



KYLE LIBBY is a third year Political Science major concentrating in Global Politics. His time at Cal Poly is spent participating in Model United Nations and working with the Institute of Advanced Technology and Public Policy on campus. Outside of campus, he volunteers at the food bank in downtown SLO and is also a licensed private pilot. After graduating, he hopes to get a job with the State Department. His inspiration for his paper developed from growing up in a law enforcement background, with his father being a detective with over 25 years' experience. This in combination with the recent media coverage focused on policing only deepened his interest in law enforcement. When Kyle looked more closely at other countries, he found many commonalities with emphasis on crime that deserved to be examined.

**COMPARATIVE POLICING: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF CAUSAL FACTORS
ON CRIME RATES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT IN CHINA, MEXICO,
AND RUSSIA.**

Kyle Libby

Abstract

Understanding how laws are adjudicated on a local level can be just as significant as understanding their origins. Crime rates and how they fluctuate relative to policing policies can reveal trends that can be traced back to social, economic, and cultural influences. When comparing China, Mexico, and Russia, we find that the similarities and differences can enlighten criminal behavior by contrasting statistics with national identity. When taken into the context of political development, effective policing policy could be extrapolated and identified.

To Protect and Serve

China, Mexico and Russia are constantly in the mainstream media, with evocative occurrences dominating contemporary discussion. In the United States, reports of police abuse fill the news cycle consistently. Regardless of how one may feel about each report individually, it is an undeniable symptom

that a problem exists with the culture on either side of the badge. Some think that the problem is institutional, but perhaps culture is the causal link to public safety instead. A comparative look at the police forces in other countries may shed some light. Mexico is constantly wracked by drug cartel violence and general unrest. Russia, for most intents and purposes, appears to have a relatively sound internal situation, yet an aggressive foreign strategy. China is thrusting itself onto the world stage, proclaiming its adequacy and controlling its domestic involvement. Policy implementation and adjudication at the lowest level, known as law enforcement, is clearly executed better in China than in Russia, which is then better than Mexico. Why is it that Mexico has experienced an institutional failure, while Russia has been able to maintain a relatively ethical hold on its police force, and China has been able to drastically reduce its crime? The answer lies in the political development of the states, namely how their power dynamics have changed recently. In Mexico, where bribes and exploitation of power are the norm, the development of the country has led to the same systemic corruption that is being fought in Russia. China uses corruption to its advantage. Mexico's system generates a higher per capita murder rate than Russia, as well as other key crime statistics. The ability to combat these criminal numbers lies within the strong authoritarian power of the contemporary Russian government. The Russians are attempting to mitigate the same problems that Mexico has encountered because they have the ability to reform their police force.

Some may argue that a country's ability to fight crime simply relies on a high police force per capita. After all, Mexico has 371.2 police officers per 100,000 people compared to Russia's 522.0, as of 2013. In Mexico, there were 18.9 murders per 100,000 people in 2013, compared to the 9.0 ratio of Russia.¹ However, China possesses 120 police officers per 100,000 in 2007, with a 1.2 ratio of the same metric. That same ratio was 2.0 in 2002, and 0.8 in 2012.² An argument can be made that the problem of ineffective policing is not due to an inefficiency of resources, but that it is tied to the citizenry and to the development of the country. Even though these countries

¹ United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. n.d. *UNODC Statistics*. Accessed November 2, 2015. <https://data.unodc.org/>.

² Xinhua News Agency. 2007. *China to Unify Police Identity Card from Jan. 1*. January 1. Accessed November 30, 2015.

have recently taken a departure from authoritarian governments, except for China, which has only just departed from an ‘authoritarian’ economy, the Russian social and political culture stands out as a more stable, law-abiding society compared to Mexico. Mexican political development is characterized by three concepts relevant to law enforcement: unstable change, a mix of interest articulation, and a weak society and weak state. Compared to Russian political development, which consists of a strong society and state and relatively strong interest articulation, (political changes in Russian history are somewhat stable, though not always) Mexico opens a window for self-interested parties to manipulate the system. Chinese political development is focused on a hierarchical structure of society, where one must ‘keep his/her station’. Previously, Russian interest articulation was heavily “...regulated by the Communist Party, and there could be no open, active competition among political parties or interest groups for support...”³ This level of control is similar to how China’s dual-rule system operates today. More recently, after perestroika and glasnost, as well as the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians have been more vocal about their ideologies, while still advocating for strong state control. Russian activists now believe “... [that] institutionalism of state power is a prerequisite for civil society development...”⁴ This allows for stronger participation in the political, and thus law making process. “... ‘[T]rust in the [national] political system’ has the strongest influence on police attitudes in nine Latin American countries... with citizens... [not expressing confidence] in the less well-performing democrac[y]... of Mexico.”⁵ Mexico is hindered by their lack of trust in a system that they cannot participate in fully. Why should they continue to vote, rally, and caucus if someone is going to sweep in by force and declare themselves the winner? “The...(in) formal rules of municipal governance [in Mexico] result in a lack of horizontal

³ Remington, Thomas. n.d. *Politics in Russia*. 7. New York: Routledge. Accessed November 2, 2015.

⁴ Taylor, Brian D. 2006. “Law Enforcement and Civil Society in Russia.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2): 193-213. Accessed November 2, 2015.

⁵ Walker, Lee Demetrius, and Richard Waterman W. 2008. “Elections as Focusing Events: Explaining Attitudes toward the Police and the Government in Comparative Perspective.” *Law & Society Review* 42 (2): 337-366.

accountability and reform continuity.”⁶ This distrust has generated a caustic political outlook that cannot be sustained long-term.

