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The State in Private Security: Examining Mexico City’s Complementary Police

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This study investigates the participation of the Mexico City government in the private security market through the Policía Complementaria (Complementary Police), a grouping of public police forces that provide protection to clients in exchange for a fee. By providing these forces with special powers and advantages, the state can outcompete traditional private security firms and profit handsomely. The state’s encroachment into the market for security raises concerns about democracy, inequality, and policing. Moreover, it challenges traditional conceptions about the relationship between the state and private security.

Key Words: Police, Private Security, Mexico City, Mexico
While walking down a busy commercial center in Mexico City, you are likely to see uniformed guards wielding large weapons in front of malls and stores. Considering the enormous boom in private security throughout Latin America, this should not be an uncommon site. However, the difference in the Mexico City case is that these guards are not employees of private companies but are actually members of the Mexico City police department. Mexico City and a number of Mexican states are unique in that they have public police forces that are legally permitted and often mandated to offer their services to private clients. Through the creation of these specialized policing units, these state governments have officially entered the private security market. Why would the state offer private protection when its role is to provide security as a public good? In short, to profit off the burgeoning market for security. By according special powers and built in advantages to these forces, the state can manipulate the private security market in a way that allows their specialized units to outcompete traditional private security firms. Consequently, state governments can bolster their coffers with these forces’ earnings. In the Mexican case, therefore, the state is encroaching on the private security market’s traditional domain and thus challenging conceptions about the relationship between states and the private security sector. Challenging past conceptions about this relationship, this example shows us how the rise of private security does not automatically challenge state power. It demonstrates both the state’s outsized role in shaping the private security market and its ability to benefit from it. Moreover, through this encroachment, Mexican states risk upending public expectations about the proper role of the state in regard to security provision by legally permitting undemocratic policing practices.

Classic definitions of the state as the monopoly on the legitimate use of force are increasingly being challenged by a variety of non-state actors in Latin America – the region with
the highest murder rate in the world – thus stimulating an emphasis on crime and policing as an emerging area of research in the region.¹ Much research emphasizes the duality of policing in Latin America between public and private entities.² Others emphasize the informal plurality of varying types of security providers, including state actors,³ criminal organizations,⁴ private security firms,⁵ citizen-led police forces,⁶ and vigilante groups.⁷ This phenomenon of private actors encroaching on the state’s responsibilities is not only specific to Latin America. According to Clunan and Trinkunas, we now live in an era of “softened sovereignty,” which has stimulated the expansion of ungoverned spaces over the past few decades. Over the past forty years, globalization and the imposition of neoliberalism as the hegemonic global economic order have loosened states’ control over their national resources and economic policies. As a result, private actors now compete with states over the provision of goods and services that were formerly solely within the purview of the state.⁸ Nevertheless, while studies have started to investigate the intersection between public and private, either of the top-down state regulation of the private industry or the bottom-up capture by criminal actors, few studies have examined instances in which the state is directly participating in the market for security.

In this paper, I examine the Mexican state’s presence in the security market with a special emphasis on the Mexico City case to highlight how states can take advantage of and benefit from the boom in private security provision, thus emphasizing the outsized role states play in shaping the security field. I begin by chronicling the development of the scholarship on private security and highlight the lack of studies focusing on the Global South and hybrid public-private police forces. Second, I provide a short description of hybrid police forces in Mexico with a particular focus on the history and make-up of Mexico City’s auxiliary and banking police forces. Third, I describe the various advantages accorded to these forces that allow them to take advantage of the
security market. Fourth, I examine the dangers these hybrid police forces pose to public expectations about public policing. I finish by calling for future research on this subject and raise questions that demand further investigation.

My findings are based on the thirteen months of field work I undertook in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey from 2013 - 2014. I used qualitative research methods to collect my data, including semi-structured interviews, observation, and archival research. I conducted forty-five interviews with representatives from the public and private security field, including private security company owners, managers, consultants, and association representatives, police department executives and communications directors, state, city, and federal private security regulators, representatives of security-oriented NGOs, journalists, and academics. I also attended security expositions in my three case study cities as well as security meetings organized by state officials and meetings held between representatives of the private security industry and the Mexico City government. Finally, I examined major Mexican newspapers and publications, including El Universal, Milenio, La Reforma, La Jornada, El Proceso, Reporte Indigo, and El Informador, and undertook archival research in various university, city, state, and national archives in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey.

**Theorizing Private Security**

Since the post-World War II era, the private security industry has grown rapidly throughout the world. In 2017, the estimated worth of the global security market was estimated to be $180 billion and projected to rise to $240 billion by this year. Industry growth has been significant in both the Global North and South. Approximately 20 million registered private security guards operate worldwide. According to a recent report in the Guardian, “more than 40 countries – including the US, China, Canada, Australia and the UK – have more workers hired to protect
specific people, places and things than police officers with a mandate to protect the public at large.  

The continually expanding private security industry across the globe has forced scholars to re-conceptualize the shifting nature of the state and its responsibilities in regard to ensuring its citizens’ safety and security. The literature for understanding the security sector has gone through different stages of development as it has grappled with the growing presence of private security provision throughout the world. Overall, there are three dominant perspectives on the nature of private policing and its relationship to the state: 1) the monopolist perspective; 2) the plural policing perspective; and 3) the anchored pluralism perspective.

