameters for the 'right' kind of choices. In line with this, risk is increasingly seen not as an ineluctable feature of the human condition, but rather as a human *responsibility* that can, in principle, be managed (Lupton 1999: 45). By extension, *failures* to ward off risks are seen as somebody's fault, with the result that risk, accountability and blame become inextricably linked (Douglas 1992 in Lupton 1999: 48). According to some theorists, the self-conceptualisation of modern individuals as rational 'choosing agents' means that failures to manage risks become internalized as their own fault, since they have failed to take adequate measures to protect themselves despite being properly informed of the dangers (Lupton 1999: 4). This individualization of blame for risk is heightened under contemporary neoliberalism, where the moral and practical burden of minimizing social risk has shifted from the welfare state to 'an advanced liberal society of prudential individuals and communities' (Dean 1999: 132; O'Malley 1996 and Dean 1997 in Lupton 1999: 5).

Other writers have argued, however, that failures to ward off risks may in other contexts not always be individualized, but may be blamed on a given institution. Such failures can be used as 'a stick for beating authority' and holding it accountable (Douglas 1992 in Lupton 1999: 48). In this perspective, discourses on risk do not necessarily reflect 'real' dangers, but are formulated and employed with a particular political intent that singles out certain risks over others as threats that must be dealt with (Douglas 1992 in Lupton 1999: 6). Wherever a particular institution is deemed responsible for protection against a given risk, it can also be held accountable for failure to do so. Discourses on risk therefore become a technique for managing conduct through the assignation of moral obligation, and are therefore a form of governance. Debates on risk can likewise tell us something about where perceptions of responsibility for managing social risks are deposited within a given society.

This perspective enables COPARMEX's involvement in public safety to be explored from alternative angles than merely as a response to 'real' threats, although this is clearly also one dimension. Kidnappings, protection rackets and robberies of business premises and transport (e.g. lorries) have plagued the business community and deterred the growth of new business initiatives. Since state capacity to reduce criminality, poverty¹⁵ and illiteracy is dwindling, the business community has been obliged to try and protect its own interests (Puga 1993; Lara 2000). COPARMEX's engagement in security matters may therefore be seen as a pragmatic attempt to curtail crime, which hurts profits, and to push public safety higher up the government agenda, in part by mobilizing the citizenry around this issue.

It is arguably more interesting, however, to explore COPARMEX's initiatives in the matter of public safety within a broader perspective of changing relations among the state, the private sector and civil society and current renegotiations of public authority. Some historical contextualisation is in

¹⁵ According to recent estimates, over half the population is poor, with 24 per cent unable to meet even their basic nutritional needs. These figures, which result from official poverty measurements have been criticised for failing to take into account access to basic social rights such as health, education and housing. They should thus be taken as an absolute minimum estimate of real poverty levels (Boltvinik in Cardoso and Zúñiga 2002; Muñoz 2002).

order here. COPARMEX's recent engagement with public safety issues is a particularly noteworthy phenomenon since corporate involvement in social affairs is a rather new (albeit increasingly prominent) phenomenon in Mexico.¹⁶ Historically, the heavy protectionism of the import substitution industrialisation (ISI) period and the paternalist role assumed by the state in terms of social welfare meant that for most of the twentieth century, business was not obliged to engage in social affairs, partly because popular expectations of social protection were centred on the State rather than on business; and partly because of the prominent role of the Church in social provision and philanthropy (CEMEFI 2002).¹⁷ Over the past twenty years or so, however, political opening combined with States' reduced sovereignty in a context of rapid economic integration, internationalisation and reforms that have severely curtailed public spending have led to a renegotiation of the conventional division of responsibilities between the State, the private sector and civil society and a redefinition of government, the political sphere and social protection paradigms.¹⁸ (Serbin 1997; Slater 1998; Yúdice 1998: 353).

The context in which this renegotiation has taken place in Mexico has been rather different than in other regions, such as Europe, however. Whereas in the latter, social rights and the rule of law were once and still are a reality in many countries, this is far from the case in Mexico where, as in the rest of Latin America, the major structural reforms of the '80s and '90s¹⁹ and the ensuing austerity severely reduced the government's capacity to guarantee these rights.²⁰ The basic social rights that emanated from the 1910 Mexican Revolution and were enshrined in the 1917 Constitution – to education, health and housing – remain unfulfilled, and have never guaranteed effective protection for the poor (Gordon 2001).

Whilst the potential for unrest generated by the gap between *de facto* and *de jure* rights was kept more or less in check under the PRI regime, however, where opposition groups were typically quelled through a mixture of cooptation or repression (Velázquez 2003), popular demands have been harder to manage by legitimate means during the process of political opening that began at around the same time as the application of the neoliberal reforms described above. The toppling of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) by the PAN, which campaigned under the slogan of *El Cambio* (Change), at the 2000 elections, generated high expectations among the population (Velázquez 2003)²¹ at precisely a time when the government was becoming progressively less

¹⁶ Information on corporate philanthropy and social initiatives is, however, still scarce. See Lara (2000) for a list of philanthropic business initiatives and organisations.

