

12.1. MOBILIZATION IN MÉXICO 2012: **THE MOVEMENT FOR PEACE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE**

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Introduction

2011's *Observatorio Mexico* entry started with the lament of more than 50,000 violent deaths during President Felipe Calderón's administration, which began in December, 2006. Tragically, this number climbed to more than 70,000² by the end of 2012, with an additional approximately 26,000³ missing by government estimates. This jump in violent deaths and disappearances, which most analysts attribute to a combination of Calderon's militarized policies attacking criminal organizations involved in the drug trade and these organizations' own turf battles, has commanded the attention of citizens, movements and organizations and caused a shift in mobilization towards demands for civil and political rights and away from socio-economic grievances. Within this mobilization for civil and political rights, 2012 saw spikes in coordinated action centered on the right to security and the demand for accountability in the presidential, congressional and numerous state elections.

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² Exact numbers vary, but this is the estimate of the Attorney General of Peña Nieto's regime released in 2013. <http://elcomercio.pe/actualidad/1511471/noticia-mexico-lucha-antidrogas-ha-dejado-70000-muertos-ultimos-seis-anos>

³ The government figure, as of February 2013, was 26,122. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-21597033>

The prospect of returning power to the PRI, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, who ruled Mexico as a “state party” for 71 years, sparked the student-inspired movement, *Somos 132*. The Mexico City-based *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, or the *MPJD*), which emerged onto the national stage in 2011 after poet Javier Sicilia’s son was murdered in March of that year, continued to demand peace and justice from federal government officials in 2012, while smaller groups of those affected directly by the violence continued to form largely at the state level with varying levels of coordination with national and pre-existing groups.

This article will focus mainly on the citizen response to violence, and on the effect of the MPJD in Mexican states, especially in two northern states, where the violence has taken a heavy toll. After a brief exploration of *Somos 132*’s activities, I will discuss three of the MPJD’s central activities of 2012: the dialogues held with the presidential candidates, the Ley de Víctimas (Victims’ Law), and the Caravan to the United States. I spend the rest of this article exploring the local organizing in response to violence in two neighboring states hit hard by the violence: Nuevo León and Coahuila, and I specifically look at how the MPJD has effected these efforts.

Using concepts from social movements and contentious politics literature, I make the argument that the MPJD’s most important work has been its role in the construction of “victims of violence” as a salient political identity, the corresponding recognition of this identity by both national and state-level officials, and the empowering and legitimizing impact this identity shift has had on local groups as they struggle to hold the state accountable for investigating the disappearances and deaths of their family members.

Before proceeding, it is important to discuss the term and concept of “victim.” In Mexico during the past six years, family members of those murdered or disappeared during the most recent wave of violence often identify both themselves and their murdered or disappeared loved ones simply as “*víctimas*,” or victims. While the term “victim” has been challenged by some organizations wanting to emphasize the active and empowered role that these family

members have taken, the term has been embraced and, I would argue, re-appropriated by many of the family members of the murdered and disappeared. This re-appropriation has become a way of asserting their common identity (regardless of the perpetrator of the crime or the circumstances of the violence perpetrated against their loved one), common demands for justice, and in asserting that they are victims of crimes – as opposed to complicit in the crimes as the government’s dominant narrative claims. Because of this, I also use the term “victim” in this article to interchangeably refer to both family members of those murdered or disappeared, as well as those who were themselves murdered or disappeared.

1) Political Context: Electoral Activism, Varying Responses to Violence

A) Electoral Activism

As Mexico approached the 2012 presidential elections, there was a sense of resignation among many. The electoral removal of the PRI from office in 2000 was the crowning achievement that many social movements had been working for over the course of decades. After widespread outrage following the 1988 elections, where left-wing Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was widely perceived to have been robbed of the presidency in an election fraught with voter fraud, most mobilization in Mexico centered on achieving clean elections in which it would be possible to democratically remove the PRI from power. When Vicente Fox of the conservative PAN, *Partido Acción Nacional*, won the presidency in 2000, many Mexicans believed that democracy had finally been achieved.