The monopolist perspective is the most traditional view that emerged from Hobbes and today strictly adheres to Weber’s definition of the state as a “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” Thus, state agencies are viewed as the only legitimate providers of security. Proponents of this view argue that the state should be the sole provider of security. In other words, they see the relationship between public and private as a zero-sum relationship in this realm. As a result, they lament the growth of private security because of the assumption that it naturally threatens and erodes state power. For example, Davis argues that states lose one of their key functions when citizens increasingly rely on non-state actors for their security needs. The state’s legitimacy is brought into question if it is no longer relied upon to fulfill one of its core responsibilities - protecting its population from physical threats. This approach to understanding security provision represents the dominant viewpoint towards security matters in politics and society. As White explains, “Hobbes and other monopoly theorists, together with countless state actors over the past three centuries, have collectively helped to make the idea of a state
monopoly over security provision one of the most pervasive political norms in the world today.”

With the continued expansion of private security across the globe, the plural policing approach emerged as a counter to the monopolist view. Many of these studies attempt to explain the growth of private security and, unlike monopolists, do not view the relationship between public and private as a zero-sum dyad. According to the pluralist policing perspective, “shifts in supply and demand have served to equalize the agency of state and private security actors within the post-war sector.” As a result, no actor possesses a monopoly over security provision and the boundaries between state and non-state security provision have been blurred. The primary originators of this viewpoint are Shearing and Stenning who developed the “nodal governance” model. It calls for transcending “the state-centered view of governance,” which they see as ignoring the appearance and increasing power of “private governments”. This approach focuses on “nodes,” which are entities with “some institutional form…. [that] must have sufficient stability and structure to enable the mobilization of resources, mentalities and technologies over time.” A plurality of nodes interacts with one another and no individual node is able to realize complete governance on its own. Security has, therefore, moved “beyond the state” as all security actors, public and private, are placed on the same plane, competing and allying with one another to create new “security assemblages” that produce order. Moreover, the creation of these new security assemblages does not imply a natural weakening of the state, but simply a new form of the state that may be stronger or weaker depending on the circumstances. These scholars, therefore, call for replacing the term “policing” with “security governance” in order to recognize security provision as both the function of state and non-state actors.
In order to bring the state back into focus, Loader and Walker created the anchored pluralism model as a conceptual category situated between the monopolist and nodal governance models. This approach accepts the idea that policing has become pluralized but argues that the state still holds precedence over other security actors and “should remain the anchor of collective security provision”. According to these scholars, the ingrained nature of the monopolist viewpoint in politics and society has granted public police forces a “symbolic power” that goes beyond “a reasoned calculation of what the police can accomplish by way of social protection...when people think of crime and order they reach as it were instinctively for the police.” Using case studies from various countries, recent scholars have further emphasized the outsized role played by the state in shaping the contours of the private security industry within their borders. States actions, such as passing private security related legislation, imposing specific economic policies, and recognizing and establishing formal and informal ties with the industry, play a major role in determining the size, shape, and composition of the private security sector. Nevertheless, while studies on private security are slowly expanding to more parts of the world, the theoretical development of the field has tended to focus on a core set of countries: The United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. As Singh and Light point out:

the private policing literature exhibits the ‘heterogeneity of causal relations’ problem, meaning private policing growth outside developed democracies may involve previously untheorized factors....When social scientists draw largely from a homogeneous set of countries, they may overlook how local settings influence causal relations and overgeneralize.

Consequently, many studies tend to highlight the ways in which state actions have facilitated the growth and profitability of the private security market since this has been the outcome in the countries most frequently studied. Focusing on a case a less studied case in the Global South, my
study follows the anchored pluralist notion that the state plays an outsized role in shaping the security sector, thus challenging the monopolist view that private security naturally weakens the power of the state and the nodal governance view that private and public private security should be considered on the same plane. I push the anchored pluralist model further by providing a new perspective on the role of the state in security by exhibiting how state actions not only play a large role in shaping the contours of the private security sector, but also how states can use their power to take advantage of the private security market to benefit themselves and profit handsomely from it. Consequently, we can see how states can integrate the logic of neoliberalism to another level by not only facilitating the privatization and commodification of security – widely considered the state’s most essential service – through outsourcing and regulation, but also by posing as a private actor by competing in and manipulating the market for security to benefit and profit from it. Moreover, it highlights the stealth privatization of a public service by the state and the potential incompatibility of profit-driven hybrid public-private police forces and democratic policing.

**Hybrid Policing in Mexico**

Mexico City and a number of Mexican states possess hybrid police forces, which Rogers defines as “a range of organizations whose formal status and operating territories cut across the public-private divide.” In the Mexican case, these forces operate as government or semi-government entities providing security for hire. The size, comportment, and legality of these forces varies widely. In many states, such as Jalisco, they are relatively small and under regulated forces operating essentially as private security companies and sometimes serving as private armies for business owners. In other cases, these forces operate in legal gray zones serving at the whim of high-level state officials providing slush funds to their political operations. The most notorious of
these cases is the State of Mexico’s *Cuerpos de Seguridad Auxiliares del Estado de México* (CUSAEM), the largest hybrid force in the country whose shadowy legal status allows it to operate with impunity and little oversight. The force has been connected to high level murder cases, drug trafficking organizations, and campaign intimidation tactics. It massively expanded its purview during Enrique Peña Nieto’s – who also served as the Governor of the State of Mexico - time as President of Mexico from 2012-2018. The Mexico City government has two hybrid forces, the *Policía Auxiliar* (PA), and the *Policía Bancaria e Industrial* (PBI). Together they comprise the *Policía Complementaria* (Complementary Police) and serve alongside a branch of the *Policía Preventiva* and under the *Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana de la Ciudad de México* (SSC). I focus on the *Policía Complementaria* because it is one of the largest forces in the country and it operates in a much more public capacity than other state hybrid forces, thus representing the most official profit-driven state intervention in the private security market.