China complicates this argument. Their authoritarian government is effectively accepted by the citizenry and social harmony is a core tenet of Chinese culture. While one may argue that having a strong central power is what keeps Chinese crime in check (crime meaning homicide rates in this case, obviously there is a broad range of crimes to be compared, but for the purpose of this paper, homicides will be used as a general indicator) asserting that it is both an increase in economic prowess and overall Chinese culture that maintains the low crime rates. The core beliefs of Confucianism necessitate a rule of morality and benevolence. In contrast to Russian and Mexican cultural history, which typically generates a more violent sociological response. While Chinese political history has hardly been pacifistic, Confucius created a now ingrained idea of a harmonious hierarchy and social unity that brings the Chinese people to behave more peacefully in their daily interaction with one another compared to what we see in Russia and Mexico. One is expected to live with the good of the society in mind, not in a self-serving way that commonly breeds crime. This leads to the argument that moral obligations could be the source of the differences in crime rates, not because of institutional guidance, but because of the public cultural psyche.

Corruption further hinders law enforcement in all areas. In Mexico the police officers on the ground are part of an institution of corruption, one that is focused on a self-centered mindset, not rule of law. This again stems from a mistrust in the government; that one should take any and all precautions to help oneself, because the political system is unreliable. While Russian police forces have historically used extortion and bribery in their enforcement, the economy of Russia has grown, allowing for economically supported change, as well as less incentive for the Russian officers to line their own pockets. In 2011, the Russian government overhauled its police force by firing 170,000 allegedly corrupt officers and raising the remaining officers' salaries.⁷ Aimed

⁶ Pansters, Wil G. 2013. “Reviewed Work: Police Reform in Mexico. Informal Politics and the Challenge of Institutional Change by Daniel M. Sabet.” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* (Centrum voor Studie en Documentatie van Latijns Amerika (CEDLA)) 95: 128-131.

⁷ Russia Today. 2011. “Russia’s rebranded police initiated with major layoffs.” *Russia Today*. March 1. Accessed November 2, 2015.

at combating corruption, this reform was sweeping in its efforts to address the chronic enforcement issues identified by the government. This can only happen in a country with strong interest articulation. When the citizens are dissatisfied, they voice their opinions to elected officials or through their votes; which, in Russia's case, created a need for police reform. It is no coincidence that this is happening now in the post-Cold War era. The now strong, reorganized variant of Russian law enforcement is a sharp contrast from the decentralized and unregulated policing of Mexican law enforcement.

Yet, China has comparatively weak interest articulation compared to Russia, as the political agenda is tightly controlled by the Communist party. However, this grip on policy allows for effective change to be implemented quickly. As such, gun restrictions, regulations, and penal codes can adapt to a changing social landscape faster than it can in Russia and Mexico, which holds as another reason for low crime rates in China. To expand, China's flourishing economy causes Russia's to pale in comparison. The corruption that persists in Chinese governance and enforcement can allow economic growth to continue and the authoritarian hold on policy making to subsist. This can then cycle back into itself, as "the survival of a relatively strong state, in turn, can help to prevent the worst types of corruption from dominating society and market activities."⁸ Policing to ensure social harmony is a key aspect of law enforcement in China. In 1991 (China stopped reporting police staffing in 1992), 34.9 percent of The People's Police were "social order police" and only 20.4 percent of officers were traffic or criminal police.⁹ While one could argue the semantics of the different types of police officers, it is clear that law enforcement is used just as much as a social tool as it is a peace one.

However, after Mexico's PRI party was removed from presidential power in 2000, how come Mexican democratization did not improve conditions in law enforcement? According to Daniel Sabet, the current political culture in Mexico creates "...a lack of horizontal accountability between the municipal president and the city council and... a lack of reform continuity across administrations... these two factors generate systematic obstacles to

⁸ Sun, Yan. 1999. "Reform, State, and Corruption: Is Corruption Less Destructive in China than in Russia?" *Comparative Politics* 32 (1): 1-20.

⁹ Wong, Kam C. 2002. "Policing in the People's Republic of China: The Road to Reform in the 1990s." *The British Journal of Criminology* 42 (2): 281-316.

institutional change.”¹⁰ These accountability problems find their beginnings in the cultural disassociation that the Mexican people have with government, seated in a history full of revolution, dissent, and a strong caudillo system that exists throughout Latin America. While the Russians have had almost 30 years removed from their authoritative ruling party, the Mexicans are still dealing with the recent repercussions of a paradigm shift, as well as internal violence from organized crime. China, more authoritarian than either of the other two countries, has been capable of a tranquil domestic existence, thanks to the cultural upbringing of the population. Therefore, differences in policing originate from cultural and system wide conflicts, not simply numbers.

By connecting the examples explored, we can conclude that Mexico’s police inefficacy is tied to the developmental shortcomings, identified as a lack of political involvement on the local level and little incentive to improve, thanks to the government’s impotence. Furthermore, Russia’s marked improvement in the field of law enforcement is linked to its increase in interest articulation, as well as its stronger horizontal accountability and civic involvement. Until the Mexican government and nation are able to address the blockages in the system by changing the culture of policing and aversion towards rule of law, organized crime will continue to flourish, with Mexico as its casualty. China has been successful in maintaining a safe social society, while contributing to the development of a civil one. Are the costs to democracy, despite political legitimacy worth it? For now, the Chinese people agree. Despite arguably similar ideologies in authoritarian governments, the political development of China, Russia, and Mexico has led to different outcomes in policy enforcement.

¹⁰ Sabet, Daniel M. 2012. *Police Reform in Mexico: Informal Politics and the Challenge of Institutional Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.