¹⁷ As in other countries like France where these two institutions have had a similarly influential position.

¹⁸ Where a universalist approach to welfare has given way to a bipolar system consisting of a bismarckian linkage of social protection and employment on the one hand, and assistentialist programmes targeting the very poorest groups on the other (Sottoli 1999; Mesa-Lago).

¹⁹ Most Latin American countries turned away from their 'old' development model of inward-oriented and protectionist import-substitution, which roughly spanned the period from the 1940s to the mid-80s, and began to switch to an outward-oriented model of close integration with international markets – marking a 'paradigm shift' in the region's economies from import-substitution to globalisation (Gwynne and Kay 1999: 3; Gilbert 1997: 325). These changes were part of larger packages of economic reforms supported by international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and implemented through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The reforms have been inspired by the so-called 'New Public Management' paradigm that advocates the deployment of private sector management strategies in the public sector (Nickson 1998: 3). The reforms are neoliberal in orientation, increasing the influence of markets on economic decision-making and reducing that of national governments. They have promoted trade liberalisation, tariff reductions on imports, privatisation and decentralisation (Gwynne and Kay 1999: 14 and 68). The informal sector (defined by the Regional Employment Program for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC) as all self-employed workers (except professionals), non-remunerated family workers and domestic workers (Palacios 1990: 120)) has grown rapidly as a result (MOST-FLACSO 1997: 5), leaving the poorest groups unprotected by social security provision there is, which is accessible through formal public or private sector employment only.

²⁰ Between 1980 and 1995, social spending on housing, social security and welfare, and education fell substantially, with spending on health unchanged (Grindle 2000: 27).

²¹ Changes that have proved slow in arriving, causing increasing dissatisfaction among the population. Recent surveys indicate that 70% of Mexicans consider that President Fox 'is not in control of the country'; and that the PAN's campaign promises have not been honoured (Survey by the Public Opinion Department of the Presidency in *El País*, Monday 24

capable of responding to social demands. At the same time, channels for political representation are losing credibility, with political parties among the least trusted institutions in Mexico.²² This combination of circumstances poses a real danger for the inexperienced PAN government under President Vicente Fox, which has already faced a number of violent social protests that it has proved unable to quell effectively (Velázquez 2003).²³ This unrest must be 'managed' in some way so that society does not become ungovernable (Yúdice 1998: 364). Here, discourses of participation and 'co-responsibility' are playing a key role in governance, since they shift the focus from the incapacities of government to the moral responsibilities of citizens to 'help themselves'. These notions are key themes in Mexican government planning documents and social programmes.²⁴

The simultaneous shrinkage of the State coupled with increasing popular demands has also brought about changes in political representation in Mexico. Competition over scarce resources means that the prerogative to agenda-set has become fierce, with politics increasingly taking the form of lobbying (Canclini 1999). Successful lobbying depends on the capacity to form alliances and consensus around particular issues, and on access to information that can support one's case - or indeed the means to generate and disseminate such information - which becomes a key political, economic and social resource. Chalmers *et al.* distinguish this new type of political representation from the four traditional ideal type structures of representation in the previous period:²⁵ 'clientelist', 'populist', 'corporatist' and 'mass-mobilizational'. They argue that the new tendencies differ from all of these in that they are less tied to a single national structure of power, and that they place more emphasis on ties resulting from decisions to associate. Chalmers *et al.* propose a fifth type of representation to encapsulate this new development: the 'associative network':

Such a network links state and societal actors--sometimes including popular ones--through interpersonal, media and/or interorganizational ties. Multiple networks process and reshape contending political claims through relatively open-ended and problem-focused interactions. 'They are distinctive not only in the way they link people with decision-making centers, but also by their multiplicity and relatively rapid reconfiguration over time. (Chalmers *et al.* 1997: 545)

The authors relate the rise of associative networks to changes in global and domestic conditions and in the strategies employed by elites and popular actors (1997: 545). A key factor has been 'the dispersion of decision-making activity away from the centralized state of the earlier era to a more polycentric state, with multiple centers of decision-making', where associative networks contribute to shape and strengthen these emerging centres (1997: 545). Associational practices engaged in by active subjects have thus become a key condition for obtaining resources (Restrepo 2001), with 'informal' consensus and linkages forged through persuasion, loyalty and trust assuming increasing importance (Linck 2002). Subjects become reconstituted as 'members of heterogeneous communities of allegiance' which assume increasing importance as a means of 'conceptualizing and administering moral relations amongst persons' (Rose 1996: 41). How are

June 2002).