In the policing literature, hybridity is still a relatively new and developing concept. It was first introduced by Johnston to understand policing agencies that are not purely public or private. Much of the research on hybridity, however, focuses on the multiplicity of actors involved in policing and the various public-private partnerships between various state and non-state security actors. In simplistic terms, “an agency is deemed public if it is part of the state or government, funded out of taxation, and offers universal or monopolistic provision. If services are provided by a for-profit organization via the market and involve contracts and competition, they are private.” These are the two ends of the spectrum and many policing agencies land on a continuum somewhere in between. Nevertheless, as Nokleberg demonstrates in his study of aviation and maritime policing in Norway, there is a “dividing line of public and private” despite
claims by some plural policing scholars that the dichotomy between the two concepts has “faded”.

Governments across the world have been gradually privatizing policing functions in a variety of ways. Adapting and expanding on Johnston’s original typology, Button shows how the privatization of policing comes in five broad forms: 1) load shedding; 2) new load avoidance; 3) contracting out; 4) franchising; and 5) embracing sector management practices. Load shedding occurs when certain services and functions of the police are passed to the private sector. Load shedding is usually connected to budget cuts to police departments, which forces them to abandon certain responsibilities due to their high costs. New load avoidance occurs when new policing services, such as cybercrime detection, are needed, but the police are not equipped to provide them, thus the private sector steps in to fill the gap. Contracting out is the act of contracting out public services, such as prison management, to private providers. Franchising is a type of moonlighting where off-duty police officers are hired to provide protection to businesses and organizations while retaining their police powers. The *Policía Complementaria* fit within Button’s final category: embracing sector management practices. This category entails the implementation of managerialism in police departments, accepting sponsorship deals for additional income, and charging fees for services. Ayling and Shearing refer to franchising and the practice of police departments charging fees for services as “user-pays policing”. User-pays policing normally serves as a form of government vending in which the government produces a service, which in this case is policing and security, and the consumer arranges to purchase the service directly as opposed to paying for it through taxes. Much of the research on user-pays policing tends to focus on police moonlighting, which is “performing police duties when off duty,” however, privately paid policing is a much broader phenomenon that
encompasses a variety of public – private configurations and includes both on and-off services that can be one-off or more permanent arrangements. User-pays policing generally serves a number of purposes, including providing police departments and individual officers an opportunity to garner additional income, providing specialized services to specific industries, or serving as a way for police departments to recoup losses from providing special services, such as making stranded hikers pay the cost of the police rescue mission, or paying for the replacement of resources when police must “perform a service in light of other demands”.

The main difference between the Policía Complementaria and these other user-pays policing schemes is that the Policía Complementaria exist primarily to garner large profits. The force is not designed to provide specialized services to a specific industry, recoup financial losses, or serve as source of secondary income for police officers. As multiple Mexican government officials and security professionals attest, the force is a cash cow for the government. For example, when I asked the Policía Auxiliar’s Director of Public Information why the PA and PBI exist, he explained,

“Because in the end it brings in a very good income for the Federal District’s coffers. We are like a business but we don’t report any of the profits. Everything goes directly to the Secretary of Finances. We don’t handle any of it. It’s a good quantity of money so you can say that the Complimentary Police are profitable, profitable for the Federal District because they authorize a budget for us and they recuperate the budget and make back more. They can double it or make even more. So that's also why the government has this type of Complimentary Police, because it will also complement us to obtain an income for Federal District government for these services” (author’s translation).

A retired Mexico police officer and security consultant with experience working with the PA put it more simply: The PA and PBI exist “because they generate income. They generate income.”

Another security consultant explained that these forces exist because they’re “a money maker.”

Moreover, the Commissioner of Mexico’s Servicio de Proteccion pointed out that the PBI and
PA were created so that “the government could charge for services that it previously could not charge for. That was the true motive” (author’s translation). As a result, the state is an active participant in the private security market that is incentivized to use its special powers to give the Policía Complementaria a competitive edge against private security firms. As a representative for the PBI stated, “In the end, we are like a private company” (author’s translation).

While the scholarship on private security and plural policing in both the Global North and South is continually expanding, the research on user-pays policing is predominantly focused on the Global North and, even more specifically, on Anglo-American countries. For example, Ayling and Shearing provide a rich and detailed overview of the many different forms of user-pays policing across the world, but besides a brief mention of a case in Indonesia, all the other references to these types of practices are from Canada, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Besides some notable exceptions few scholars have directly studied users-pay policing in the Global South where police – private arrangements vary from those in the Global North and more greatly impact young democracies confronting high levels of inequality and alarming rates of crime and violence rates.