After 12 years of “democratic” PAN rule, however, most were disillusioned with electoral politics. People were disappointed with the lackluster rule of Fox (2000 – 2006), and horrified by the violence sparked by Felipe Calderon’s (end of 2006 – 2012) “War on Drugs.” While economically Mexico grew slowly in the first years of the so-called democratic transition following the 2000 elections, the 2008 world recession hit Mexico hard, exacerbating the enormous gap between rich and poor that already existed. While most Mexicans agreed that the rule of the PAN had been a disappointment, going into the 2012 elections there was no clear idea of what the path to prosperity and peace might be. Many Mexicans reluctantly thought that returning power to the PRI might at least slow down the

violence they had seen during the previous six year, while others, especially those who had participated in the many movements that worked so hard to end the PRI's rule, couldn't imagine how willingly bringing back the party of one-party rule could represent progress.

Against this backdrop of violence and disillusionment, the *Yo Soy 132* movement was born. The movement emerged after a May 11th, 2012 event at the Iberoamerican University in Mexico City, where PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto's response to demonstrating college students was to accuse them of being paid by outside agitators⁴. The coalition of students, social movement organizations and concerned citizens making up the *Yo Soy 132* movement held several large rallies before the July 1st election⁵, calling Televisa⁶ to task for its biased coverage, and demanding the democratization of the presidential debate process.

On July 1st, 2012 Peña Nieto won the Mexican presidency decisively with 39% of the vote, almost seven points ahead of left wing PRD, *Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, candidate Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador (and well ahead of PAN candidate Josefina Vázquez Mota). Lopez Obrador had run for president in 2006 and finished in a near tie with Calderón. His supporters had occupied the streets in Mexico City for months after the disputed 2006 elections. After Peña Nieto's election, however, there was not mass mobilization. *Yo Soy 132* distanced itself from the marches called by two-time failed candidate, and despite Lopez Obrador's call for the invalidation of the election due to vote buying and fraud by the PRI, the transition to power for Peña Nieto went relatively smoothly.

⁴ After Peña Nieto's accusations, 131 students from the Iberoamerican University made a video showing their university id cards, demonstrating that their identities and protest were authentic. "Yo Soy 132," or, I am the 132nd, became the shorthand for expressing solidarity and agreement with the students' critique and demands.

⁵ The MPJD and Sicilia repeatedly voiced their support for the *Yo Soy 132* movement, and participated in its mobilizations. <http://www.sdnoticias.com/nacional/2012/05/23/llega-javier-sicilia-a-la-marchayosoy132>.

⁶ Televisa is the "largest media company in the Spanish-speaking world" and controls more than half of the television stations in Mexico. They were accused publicly by the leading UK newspaper The Guardian of favoring Peña Nieto in their coverage, and this critique was picked up by Somos 132. This accusation spawned the following public resolution between the Guardian and Televisa: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/gnm-press-office/interactive/press-releases-gnm-statement-february-2013>

B) Response to violence

Prior to 2006, talking about violence in Mexico nearly always referred to state-sponsored violence. The 1968 Tlateloco massacre; violence against the Zapatistas in the 1990s including the merciless Acteal massacre of women and children; Peña Nieto's 2006 brutality against the peaceful Atenco protests; the police practice of torture to gain confessions: the PRI-led state was the source of violence, and the rightful target of human rights groups. National and international human rights groups arose in response to the many state-perpetrated atrocities and became well-established institutions with the capacity to document and prosecute human rights cases in national and international courts.

Since 2006⁷, however, the material author of violence has become much less clear. Oaxacan intellectual and organizer Gustavo Esteva uses "*lodo*," mud, as an analogy to talk about violence in Mexico. For Esteva, the state and organized crime/narcos are no longer separate entities – they have mixed, erasing the independent properties of each, like earth and water turning into mud. This "mud" blurs any clear sense of who is responsible for violence⁸.

This muddiness, along with the skyrocketing overall levels of violence, has shifted

the nature of organizing against violence in terms of its mode of contention, the actors and identity of those organizing, and those organizations involved. With the shift away from focusing on the state as a target of mobilization, there has emerged a broader understanding of repressive forces in both the state and societal sphere. While the MPJD is perhaps the best known of the new actors and organizations, many others have emerged both in coordination with and separately from the MPJD. What follows is this author's effort to group the various citizen-led efforts against violence. I attempt to describe trends in

⁷ The violence in Ciudad Juarez is an exception. In particular, femicides, the phenomena of homicides of young women, documented since 1993, is a pre-2006 example of violence without a clear material author that sparked a different kind of organizing than previously seen in Mexico's human rights community.