²² According to the *Latinobarómetro (2002)* public opinion survey: *Attitudes Towards Political Parties*, only 12% of the population have confidence in the political parties.

²³ E.g. the machete-wielding smallholders (*ejidatarios*) mentioned above, who protested against the expropriation of San Mateo Atenco to make way for the construction of the new Mexico City airport; as well as groups of *Barzonistas* (**check**) and teachers who violently entered the Mexican Congress to put forward their demands (Velázquez 2003).

²⁴ E.g. the current National Development Plan (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2001-2006*); and the Social Ministry's (SEDES) targeted social assistance programme, *Oportunidades*.

²⁵ Broadly, the ISI period that spanned from the 1930s-40s until the mid-'80s in most Latin American countries.

such allegiances and consensus forged, however? And how do certain non-state actors accrue authority in this process?

Moscovici and Doise define consensus as an essential aspect of community life 'when people seek to associate together, act in concert and make decisions' (1994: 1). Agreements reached in this way by a given social group become consensual when they are to be so evident that they become unquestionable (Linck 2002). The concept of consensus has been prominent in organization theory (Alvesson 1987), as well as in discussions of bioethical issues such as technical intervention in human reproduction (e.g. IVF/abortion). In the latter type of discussion, consensus is considered as 'truth' for all practical purposes, just as it was by ancient thinkers such as Aristotle, who considered consensus 'evidence for the correctness of statements' (Moscovici and Doise 1994: 3; Bayertz 1994: 42).²⁶ Theories emphasise the difficulty of building general, normative consensus in modern societies which lack the dense 'face-to-face' relations and tight social and moral control that often characterise smaller communities (Bayertz 1994: 4). Rather than general consensus over broad issues, then, contemporary societies are said to be characterised by 'particular consensus over a particular question by a limited number of individuals' (Bayertz 1994: 5). Consensus in modern societies, therefore, must be both mobilised and sustained: it is a *process* rather than a result (Bayertz 1994: 3).

Moscovici and Doise (1994:1) further differentiate between 'consensus' as an active concept, i.e. 'when people seek to associate together, act in concert and make decisions'; and the more passive notion of 'consent' or conformity, i.e. agreement concerning the 'truth' of a proposition – for instance that public safety is a good thing. Consent does not necessarily produce action, even when it concerns disagreeable or oppressive circumstances, as pointed out by theorists of collective mobilisation and resistance (Snow and Benford 1992; see also e.g. Gaventa 1980; Scott). Consensus, however, involves a more deliberate acknowledgement and presentation of a particular issue as good, bad or a problem with a view to acting upon it. Following Goffman, the presentation of an issue in a particular way may be referred to as 'framing':

collective action frames serve as accenting devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable ... activists employ collective action frames to punctuate or single out some existing social condition or aspect of life and define it as unjust, intolerable, and deserving of collective action (Snow and Benford 1992 in Anker 2000: 45).

Such framing devices may also be used to apportion blame for the situation framed as intolerable:

[frames] focus attention on a particular situation considered problematic, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, and articulate an alternative set of arrangements including what the movement actors need to do in order to affect the desired change' (Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994 in Anker 2000: 54).

The construction of such collective action frames may differ according to the scale of consensus the mobilisers seek to achieve, or according to the size of the group they seek to involve. In small societies, where 'face-to-face' relations predominate, physical gatherings or public debates may suffice to generate consensus around an issue, whereas in complex, modern societies, the media

²⁶ The key difference between ancient and modern conceptions of consensus, however, lies in their depictions of the relationship between the State and individuals. For Aristotle and his contemporaries, the state and its institutions precede man as an individual, with man conceived of as 'naturally' political; whereas for modern political thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke the State cannot exist legitimately without a general consensus: here, 'individuals precede the state' (Bayertz 1994: 42-3).

can fulfil this function of 'harmonising' opinions before people are actively called upon to reach agreement (Moscovici and Doise 1994: 1). Thus, theories of collective action draw a parallel distinction between *associational solidarity* where people are drawn into movements on the basis of their networks of affiliation that, in turn, depend based on the identification of shared occupational, economic or political interests; and *community ties* where movements act on behalf of 'natural' communities such as families, village or ethnic group (Melucci 1996: 291 in Anker 54-5).