Moreover, despite their ubiquitous presence in the capital, scholars have paid scant attention to Mexico City’s Policía Complementaria and almost nothing has been published about other privately paid police forces in the country. Little has been written about Mexico City’s Policía Complementaria beyond a study analyzing accountability mechanisms for the PBI in comparative context with privately paid policing units in New York and Johannesburg and brief references to the PBI and PA in relation to the Mexico City police force as a whole or private security provision in the city. Yet the Policía Complementaria make up a large portion
of the Mexico City police force, earn millions of dollars per year for the city, and significantly impact the relationship between the state and the citizenry as well as the private security sector.

**History**

The *Policía Bancaria* was founded in 1941 by Colonel Arturo Godínez Reyes in collaboration with the Association of Mexican Bankers as a force specifically tasked with protecting Mexican banks. Although recognized by the government, the banking police would be funded by its clients. Therefore, it was originally structured like other forces, such as the British Transport Police and the Western Australian Police’s Gold Stealing Detection Unit, that create a “more permanent user-pays arrangement” providing specialized services to one specific industry or economic sector that foots the bill. Nevertheless, the *Policía Bancaria* soon expanded its original mandate. The force started with only twenty-one employees; however, Mexico’s economic boom in the 1940s caused massive industrial growth in Mexico City. The widespread construction of industrial and commercial installations prompted a greater demand for protective services. The force recruited an additional 5,000 employees during this period and began contracting out its services to a variety of industrial and commercial clients similar. The force, thus began to operate more like a typical private security firm and its name was extended from the *Policía Bancaria* to the *Policía Bancaria e Industrial* (PBI), which is what it still goes by today.

The *Policía Auxiliar* (PA) originated from private groups of watchmen that began to appear in Mexico City in the 1920s. These watchmen were similar to modern day private security guards, except that as opposed to being employees of a company, they were hired individually or as part of a union or association. By 1937, there were over 1,400 independent watchmen operating in the city. In 1941, these various watchmen’s units were combined and
recognized as the *Policía Auxiliar* by President Manuel Ávila Camacho. Incorporating watchmen into the state initially served as an effort to monopolize the state’s control over the legitimate use of force. Incorporation could both neutralize the watchmen as a potential threat to the state’s legitimacy as the appropriate provider of protection within the city and could bolster the size, strength, and quality of the city’s security forces, thus improving the state’s capacity. The PBI were recognized in the same decree. Despite their recognition, the PA and PBI still maintained a high level of autonomy. There was little oversight or regulation of either forces’ activities as they were enmeshed in the Mexican police’s large network of corruption. The PA became particularly well-known for having poorly trained, underequipped, and underpaid units controlled by police commanders who pocketed all their profits.61 Therefore, soon after incorporation, the forces had become a healthy source of income for police and state officials.

In 1984, the government of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado passed a sweeping new law restructuring the Mexico City police forces. Within this law the PBI and the PA were officially integrated into the Mexico City’s police department in an effort to better regulate, professionalize, and modernize the two forces as well as improve their coordination with the city’s other policing units. The PBI and PA were integrated as members of the newly created *Policía Complementaria* under the direction and leadership of the *Secretaría de Seguridad Pública del Distrito Federal* (SSPDF), the law enforcement agency charged with maintaining safety and public order in Mexico City. Although housed under the title *Policía Complementaria*, the two forces remained separate from each other. They were mandated to not only continue their regular practice of working as contractors providing protective services for public and private clients, but also to assist the *Policía Preventiva* in cases of disasters and massive events, such as protests and demonstrations. Additionally, all of their earnings were now
directed to the Mexico City Treasury. Nevertheless, most of these forces’ earnings, 98% in the case of the PA, were returned to their commanders to be doled out for salaries and equipment, thus they still possessed a high level of autonomy. It was not until the early 2000s when the Mexico City government took complete control over the forces’ finances that the PA and PBI were fully incorporated into the SSPDF, which changed its name to the *Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana de la Ciudad de Mexico* (SSC) in 2018. Subsequently, the PA and PBI now subsist on a fixed budget annually, created and voted upon by the Mexico City legislature. Ultimately, by integrating these forces into the city’s public security apparatus and taking complete control of their resources, the Mexico City government became a major player in the private security market.

**Participating in Mexico’s Private Security Market**

Mexico has a growing and thriving private security industry. An estimated 450,000 private security guards work in Mexico and approximately 8,500 companies operate in the country today – close to 4,000 of which are officially registered with the Mexican government. The industry has grown so large that it currently represents 1.6 percent of the nation’s GDP and growth remains steady. According to the *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Privada*, a Mexican private security association, the country’s formal private security industry is worth close to $1.5 billion – a figure that is “180% higher than in 2012 and growing every year, even without accounting for the private security firms operating in the informal sector.” Currently, the industry grows at a steady pace of 3-4% per year. The industry consists of a wide variety of firms that range from highly professional multinational companies to low-level unregulated firms derisively labeled “patitos”.