⁸ Recording of Esteva's comments during a September, 2011 forum in Oaxaca, Mexico.

organizing among Mexican civil society as a response to violence, but do not claim that these categories are mutually exclusive or exhaustive:

Established human rights organizations: These organizations were established in response to the aforementioned state violence. Many are based in Mexico City, though many states have at least one “human rights center” as well. Historically, they adopted a fairly strict definition of “human rights violation.” They rigorously document cases and publish their results, participate in international organizations such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, and usually choose to focus their advocacy around a small number of strategic or paradigmatic cases where the state is the clear material author of the crime. Those with sufficient financial resources pursue judicial results for these cases at the state, national and international level, and often have close relationships with international human rights organizations⁹.

Local movements and organizations of those directly affected by violence: In many states affected by the violence, victims of similar types of crimes, most often the disappearance or murder of loved ones, have come together. Their work usually revolves around two central axes: (1) providing and/or seeking psycho-social support; and (2) pursuing justice and encouraging the state to investigate crimes. These groups vary in their links to established local human rights centers and faith-based organizations, but often form under the auspices of one of these organizations who have expertise in providing both psychological and legal support. They have mostly emerged since 2006, often are not officially registered with the state as “Civil Associations” and their members generally come from all different economic classes, but especially the poor. They often stage small protests at state entities demanding justice, and they usually do not receive a high level of sustained media attention, though the local media periodically covers their protest activities.

Groups of victims that arise around a specific tragedy: after horrific

⁹ This description and the analysis that follows draws from the following article: <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/winter-2012/organized-crime-human-rights-issue>

tragedies, often with multiple victims, groups of family members and sometimes other advocates have formed. These cases include (but are of course not limited to)

- Casino Royale: Aug, 2011, Monterrey: 52 people died in casino fire set by organized crime;
- Tec de Monterrey: March, 2010, Monterrey: 2 students killed by army which then disguised them as members of organized crime;
- Villas de Salvácar: Jan, 2010, Ciudad Juarez: 18 high school students killed at a party by an unknown group;
- and the case of Fernando Martí: July, 2008, Mexico City: 14-year old son of businessman kidnapped and killed with the involvement of police.

In each of these terrible cases, these victims have been granted direct dialogue with high-level government officials, including the president. These cases receive extensive local and national media coverage, and attention from elected officials who promise judicial attention to the cases. Victims are most often middle or upper class, and their demands range from justice in their specific cases, to broader calls for policy change and improved security and justice. They usually don't collaborate closely with other human rights or victims' organizations¹⁰.

2) The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity: Brokering scale shift

The MPJD does not clearly fit into one of the above categories. Rather, I argue that Javier Sicilia and the MPJD are classic social movement entrepreneurs who have worked hard to bridge the (often previously unconnected) actors cited above under a common identity. In social movement literature, this is known as *brokering*, or “information transfers that depend on the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites” (Tarrow and McAdam, 2003: 9). This

¹⁰ The organized reactions to the killing of two groups of people are not reflected in these categories: migrants (largely from Central America) and journalists. Migrant shelters and organized Central American mothers have raised awareness of the violence against migrants, by all accounts one of the most vulnerable and hardest-hit groups. Mexico continues to be one of the most violent places for journalists in the world, with at least 74 journalists killed since 2006 according to the State Human Rights Commission. Mobilization against violence against journalists has largely been taken up by existing human rights groups.

brokering is done with the goal of building a bigger, stronger movement, known as *scale shift*, “a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious action leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001: 331).

The killing of Javier Sicilia’s son, a middle class student, is similar in many ways to other horrific cases of killing I discussed in the previous section. However, Sicilia’s position as a respected poet, social commentator and ally of the left, his alliance with established human rights advocates and organizations, and his personal identification with those who had lived through terrible tragedy, positioned Sicilia and the MPJD to broker the scale shift between these previously disconnected or, in many cases, barely articulated groups. When tens of thousands of people joined Sicilia to march to Mexico’s central square in May, 2011, the brokering potential of Sicilia was proved, and the MPJD was born. Using the rallying call *Estamos hasta la madre* (roughly translated, “We have had it with this violence”), the MPJD succeeded in connecting many of the groups cited in the previous section with each other, and also with numerous Mexicans who had not previously participated in social movement organizations.