It is suggested here that COPARMEX has deployed the problem of kidnapping as a 'frame' around which to mobilise consensus over public insecurity as a nationwide concern. The organization has had an ongoing dispute with the authorities over kidnapping statistics, which it claims are systematically underestimated (www.coparmex.org). COPARMEX keeps its own detailed database of kidnapping cases containing data about the worst-affected states, the number of kidnappings actually reported to the public authorities, types of kidnapping and fatalities resulting from it (www.coparmex.org). These statistics are regularly disseminated in COPARMEX press bulletins (see e.g. *El Universal* 20.10.02; *El Heraldo de México* 16.10.02; *El Noticiero* 15.10.02: further details in www.coparmex.org *Boletines de prensa*) and contested by the public authorities such as Chief of Police (*Policía Judicial*) and the Office of the Attorney General (PGJ) which issue counter-statements refuting COPARMEX's statistics (*En Contraste, Televisa*, 8.10.02; *El Universal* 3.10.02).

Whilst it is true that incidences of kidnapping have increased substantially since the early 1970s when it was virtually unheard of, to 732 cases in 2001, it is hardly a problem of epidemic proportions. Compared to other types of crime it is still relatively infrequent (13% of all crimes involve kidnapping according to ICESI's survey),²⁷ and its primary target group is business people.²⁸ Kidnappers²⁹ are, moreover, more likely to select their victims to maximise gains than in more arbitrary types of crime (Gaviria and Pagés 1999: 14).³⁰ Yet COPARMEX describes kidnapping as nothing less than 'one of the main problems facing Mexican society', referring to Mexico as a 'kidnapped society' (*sociedad secuestrada*), and claiming that the problem of kidnapping should be 'the State's highest priority' (www.coparmex.org). According to COPARMEX's director, Jorge Espinosa: 'Kidnapping is a crime that affects business people, but it has now transcended to affect the rest of society ... this situation requires special attention from society and from all levels of government ...' (Interview *De 1 a 3 690 FM*, 16.10.02). COPARMEX has also declared publically that the political will to solve this problem is lacking (*Milenio Diario*, 16.10.02.).

The focus on kidnapping illustrates how a comparatively small-scale problem affecting mainly the business community is being deployed to mobilise wider societal concerns about crime, citizen safety and public accountability. It also shows how consensus-based politics does not preclude the subtle imposition of certain agendas by powerful groups purportedly acting in the name of 'the people'. Far from being played out on an even playing field, consensus-based politics relies upon resources, such as information, that powerful groups are more likely to be able to mobilise. By engaging with the issue of public safety - around which it may be said that a broad tacit 'consent' already existed in Mexican society - and framed it as a particularly dramatic pressing problem requiring action, the issue is brought into far sharper focus than if it were left 'unmobilised' (Durkheim in Moscovici and Doise 1994: 4). Thus, in COPARMEX's anti-crime initiatives we can identify an attempt to form associational solidarity with other societal groups, based upon a

²⁷ With almost half of these comprising so-called 'express-kidnappings' or 'kidnappings light' whose primary aim is robbery, usually involving hi-jacking a person for up to several days and forcing them to withdraw money from cash machines.

²⁸ Although kidnappings also occur among people from other social sectors.

²⁹ Burglars are another example of more selective crime (Gaviria and Pagés 1999: 14).

³⁰ Interview with CCSCJP official, Morelos.

consensus that the organisation has actively mobilised around the problem of public insecurity, with kidnapping as the key framing device.

Governance and the struggle over moral authority in Mexico

COPARMEX's engagement with public safety issues can be better understood in the light of the above-mentioned changes in political representation and the dispersion of public authority, with private actors increasingly assuming public functions both in Mexico and in Latin America as a whole. The question remains as to why the organisation is going to such lengths to forge solidarity with civil society in the process. A look at relations between business elites and civil society can perhaps help to shed light on this. Business has an ambivalent image in Mexico today. Whilst on the one hand, the private sector is seen as more modern and dynamic and less corrupt than the public authorities, on the other, there is considerable scepticism among many sectors about business as a potentially positive social force. This is partly due to business having historically been seen as rather distant from the rest of society and from political life (Story 1990; Luna 1996). Post-revolutionary governments cultivated their support base in the popular classes, and business - or the bourgeoisie as it was then often despectively referred to in Mexico - was denied a positive role as a political subject though at the same time its economic interests were protected under the import substitution model (Puga 1993; Korzeniewicz 1994; Luna 1996).³¹ Underpinning this was the notion that capital, while necessary for development, could be kept under state control and harnessed to its interests (Bensabat Kleinberg 1999: 72). Businessmen were excluded from political activity, particularly as electoral candidates, with chambers of commerce and business associations never becoming incorporated into the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) as mass labour and peasant organisations were (Puga 1993: 50).