The Mexico City government has taken advantage of this booming industry by reaping major profits through the PA and PBI’s participation in this market. In Mexico City’s 2020 budget, the government estimated that the PBI would earn 5 billion pesos (~ $230 million USD) and the PA 7.2 billion (~ $330 million USD). The PBI has approximately 15,448 employees while the PA has 28,032 employees. Combined together as the *Policía Complimentaria*, they are the largest police force in Mexico City. The PBI and PA are both headquartered in offices miles from the SSC. While their uniforms are different from those of the *Policía Preventiva*, they share many of same general characteristics and are not very distinguishable to the untrained eye. PBI employees wear dark blue uniforms adorned with red strings. They also wear red and dark blue hats and red and black insignias on their arms. The red on their hats, insignias, and strings differentiates them from regular Mexico City police officers and their uniforms are slightly darker in color. PA officers share the same navy blue uniforms as the *Policía Preventiva* except “Policía Auxiliar” is written across their backs instead of “Policía Preventiva”. They also wear light blue insignias on their upper arms and some wear light blue hats while others wear the same navy blue hats as members of the *Policía Preventiva*.

Members of the PBI and PAC can be contracted out to public and private entities. There are few restrictions regarding who these forces can protect. Most PBI and PA contracts are with private companies, government offices and agencies, and public institutions. 90 percent of the PBI’s contracts are with private entities, while the PA splits its contracts evenly between the public and private sector. These units can also be contracted out to individual neighborhoods and even entire delegations where they assist with or perform the duties of the *Policía Preventiva*. Government officials and individual citizens may also hire PBI or PA agents to serve as their
Representatives from the PBI and PA both admitted to being in a friendly competition with one another for prestige and recognition from the SSPDF and the public. The state, by virtue of being the state, has been able to enhance the capacity of the PBI and PA to outcompete their wholly private counterparts. More specifically, the Mexican City government has endowed the Policía Complementaria with special powers, advanced training, and a firearms license, which gives them an edge over most private security firms.

**Special Powers**

As official members of the SSC, the PA and PBI are directly linked to the government’s public security apparatus. They are equipped with radios in which they can coordinate their activities with the Policía Preventiva and Policía de Investigación and call for back up when necessary, a point highlighted to me by a security consultant as a major advantage that private security providers do not possess. Moreover, as part of the Policía Preventiva, the PA and PBI are bestowed with the right to detain suspects and present them to the ministerial authorities. Private security guards are not. They must contact the police to have a suspect detained. Private security guards do not possess a direct link to the police and in general have very little contact with them beyond the exchange of statistics and information. Informal relationships may exist between private security companies - usually those run by ex-police officers - and members of the local police forces.

Moreover, the PBI and PA’s status as members of the police department gives them a special legitimacy and symbolic power that private security providers lack. Police and private security scholars have shown how government police forces tend to hold a special precedence over non-state security actors. According to Goldsmith this tendency holds in both the Global
North and Global South. Reiner coined the term “police fetishism” to describe “the ideological assumption that the police are a functional prerequisite of social order so that without a police force chaos would ensue.” Loader further argues that the police have a “symbolic power” in which citizens immediately associate the institution with crime fighting, law, and order. The police, therefore, “start from a winning position” while private security providers are in a losing position due to the greater inherent cultural attraction towards public security over private. Citizens, therefore, tend to be predisposed towards accepting the activities of the police, which facilitates and legitimizes the agency of state actors while simultaneously curtailing and de-legitimizing the agency of private security actors. While the Mexican police have an extremely poor reputation, evidence still exists of a sense of police fetishism throughout Mexico City and across socioeconomic levels.

Training

PA and PBI officers receive approximately four weeks of training before they go out into the field and they are mandated to continually take more training courses afterwards. Private security guards are expected to receive approximately 80 hours of training. Nevertheless, providing proper training is costly for companies, especially small ones, so it is often bypassed or highly curtailed. Moreover, the field of private security has extremely high employee turnover rates and firms often provide their employees with short-term contracts that may last only a few weeks or months. Consequently, companies are even more reluctant to spend training costs on them. As a result, many guards only receive a basic one to two-hour lesson, if that, and are then sent into the field. Thus, it can be assumed that the average PBI or PA officer is better trained than the average private security guard.

Firearms
The SSC possesses a firearms license and thus PA and PBI agents are authorized to carry guns. While PA agents tend to carry pistols, it is common to see members of the PBI wielding sub-machine guns. Private security companies are permitted to obtain a firearms license; however, the process for obtaining one is complicated, costly, and involves a number of risks, thus many companies are dissuaded from legally obtaining one. Companies must apply to the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA) for a firearms license as well as purchase all their weapons and bullets from the institution. In general, receiving approval for a license involves a lot of paperwork, time, and money (Security Company Owner 2014). The cost for a weapons license for a private security company is $34,094 pesos (~$1,853 USD), which is more than the cost of a license to operate a private security firm in Mexico City. Once granted, a weapons license must be revalidated annually for the same cost as the initial registration fee listed. Moreover, claims have been made that it is nearly impossible for a company to obtain a weapons license if its owner does not have political connections. The difficulty in obtaining a license is evident in the fact that there exists a thriving black market in which individuals with contacts within SEDENA acquire and then sell off their weapons licenses. One of these individuals is quoted as saying that “It’s easier to win the lottery than obtain a license” (translated from Spanish). In general, receiving approval for a license involves a lot of paperwork and time. Private security companies are also required to rent or construct a shooting range and obtain weapons training certification from all of its employees, both costly endeavors. Additionally, criminals have been known to target private security guards for their weapons, robbing them of their guns while ignoring the property being guarded. Many private security company owners thus worry about the risk of receiving harsh sanctions from SEDENA if their employees misuse or lose their weapons.
Due to these barriers, it often is not worth it for companies to pursue a firearms license. Therefore, it is relatively rare to see private security guards carrying firearms, unless they are transporting goods in armored cars. As result, approximately 15 percent of all private security companies possess a firearms license. While there are pros and cons to carrying weapons, in general, the deterrence factor for a criminal and the presumed benefit to the private sector client is higher if confronted by a guard carrying a firearm versus one who is not. As one security consultant explained, “It is more of a visible deterrent when they [criminals] see a guy with a gun in his holster. Therefore, the PA and PBI have a distinct advantage over the majority of private security companies in their ability to deter crimes from occurring in and around the spaces they protect.