As part of scale shift, or movement building, the MPJD concentrated on bridging the claims and identities among all those directly affected by the violence (people murdered or disappeared and their family members) under the identity of *víctimas* (victims)¹¹. The MPJD sought to accomplish this by physically traversing most of the country in two nationwide caravans in June and September of 2011, providing local stages where family members of those killed or disappeared who were active in the MPJD would join local people with similar stories of loved ones who had been murdered or disappeared, and they would alternate turns speaking, each giving “victim testimony.” By sharing the stage with the unemployed mother whose son had been disappeared while working for the army, the vendor whose son was disappeared while working as a street

¹¹ Social movement literature discussion of the concepts of meta-narrative or master frame are also useful in analyzing this phenomena. See McAdam, 1996: 41-43; Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986 for a discussion of framing.

performer and the wealthy couple whose son had been disappeared from his car after being stopped at an army check-point, Sicilia and the MPJD successfully changed “the number and level of coordinated contentious action leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” – the definition of scale shift. While any claims to measure the success of this shift objectively are difficult, in interviews with state officials, members of the media and the *víctimas* themselves, nearly all (with the notable exception of some state officials) speak of changing their perception of those affected by violence since 2011. While not everyone agrees it was the MPJD that was the spark for this change – some cite local organizations, some certain press outlets – I argue here that at the very least the MPJD was an important part of brokering and legitimizing the *víctima* identity.

In this section, I discuss some of the steps taken by the MPJD to solidify recognition, or “certify” this identity in 2012¹². By certification I refer to the “validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external parties, especially authorities” (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001). In 2011, Sicilia himself, along with national government authorities (including two public meetings between the MPJD and President Calderón) provided important certification of this identity shift through their various high-level meetings. In 2012, through the codification of *víctimas* into law and the participation of victims in dialogues with presidential candidates, I argue that MPJD solidified the advances it made in 2011 in the construction and certification of “victims of violence” as a salient political identity. Additionally, the MPJD decided to build on its success in brokering and scale shift by launching an ambitious effort at brokerage between the United States and Mexico: the MPJD led a caravan to the United States in an effort to link the victims of militarized drug and border in the US with victims of the violence in Mexico, and worked to assemble a bi-national coalition capable of changing wrong-headed US policies.

A) Candidate Dialogues: Consolidation of Certification

¹² It should be noted that while the MPJD did not engage in mass mobilization in 2012, a committed core group of activists – organized into as many as 17 commissions, or working groups - and organizations supported this work. The institutional home for these efforts were CENCOS, the National Center for Communications, and Serapaz.

On May 27th, 2012, a month before Mexico's presidential elections, the MPJD brought together the four presidential candidates at Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City. Their goal was to place the drug war, the violence it had generated and the lack of justice for victims at the center of the electoral agenda, and to ask the candidates to commit to end the violence if they were elected. Sicilia, together with family members of people killed or disappeared during Calderón's administration, national press, and each candidate and their staff, sat down at a table together and for 90 minutes spoke of the way forward for Mexico.

Sicilia did not mince words: he opened each dialogue by faulting the candidates for failing to eliminate corrupt and compromised politicians from their ranks, for failing to make democratic reforms, and most importantly, for failing to move forward a united agenda that would save the country from the violence brought on by Calderon's drug war¹³. Then, he called politicians individually to task for their failings, and family members of people who had been victims of each candidate's policies gave their testimony.

To PAN candidate Josefina Vázquez Mota, Sicilia reproached her for being the representative of the party that after 12 years of rule "has left the inheritance of a huge cemetery as a homeland." She responded by asking for forgiveness to all those affected by the violence of her predecessors. To Peña Nieto, the PRI candidate who would go on to win the presidency, he criticized the PRI's corrupt "imperial" past, condemned Peña Nieto for his actions in Atenco when he was governor of the State of Mexico, and questioned his dismissal of the students at the IberoAmerican University, a nod to the *Yo Soy 132* movement. Peña Nieto acknowledged an "excessive" use of force in Atenco, but refused to make any promises to end the war¹⁴.

¹³ Javier Sicilia's speech to the candidates: <http://movimientoporlapaz.mx/es/2012/05/28/javier-sicilia-habla-a-los-candidatos-y-la-candidata-a-la-presidencia-de-la-republica/>. For an excellent brief summary of the MPJD's presentation to each candidate: <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2012/05/28/sicilia-cuestiona-presidenciales>, or <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2012/05/en-reunion-con-el-movimiento-por-la-paz-josefina-se-disculpa-a-nombre-del-pan/>, which includes the full transcript of each candidate's response.