This distance turned into open hostility under the presidency of Luís Echeverría in the 1970s, when businessmen were branded 'reactionaries', 'bad Christians', and even enemies of the people's progress (Story 1990: 168). The business sector was characterised by a 'reactive' stance towards the State rather than by active participation in political decision-making processes, although it maintained both presence and influence within the State through various informal channels, such as personal ties between businessmen and politicians (Bensabat Kleinberg 1999: 73; Kay 2003).³² Effectively, however, the formal split between business and government meant a split between the seats of political and economic power that gradually became an 'integral part of the Mexican political system' (Puga 1993: 51). Added to this was the fact that business has, until fairly recently, been rather fragmented into ideologically dissimilar factions represented by various associations.³³

This began to change in the 1980s as globalisation, liberalisation and state reforms saw an increasing convergence between business and government interests. The business community, dissatisfied with their lack of political influence and with an economic climate hostile to their activities, played a key role in the political and economic transformations of the 1980s, helping to promote a 'mixed economy' model, and taking a more active part in politics through their participation in the PRI and PAN. During this period, relations between business and the government became more cordial, and based increasingly on negotiation rather than confrontation, with relations coming to be known as 'a strategic alliance' under the presidency of Salinas de Gortari from 1988-1994 (Luna 1992; Bensabat Kleinberg 1999: 71). Entry into NAFTA cemented

³¹ The government of Echeverría in particular, and to a lesser extent López Portilla, deployed an anti-business rhetoric that sought to align the state with nationalism, and the business community with capitalist exploitation (Puga 1993).

³² Puga (1993: 52-3) notes, certain historic agreements have enabled the business community to maintain an 'efficient' relationship with the State, e.g. the pact that underpinned the *Banco de México*, which officially defined the Mexican economy as 'mixed', and facilitated a number of alternative channels for business representation that did not require inclusion in the PRI or in government circles more generally.

³³ See Luna (1996) for an overview of these associations and their ideological affiliations.

this process (Bensagat Kleinberg 1999).

The public image of business has, however, suffered from the increasing convergence of business interests with the unpopular neoliberal economic model pursued by Mexican governments since the 1980s. This has been a focus for recent massive popular opposition that is hostile to the national business community whose interests are seen to converge with those of transnational financial elites (Puga 1993; Canclini 1999: 22). This opposition has taken the form of alliances among a plethora of groups, including academics, student and environmental organizations who have coalesced around specific events or issues that have provided a focal point for expression of a broader, anticapital agenda. (Velázquez 2003).³⁴ Indignation at the poverty and social exclusion seen as resulting from the neoliberal economic model has found increasing expression in such popular protests, of which the Zapatista movement in Chiapas is the best known. The Zapatistas articulate specific material rights and claims for indigenous rights and democratisation, but have also made sophisticated use of the Internet and other media to campaign for a broader anti-neoliberal, anti-free trade agenda (Yúdice 1998: 357; Chalmers *et al.* 1997). More recently, anti-capital/neoliberal discourses have also provided the framework for protests over, *inter alia*, the construction of the new airport in San Mateo Atenco, which was blocked by smallholders (*ejidatarios*) protesting against the expropriation of their land for what was seen as miserly compensation.³⁵ Again, a large number of other groups, including the Zapatistas and international organizations such as *Greenpeace* allied themselves to the *ejidatarios*' cause (Velázquez 2003).³⁶ The Atenco protest polarized debates on the economic development model followed by the PAN government, which was depicted by some participating groups as portraying the interests of 'the oligarchy and the bourgeoisie' as opposed to that of the 'exploited and forgotten people'.³⁷ Similar discourses have framed recent protests against the Plan Puebla-Panamá and the Free Trade Area

³⁴ As in other parts of Latin America, social mobilization was formerly typically organised along class lines (e.g. labour unions, peasant or urban squatter movements) seeking chiefly material benefits from the State, which represented these groups' main focus and interlocutor (Foweraker 1995: 29). Populism, corporatist structures and authoritarianism largely impeded broader alliances among groups with different interests, with civil society 'weak and deliberately divided' and frequently exhibiting authoritarian tendencies itself. Social movements were obliged to relate to the State in a strategic way in order to obtain scarce resources (Foweraker 1995: 26-28). Compared to European and US social movements, then, for whom state institutions were the *target* of groups wishing to implement change, in Latin America formal political structures of representation 'often embodied social or class interests in ways unparalleled in the democratic systems of advanced capitalist nations' (Davis 1989 in Foweraker 1995: 28).] The authoritarian legacy in Latin America has also meant that theoretical debates have been framed in terms of the divide between the state and civil society (Foweraker 1995: 6). In the current context of State withdrawal in Latin America, however, recent social mobilisation has tended to coalesce around issues that cut across traditional class or sectoral boundaries and often have a transnational character, for instance environmental, ethnic or anti-free trade movements that are not necessarily aimed exclusively at obtaining resources for disadvantaged sectors, but are ostensibly motivated by questions of identity (Bell 2002; Serbin 1997). These so-called 'new' social movements have been said to represent a new kind of democratic citizenship based on the claiming of social and political *rights* both from the State and other authorities rather than on resource mobilisation (Alvarez *et al.* 1998: 12; Foweraker 1995). This approach is inspired by the idea that in post-industrial societies, movements are motivated by a 'post-material' logic which leads them to seek symbolic goods rather than material goods (Foweraker 1995: 31). It has been argued that given the extent of poverty and exclusion in the region and, hence, the continuing and crucial importance of material needs, the application of 'new social movement' theory to Latin America, is inappropriate³⁴ (Foweraker 1995: 31). It has been suggested that identity- and strategy-based approaches are not mutually exclusive in the Latin American context, but, rather, that both the 'cultural and the purposive' dimensions of their activities should be taken into account (Scott 1991 in Foweraker 1995: 17). Thus, Cohen (1985 and 1992 in Foweraker 1995: 21) has argued that social movements can construct both 'personal and collective identity *and* instrumental and strategic activity'. This is arguably the case with respect to protests such as the San Mateo Atenco case.