Moreover, the forces receive more scrutiny and oversight from the government and civil society than private security companies and are thus more accountable to the public. Accountability is important to ensuring to the public that an institution is properly performing its activities and upholding its responsibilities. The higher accountability of Mexico City’s Complimentary Police force serves as another important reason for its preferred status compared to that of private security companies.

**Transparency**

The police in Mexico are a historically opaque institution. Nevertheless, the level of transparency in the PA and PBI is still much higher than that of the average private security company. The PA and PBI both have websites that provide detailed information about their budgets, staff, salaries, and operations. They also have hotlines and email addresses that one can use to ask questions or file complaints. Private security companies, on the other hand, tend to offer little information about themselves to the public. Some operate out of unmarked buildings and others that are
marked have highly rigid controls over who can access them and who cannot. Finding information about the staff, earnings, and internal structure of a company can be difficult, if not impossible. They can also be hostile to outsiders.\textsuperscript{95}

\textit{Oversight}

Additionally, there is much more government and civil society vigilance over police activities compared to that of private security companies. Government watchdog organizations, such as the Mexico City Human Rights Commission, receive and publicize complaints about the actions of public officials, including those about PBI and PA agents. The Commission uses these complaints to pressure the government to seek justice as well as improve its policies regarding police activities. The Commission, however, only receives complaints regarding public activities and thus private companies are exempt from their oversight. Complaints about the actions of private security guards must be sent to the Mexico City Public Security Secretariat’s Private Security Office and are then handled internally. Additionally, non-governmental organizations, such as \textit{Mexicanos Unidos Contra la Delincuencia} and \textit{Causa en Comun} work with the police and oversee their activities in an attempt to improve them. These organizations, along with most other security-oriented civil society organizations and think tanks, such as \textit{INSYDE}, pay little attention to the activities of private security companies.\textsuperscript{96} Private security companies are thus subject to much less public scrutiny than the PBI and PA.

Furthermore, only thirteen employees in the SSC are authorized to verify private security companies’ registration and then oversee their operations to make sure they are complying with regulations. Only three out of the thirteen of the individuals are officially denoted as verifiers.\textsuperscript{97} Having so few verifiers makes the oversight process very difficult considering the hundreds of private security companies operating and attempting to register in the capital. Therefore, the
oversight that does occur for registered companies is minimal. Oversight generally amounts to
the government making sure a company’s registration papers are all accounted for and then
checking in once a year to demand its annual fees. Actual site visits are rare. Most importantly,
the majority of private security companies in Mexico are not registered. According to some
estimates, over 80 percent of private security companies are not regulated in the country.

Overall, it is clear that Policía Complementaria possess a number of advantages over private
security companies in both the sense that they are better equipped and trained, more closely
linked to public security, and have higher quality personnel while also being more transparent
and accountable to the public for their actions. Moreover, representatives from the PA and PBI
openly admit that these advantages give them an edge over their private competitors.

Nevertheless, while the Policía Complementaria may possess superior capabilities and are
subject to greater exterior controls than traditional private security companies, their existence
subverts the traditional responsibility of a democratic state regarding the provision of security.

Hybridity and Policing in a Democratic Society

The state’s participation in the market for security has led to criticism of the Policía
Complementaria by representatives from the private security industry. For example, Alexander
Desfassiaux, the former president of the Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Privada and Julio Cesar
Garcia Marin, the president of the Sociedad Mexicana de Guardaespaldas, have both
complained to the press that the Mexico City government is running the PBI like a business
when constitutionally it should be providing its policing services to the public free of charge.
This argument highlights a critical point that demonstrates why these hybrid forces are
problematic entities because their existence subverts the traditional responsibility of a democratic
state to provide equal policing services to all of its citizens and serves as a form of stealth privatization of a public service.