¹⁴ To Quadri, the Green candidate and the most marginal of the four, Sicilia accused him of hypocritically extolling liberalism while running his campaign with the support of the corrupt head of the teachers' union, Elba Esther Gordillo, who was indicted in February, 2013 on fraud and corruption charges.

What made the most headlines, however, were Sicilia's words to Lopez Obrador. Sicilia accused the candidate who most assumed he would support¹⁵ as being "intolerant" and a messiah with the inability for self-reflection. The candidate responded by denying outright what Javier accused him of, saying "I can look anyone here in the eye... I am not cut from the same cloth as the other candidates." While he also went on record as supporting the MPJD's call for democratic reforms and a change in the war strategy, the Mexican press lit up with the news of the conflict between the two natural allies.

While many saw the "Dialogues" as a setback for the MPJD because of the left's anger with Sicilia over his comments to Lopez Obrador, I would argue that the dialogues were another important step in positioning the issues important to the MPJD front and center in the most important national stage, the presidential elections. Further, the leadership role that *víctimas* active in the MPJD took in these meetings confirmed the importance and legitimacy of their voices in the national conversation.

B) *Ley de Víctimas*, Victims' Law: Legislative Certification

The *Ley de Víctimas*, or Victims' Law, signed into law on January 9th, 2013 by Enrique Peña Nieto, obligates the government to create a reliable registry of the murdered and disappeared, mandates the financial compensation of family members of victims of violence, and lays out victims' rights as they seek protection from the government. It was written by a coalition of academic and civil society groups¹⁶ who came together at the MPJD's request following their 2011 meetings with President Calderón, who were able to present it to Mexico's Congress by April of 2012.

¹⁵ Sicilia has deep ties to the Left in Mexico, explicitly aligning himself with the Zapatistas since the 1994 rebellion. It had been widely assumed that he would at least tacitly support the PRD in the elections.

¹⁶ CENCOS reported that the law was drafted after the MPJD requested it during meetings with the Executive branch. The groups that worked on the drafting of the law included: la Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH), el Centro de Colaboración Cívica (CCC) el Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Penales (Inacipe), la UNAM, y Fundar centro de Análisis de Investigación, among others. See <http://cencos.org/node/28971>

At the two 2011 meetings with President Calderón, the MPJD presented their platform. The first demand in the founding platform was for the Mexican government to name those murdered or disappeared, and was one of the first points included in the law. In the course of dialogues with Calderón in 2011, both the MPJD and the President agreed on the need for new legislation to fight impunity and provide assistance to those affected by the violence during his administration¹⁷, and the second two sections of the law respond to these necessities.

The law, modeled partially after Colombia's Victims' Law, was an important focus of MPJD energy and mobilization in 2012. Sicilia became the Law's most visible advocate, arguing that it was a crucial step in complying with the agreements reached with Calderón, and that it was a historic step forward for justice and peace. When the lower house of Congress approved the law unanimously in April, 2012, with a contingent of MPJD members present in the Chambers, there was a palpable sense of accomplishment: the government had legally recognized the existence of victims of the drug war. Further, this group had accomplished in less than a year what had taken years in other countries, most notably in Colombia.

This sense of accomplishment, however, would be quickly replaced by anger as President Calderón reneged on his promise to sign the law. Citing constitutional concerns, he declined to sign the bill into law before leaving office. Not until Peña Nieto took office would the law be signed, though he also acknowledged a need for the clarification on certain points. Since it was signed into law, Sicilia and the MPJD have taken an active role in formulating and presenting the modifications to the law that will be necessary to ground it in legal precedent and empower it to provide the attention to victims the MPJD lobbied for.

The legal impact of the law has yet to be tested, and much will depend on who

¹⁷ For the MPJD press release recounting the history of the Victims' Law: <http://cencos.org/node/28885>. Link to the "National Pact" of the MPJD: <http://movimientoporlapaz.mx/documentos-esenciales-del-movimiento/pacto-nacional-por-un-mexico-en-paz-con-justicia-y-dignidad/>

from civil society will serve on the governing commission that will oversee the implementation of the law. Whatever happens, the legislative certification of “victim” as an identity worthy of attention, state resources and ultimately a right to justice is an achievement almost unimaginable before the emergence of the MPJD, and a tangible marker of the identity shift which has occurred since 2011.