³⁵ The initial government compensation offer to the *ejidatarios* was seven pesos per square metre.

³⁶ See e.g. *La Jornada* Sunday 29 September 2002 and *La Jornada* 23 November 2002 for reports on how the dissident teacher's union, the CNTE, and the Mexican Electricity Workers' Union (SME) joined forces with the smallholders of San Mateo Atenco in planning an 'anti-neoliberal front' to coordinate protests against the privatisation of the electricity industry, the construction of the new airport in San Mateo Atenco, and the reform of the education sector.

³⁷ Quote from *Rebelión*, the mouthpiece organization of the *Partido Democrático Popular Revolucionario* and the *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (quoted in Velázquez 2003: 15).

of the Americas (FTAA), due to come into effect in 2005.³⁸

This dissatisfaction and the mobilisations it has occasioned have articulated what has been seen as a growing disjuncture between the interests of the economic and political elites and the majority of the population (Canclini 1999: 22). The current PAN administration, with its historically prominent links to the business community (Hernández Rodríguez 1992 in Kay 2003: 295), its overly-enthusiastic use of the media coupled with its mediocre performance in the three years since it came to office has added to cynicism. As a recent newspaper article pointed out, the majority of Mexican society 'labours under the false idea that anyone who runs a business is doing nothing but exploiting their workers and cheating their customers, or at least trying to secure maximum profit in exchange for minimum effort' (Calderón 2002b).

COPARMEX makes no secret of the image problems suffered by business in Mexico, as the following citation from the organisation's home page shows:

In the face of public policies that restrict business activities and populist attitudes that declaim it; in the face of a type of propaganda and education that, while no longer so widespread, still perpetuate animosity and ignorance towards business, a question that we must address is: Who needs more, and better, businesses?³⁹

COPARMEX has been working energetically on several fronts to dispel this negative image (www.coparmex.org). Part of this endeavour has involved promoting an economic model based on a 'market economy with social responsibility and citizen participation' (www.coparmex.org), and a strong focus on improving employer-employee relations through a strategy called the 'New Labour Culture' (*Nueva Cultura Laboral*, henceforth NLC). The NLC is the result of collaboration between COPARMEX and the Mexican General Workers' Union (CTM: *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos*) (www.coparmex.org),⁴⁰ and is part of an effort to improve and strengthen relations between employers and workers in the context of globalisation and the ensuing changes in the process of production. The aim is to minimise social and labour unrest by promoting a culture of 'dialogue and consensus' between workers and employers, instead of an atmosphere of 'confrontation and class conflict' in the context of discussions over proposed reforms to the Labour Law (www.coparmex.org). Consensus-based decision-making is portrayed as a key instrument in promoting democracy, development, greater productivity and a harmonious employer-employee relationship:

Dialogue between workers and employers in the framework of a New Labour Culture is the result of the profound conviction that agreement and consensus-building are the

³⁸ Anti-capital and anti-trade liberalisation discourses in the region are also providing a focus for political unrest in other Latin American countries: riots in Paraguay in 2002 over opposition to free-market policies; protests in Peru in June 2002 against the privatisation of two power utilities; as well as in growing support for left-wing candidates who have refused to accept the US trade liberalisation agenda in the region (*San Francisco Chronicle*, August 7 2002), for instance, Brazil's left-wing President Lula Ignacio da Silva, whose government headed the G-21 group of countries refusing to accept the agricultural reform agenda at the Cancún trade talks (*The Economist*, 18-24 October 2003); and Evo Morales in Bolivia, who explicitly shuns the 'neo-colonialism' of the US in South America in favour of an anti-capitalist, local, indigenous and socialist agenda (*The Observer*, Sunday October 26, 2003).