Broadly speaking, hybridity can be defined as “a degree of integration or fusion of elements from different systems.” As Jackson and Albrecht point out, these systems tend to operate based on competing logics. In the case of the Policía Complimentaria, we see the systems of public and private policing fused together despite their clashing logics. In regard to public policing, equal protection for all members of a society is a key element that democratic states should try to achieve. As Gary Marx argues, “Democratic societies strive for equal law enforcement. Citizens are to be treated in equivalent ways. Police are trained to behave in a universalistic fashion.” Building on this point, Birbeck and Gabaldón argue that “democratic policing is primarily understood as a service to the universal citizen, based on a commitment to human rights (original authors’ emphasis). The public police, therefore, should be accountable to and at the service of all the people. Private security companies, on the other hand, inherently provide services only to their paying clients, thus the portion of society that cannot afford to pay for those services receive less protection. A number of scholars have expressed concern that the rapidly expanding private security industry is antithetical to democratic governance because it promotes the unequal provision of protective services. For example, Thorburn explains, “Private security is highly partial toward those who are paying its fees” whereas the “police are – or, at least, ought to be – impartial as between the parties to a dispute.” Sklansky further argues that “the more fundamental problem is that private police are not even nominally committed, as public police are, to the egalitarian project of protecting all citizens from private violence; the defining characteristic of private policing is its ‘client-driven mandate.’” As members of the Mexico City public security apparatus, the PBI and PA represent the Mexico
City government, yet they are legally certified to offer their services to private clients. Consequently, the government is offering its protective services to those who can afford it, thus formalizing and legalizing the unequal provision of security by the state. Moreover, the PA and PBI’s hybrid standing makes it unclear who they are serving. Are they accountable to the general public or their paying clients?

For Mexico, specifically, the existence of these public-private police forces further exacerbates the country’s long history of unequal public provision of security. As Markus-Michael Muller argues, from its founding, the Mexican state developed and consolidated through a process of negotiation between the central state and local power holders. In order to secure loyalty and support, the central state has tolerated and allowed local strongmen to appropriate public resources for private purposes, act with impunity, and use extralegal force. During the Porfiriato of the late 1800s and early 1900s, “public security became identified with political stability.” Since then, the police have been primarily used as a force tasked with subduing and repressing political threats. In 1929, informal negotiations between the center and local strongmen were institutionalized with the creation of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) bringing everyone together under the umbrella of one party. In hopes of quelling unrest and consolidating the central state, local strongmen often received tacit permission to utilize public resources, including the police, for their own personal gain. Continuing practices of the past, the central state allowed local strongmen broad autonomy in terms of their use of public resources, including the police, as long as they continued to support the party. During the long reign of the PRI until approximately 2000, local powerholders maintained the ability to use the police for private purposes in exchange for loyalty to the party.
This process has continued to the present day despite the onset of democratization at the turn of the 21st century. The actors controlling the police today tend to have weaker party ties due to the fragmentation of power and the erosion of PRI-dominated patron-client networks since democratization. Efforts to reform the police have brought some successes, but “fail to redress spreading, blatant institutional corruption and impunity.” In sum, “the central parameters of Mexican policing…are its politicized, negotiated, informal, and appropriable nature.” Despite efforts to curb these central parameters of the police, the Mexico City government has simultaneously formalized and normalized the appropriable nature of the police through the creation and maintenance of the PA and the PBI. Not only are the police now informally appropriated for private means by public and private actors, but the existence of these hybrid police forces allows private citizens and companies to legally appropriate the private services of public security actors, thus further eroding one of the core elements of a democratic state: the equal provision of public security.

Conclusion

This study has shown how the Mexico City government along with a number of other Mexican states have inserted themselves into the market for security through the creation of hybrid police forces whose officers serve as public servants providing protection to private clients. In regard to the Mexico City case, by endowing these forces with special powers, enhanced training, and access to firearms, the city’s hybrid forces are able to outcompete private security firms and reap large profits for the city treasury. Nevertheless, while lucrative, the government’s participation in the security market has served as a stealth privatization of public policing and an exacerbation of unequal security provision in the city, thus undermining the state’s democratic responsibility towards its citizenry.
Following and furthering the anchored pluralist model, this study exhibits how states not only play an important role in shaping the private security sector but also how they can insert themselves into this market and manipulate it for their own benefit. Therefore, we can see how states are not naturally threatened by the emergence of private security nor are they operating on the same plane as non-state actors since their special powers give them an advantage over private competitors. I hope this study will help to stimulate more research on hybrid police forces and other ways in which states use the private security market to their advantage. Following the call of Singh and Light, more comparative analyses of private policing and studies of cases beyond the typical ones are necessary to gain a fuller picture of the subject and explore the impacts of these types of hybrid police units on democracy. Important questions for future research include: How does the existence of hybrid police forces affect citizens’ views towards the police, their government, and democracy? How and why do governments insert themselves into the private security sector in other countries? Do these hybrid forces symbolize a capitulation to the power of the private security market and an abandonment of adherence to Weber’s definition of the state? Or do these acts serve as a re-assertion of state power? Do we need to re-conceptualize the state’s security related responsibilities towards its citizens in a world where the size of the private security industry far exceeds that of states’ public security apparatuses? Should we change our definition of the state as a result? Answers to these and similar questions can further the still emerging field of private security studies and enhance our understanding of policing and state-society relations under the current neoliberal order.

End Notes


Ibid.


Ibid. 35.


22 Muller, “Private Security and the State in Latin America,” 132.
29 The federal government also entered the private security sphere in 2009 with the creation of the Servicio de Protección Federal. The force operated throughout the country and was designed to protect the national good by providing security to industrial sites, installations, and other areas deemed high priority sites by the federal government. The force provided security to both public and private clients and generated at least $1.2 billion pesos (~$650 million USD) annually. Nevertheless, in July 2015, the Commissioner of the Servicio de Protección Federal, declared that the force’s aim was not to act like a business and compete with private security companies. As a result, beginning in January 2016 the force started offering services exclusively to public institutions. Gustavo Castillo García, “Protección Federal ya no competirá con empresas de seguridad privada,” La Jornada, July 8, 2015, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/07/08/politica/007n2pol (accessed August 15, 2015); Commissioner of Servicio de Protección Federal, author interview. January 24, 2014.
32 The Policía Preventiva is the largest police force in Mexico City. They operate like beat cops — patrolling the streets, preventing crimes from occurring, and maintaining order.
36 Ibid.
37 Johnston, The Rebirth of Private Policing, 58-70

41 Not all cases of user-pays policing are examples of government vending. For example, search and rescue missions would not qualify as a form of government vending, because the consumer is not the arranger of the service. A case in which individuals must pay the fees of the state is “charging the consumer directly for the government service, for which the government is the arranger,” Emanuel S. Savas, *Privatization and Public-Private Partnerships* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000): 67.

42 For a detailed literature review on police moonlighting see Lippert and Walby, “Police Moonlighting Revisited.

43 Ayling and Shearing, “Taking Care of Business,” 36.

44 Director of Public Communications at *Policia Auxiliar* (PA), author interview, November 30, 2013

45 Retired Mexican police officer and security consultant, author interview, October 2, 2013.

46 American security consultant, author interview, November 29, 2013.

47 Commissioner of *Servicio de Proteccion Federal*.

48 Director of Institutional Communication at *Policia Bancaria e Industrial* (PBI), author interview, November 26, 2013.

49 I use the terms private security and private policing interchangeably throughout this article. Private security and private policing are a subtype of plural policing that comprises “those self-employed individuals and privately funded business entities and organizations providing security-related services to specific clientele for a fee, for the individual or entity that retains or employs them, or for themselves, in order to protect their persons, private property, or interests from various hazards.” William C. Cunningham, John Strauchs and Clifford W. Van Meter, *Private Security Trends 1970–2000: The Hallcrest Report II*. (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1990): 124.


52 Ayling and Shearing, “Taking Care of Business,” 36.


56 Muller, “Private Security and the State in Latin America,” 146-148.

57 Director of Institutional Communication at Policía Bancaria e Industrial (PBI).


61 Former Administrator at Policía Auxiliar (PA), author interview, October 7, 2014; Director at Policía Auxiliar (PA), author interview, April 29. 2014; Davis, “Policing and Populism in the Cardenas and Echeverria Administrations.”


63 Former Administrator at (PA)

64 Director of Institutional Communication at PBI; Director of Public Communications at PA.


70 Ibid.

71 Director of Institutional Communication at PBI; Director of Public Communications at PA; Director of Policía Auxiliar (PA), author interview, April 29. 2014.

72 The Policía de Investigación are charged with investigating crimes and arresting and prosecuting suspects.

73 Security Consultant, author interview, April 29 and December 9, 2014.

74 Retired Police Officer, author interview, October 2, 2013; Representative at Agrupaciones de Seguridad Unidas Por un México Estable (ASUME). author interview, April 2, 2014

75 Security Consultant.


78 Loader, “Policing and the Social,” 3

79 Despite the prevalence of police fetishism in modern societies, there are cases where the police do not possess greater legitimacy than non-state actors. Scholars have shown that in certain contexts, such as where the police are extremely weak and ineffective or have a history of targeting and abusing specific groups in society, communities have greater trust in non-security providers than the state police. See Rod K. Brunson, “Police Don’t Like Black People: African-American Young Men’s Accumulated Police Experiences.” Criminology and Public Policy 6, no. 1 (2007): 71-102. Robyn Spencer, The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016): 35-60. Rowland, “Local Responses to Public Insecurity in


81 Government Official at PBI; Director of Public Communications at PA. Azaola’s anthropological study of Mexican police officers questions the quality of this training. Elena Azaola, Imagen y autoimagen de la Policía de la Ciudad de Mexico. (Mexico City: Alter Libros 2006).


84 Perret, “Privatization Without Regulation,” 168.

85 Security Consultant; Commissioner of Servicio de Protección Federal.


87 Security Consultant.


89 Security Company Manager [1].

90 Representative at ASUME.

91 Commissioner of Servicio de Protección Federal.

92 Security Company Manager [2], author interview, December 9, 2013.

93 American security consultant.

94 Director of Institutional Communication at PBI; Director of Public Communications at PA.

95 For example, in my attempts to learn more information about a major private security association in Mexico City, I was bluntly told by a human resources representative that all of their information is confidential besides what can be found on their web-site. In another example, I was told by the head of a private security association that I could attend one of their morning meetings if I paid them between $7,500 to $15,000 pesos (~ $570 to $1,140 USD).

96 Employee at Mexicanos Unidos Contra la Delincuencia, author interview, November 20, 2014; Employee at INSYDE, author interview, February 20, 2014.


Muller, Public Security in the Negotiated State, 29-65.
Ibid, 50.
The party was originally founded as the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), but later had its name changed in 1938 to the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) and then had it changed again in 1946 to what is still its present day name, the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI).
Muller, Public Security in the Negotiated State, 29-65
Davis, “Undermining the Rule of Law.”
Muller, Public Security in the Negotiated State, 65.
Singh and Light, “Constraints on the Growth of Private Policing.”