³⁹ Spanish original: 'Una pregunta que debemos formularnos respecto a la empresa, ante las políticas públicas que la obstaculizan, ante las posiciones populistas que la denostan, ante una propaganda y una educación, ya no tan vigentes pero cuyos efectos de animadversión e ignorancia todavía permanecen es: ¿quién necesita más y mejores empresas?' (www.coparmex.org: 'Bienvenida').

⁴⁰ Concretely a document signed by the CTM and COPARMEX, called 'Principios de la nueva cultura laboral', which lays out details of the duties and obligations of employers and unions, respectively (coparmex.org.mx: 'Nueva Cultura Laboral'). This followed the drafting, in 1995, of a document entitled 'Por una Nueva Cultura Laboral. CTM-COPARMEX'.

ideal methods for overcoming any confrontation, contributing to consolidate a democratic culture and achieving the development of our country with social justice.⁴¹

In the light of the above, COPARMEX's attempts to highlight government deficiencies in the matter of public safety and at the same time to step into the gap themselves whilst aligning themselves with 'civil society' in umbrella organisations such as the CCSPJP may be seen as a counter-mobilisation designed to improve relations with civil society and to project a certain distancing from the government. Government officials are, for instance, explicitly barred from any real influence in the organisational structure of the CCSPJP: they may attend meetings but they cannot vote or influence the agenda in any meaningful way. The CCSPJP is, in fact, openly sceptical about government-directed attempts to foment social participation:

social participation directed by the government runs the risk of not being representative or appealing and may even be manipulated (www.consejociudadano.org.mx).

Government is depicted in CCSPJP documents as indifferent, ineffective, corrupt and out-of-touch, compared to local, civil society organisations that are characterised as a source of efficiency and integrity. For instance, when asked about possible overlap between their work and the government-directed *Ojo Ciudadano* citizen anti-crime programme launched in January 2001,⁴² CCSPJP officials interviewed reiterated the conviction that no project can work if imposed from above, only if it arises 'from below' (*abajo-arriba*). They articulated morality in terms of a vertical spatial dichotomy - top-down/bottom-up - and situated themselves as working alongside those 'below' in the matter of public safety. At the same time, however, the CCSPJP identifies a need for 'social leadership' (*liderazgo social*) of this civic participation - a leadership role it voluntarily assumes:

So that the CCSPJP achieves its objectives it is essential that leaders of social, business, civic and academic organisations participate, in order to facilitate the launching, coordination, synergy, rootedness and public presence of the CCSPJP's objectives ... (www.consejociudadano.org.mx)

COPARMEX is explicit about its intention to extend its mission far beyond the matter of public safety to a more far-reaching influence on society. In this connection, the organisation has come in the firing line recently over its increasing involvement in politics, specifically its attempts to influence the next elections to the Chamber of Deputies by devising a civic programme called 'Making the Congress Work'. This includes plans to launch a political awareness programme to promote 'A Reasonable Vote', including the distribution of leaflets describing 'the perfect deputy' aimed at 'raising awareness among business people and the citizenry about the type of men and women that Mexico needs in Congress 2003-2006'; public questionnaires applied by COPARMEX to candidates requesting their opinion on congressional reforms; the dissemination of information to citizens concerning the candidates so that they can 'freely choose who they want to vote for'; and electoral observation (Camacho 2003).⁴³

⁴¹ El diálogo entre trabajadores y empresarios hacia una Nueva Cultura Laboral es resultado de la profunda convicción de que la concertación y la construcción de consensos, constituyen los métodos idóneos para superar cualquier confrontación, contribuir a afianzar la cultura democrática y alcanzar el desarrollo de nuestro país, con justicia social' (wwwcoparmex.org 'Principios de la Nueva Cultura Laboral').

⁴² Following an agreement between the Ministry for Public Security, President Vicente Fox, municipal politicians, business and civic institutions. *Ojo Ciudadano* was designed to encourage citizen participation in and evaluation of, crime prevention, with particular emphasis on the monitoring by citizens of public organisms involved in security matters (e.g. police and judiciary), and encouraging the reporting of crimes.

⁴³ COPARMEX's overt involvement in electoral politics began in 1994, when the organisation acted as a civic electoral observer. Since then, it has carried out 'rapid vote counts' at the 1997 and 2000 elections; and in November 2002 COPARMEX's president, Jorge Espinosa, gave 'marks' to deputies according to their

The organisation is also explicit about its aim to bring about changes in social values through the CCSPJP:

It is necessary to identify educational and social organisations that are willing to collaborate through linking activities and curricula in a suitable way to the CCSPJP's own strategies...We are proposing that civic education in schools should include education in values, so that if we educate our children properly in primary school, if we give them sex education when they are in fourth or fifth year, we have to teach them to respect others, to teach them values like the importance of reporting crime (www.consejociudadano.org).

It is noteworthy here that COPARMEX's principles have roots in Catholic doctrine (Sánchez Navarro ?), and that it forms part of what Luna (1996: 111) refers to as the liberal conservative current in the business community, a group that supports market preeminence, liberal democracy and champions private initiative, family and religious values with a view to bringing about fundamental changes in Mexican civil society and culture. The organisation has described itself as a 'humanist organisation' since its inception in 1929, since which time it has transformed itself from an organisation struggling for legal recognition and facing hostility from both government and society, into one that currently has 36,000 members employing a total of over two million workers. From the 80s onwards, the organisation has become increasingly politicised, and has increasingly sought to establish itself as a leading figure engaged in 'social and moral issues', describing itself as 'an acknowledged moral authority' in Mexico today (www.coparmex.org '¿En qué creemos?'; Luna 1992: 198). Through the CCSPJP, COPARMEX appears to be seeking a leadership role by using the consensus it forges through its actions in the matter of public safety to disseminate a broader conservative agenda and values, influence electoral behaviour and reach out to an increasingly sceptical public.

Public safety is an issue that lends itself particularly well to attempts to forge broad societal consensus. First, it cuts across traditional social divides such as class since it appeals both to middle- and upper-class concerns about crime and popular sectors' demands for civil rights and frustration with police brutality and corruption (Yúdice 1998: 357). It is also an innately uncontroversial issue: few but the disturbed or professionally delinquent would argue against the need to combat it. The arbitrariness of crime also means that, much like terrorism, fear of it may far exceed any statistical probability of becoming involved in a violent incident, making crime more susceptible to dramatization than more predictable types of hazard. At the same time, it can be tackled in a far more visible way than, for instance, the poverty or unemployment of which it is arguably a symptom. Moreover, when crime strikes, its victims will usually evoke sympathy – regardless of their social origins. So, whereas crime may only constitute a real threat to a relatively small sector of the population, it has the potential to mobilise angst and a common front of indignation among a far wider group. Discourses of crime and risk therefore lend themselves readily to constructing cultural boundaries *vis à vis* 'risky' groups (Lupton 1999: 3), generating seductive dichotomies of good, responsible civic-minded citizens versus rogues.

Concluding reflections: Social responsibility or moral authority?

performance. The worst marks were given to deputies whose ideological standpoint lay furthest from that of COPARMEX (Camacho 2003).

Whether publically or privately instigated, initiatives to improve public safety in Mexico are necessary, something that is not in dispute in the paper. The paper does, however, seek to highlight some dangers that can arise when powerful groups use their resources in such a way as to mobilise popular consensus around issues, such as public safety, that are primarily of concern to themselves rather than necessarily the immediate priorities of those groups they seek to enlist. In the case discussed above, it is evident that COPARMEX's problematisation of crime *per se* risks drawing attention away from the poverty and social exclusion that actually lead to criminality. The symptom, crime – and notably kidnapping in this case – takes centre stage, monopolising resources and attention, while the causes remain unattended. In this way, crime becomes the 'scapegoat' for all kinds of other insecurities (Dammert and Malone 2003: 80). The consensus forged in this way may then be used to propagate far broader agendas and values espoused by powerful groups, for instance electoral influence, as mentioned above.

Thus, whilst COPARMEX's mobilisation of civil society groups around security constitutes an example of the 'multiplication of public arenas ... in which exclusion might be contested' (Alvarez *et al.* 1998: 19), arenas that undoubtedly have the potential to foment democratic governance in Mexican society, overly optimistic conclusions in this regard should be treated with caution. As Chalmers *et al.* (1997: 545) emphasise, 'associative networks ... are not inherently more democratic than the earlier forms, although they have the potential to be so' (1997: 546). The resources required to generate consensus around a given issue are inequitably distributed within Mexican society, with the risk that new spaces for claim-making opened up as a result of political opening and the shrinkage of the State are monopolised by other powerful groups, thus reproducing pre-existing social inequalities rather than attenuating them.

The paper also suggests that COPARMEX's initiatives in the matter of public safety form part of a counter-mobilising strategy to improve the image of business in a climate of popular hostility towards it. Its engagement in public security is a way of manifesting its 'good will' and responsible disposition *vis a vis* society. This is, however, problematic inasmuch as whilst engaging in public matters such as security, COPARMEX does not necessarily also assume the accountability that goes with them – indeed it takes pains to stress that accountability for failures to assure public safety remains very much a State prerogative. Precisely because its actions are voluntary, it benefits from a socially responsible image whilst avoiding 'blame' if its public safety initiatives prove unsuccessful. By deploying discourses of social participation and civic responsibility, responsibility for managing crime is, in fact, ultimately devolved to private institutions, e.g. the schools, civic associations and firms gathered together in the CCSPJPs – those perhaps least suited to the task.

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