C) Caravan for Peace with Justice and Dignity: Ambitious Brokering

In 2011 the MPJD had led two caravans, first in June to the north, and then in September through 22 different cities in the South. These caravans were exercises in brokering: family members of people murdered or disappeared during the drug war came together on stages in both small towns and cities, many of whom had been too scared or ashamed to previously speak publicly, and few of whom had participated in any type of social mobilization previously. These people joined the local human rights organizations and, especially in the South, movements that have historically focused on demands for social and economic in receiving the MPJD caravans. Though the results of these efforts at brokering are debatable, I would argue that they succeeded in the “attribution of similarity,” that is, making a compelling case that all Mexicans are suffering from a violence brought on by the Mexican state’s policies, and that all states in the Republic are suffering the loss of innocent victims.

Following these caravans, and specifically after Sicilia answered affirmatively when asked in an interview whether he thought a Caravan to the United States was possible in late 2011, by January 2012 it had become a formal proposal in front of the MPJD at their national meeting. The idea behind the caravan was that the MPJD, in cooperation with their local partners, was doing all it could to end Calderon’s war on drugs and promote justice from within Mexico, but that if they really wanted to end violence in Mexico, it would be necessary to go to the United States.

They saw the US demand for drugs, together with the US government’s policy of total prohibition of drugs and lax policies on weapons sales especially in border states, as providing both the money and the weapons that were at the

root of the violence in Mexico. In response, the MPJD proposed a month-long caravan of “citizen diplomacy.” Though their ultimate goal was policy change on those issues directly fomenting violence in Mexico, the caravan focused on making common cause and political alliances with communities who had also been hurt by the drug war, weapons sales, and wrong-headed immigration policies in the United States.

To accomplish this transnational scale shift, they again attempted what they had become quite adept at on their caravans within Mexico: brokering relationships between previously unconnected actors to build a larger movement. This time, however, they would be attempting to broker across the physical, linguistic and political border with the United States. Like they had done with the caravans in Mexico, they relied heavily on their institutional allies to do the brokering with other organizations. CENCOS, the National Center for Social Communication and one of the institutional homes of the MPJD, took the lead on organizing this logistically and politically ambitious project in Mexico¹⁸. They would reach out to organizations in Mexico who were working on the themes of interest to the Caravan, but who had not necessarily previously been active with the MPJD. San Francisco-based Global Exchange, who had supported the Movement since the first Caravan to the north in 2011, became the lead organization in the US. Working closely with the MPJD, they began to try to bring together a diverse group of US allies to both host the large group of MPJD members who would participate in the Caravan, and to partner politically with the MPJD in order to bring the MPJD message of policy change to their diverse constituencies.

At the June pre-Caravan meeting, a mix of US-based grassroots, lobby, and policy-based organizations joined the lead Mexican organizing groups in Mexico

¹⁸ Organizations involved in the Mexican Coalition included: Alianza Cívica, El Grito Más Fuerte, Serapaz, Iniciativa Ciudadana, Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, APOFAM (Asociación Popular de Familias de Migrantes, Fuerzas Unidas por los Desaparecidos en México (FUNDEM), Sin Fronteras, INEDIM, Asociación Popular de Familiares de Migrantes (APOFAM), Red por los Derechos de la Infancia, CuPIDH, Espolea, Reverdecer, Iniciativa Ciudadana para la Promoción de la cultura de Diálogo, Pastoral de Movilidad Humana, Alarbo, Students for a Sensible Drug Policy, and Servicios para la Paz, among others.

City to develop the Caravan's platform¹⁹. The platform of the Caravan was to call for a dialogue about alternatives to the prohibition of drugs, to end arms trafficking, to stop money laundering from the US to Mexico, and to promote humane policies in US immigration and foreign policy²⁰. The hope was that these broad demands would enable alliances and collaboration between communities that hadn't previously worked together within the US and facilitate the formation of a new transnational advocacy network around these issues. By listening to each other's stories of suffering on both sides of the border due to similar wrong-headed policies, the Caravan aimed to plant the seeds of collaboration to work together to change hearts and minds. And this June organizing meeting in Mexico City pointed to this being possible: the President of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, 33-year Baltimore Police Department veteran Neill Franklin, was moved to tears by the testimonials of the family members of those killed or disappeared. He made the connection between US drug policy causing both the horror he heard recounted in the testimonials in Mexico, and also the death of his friend and colleague, which came while working in as a police officer in the United States enforcing drug laws. Franklin, together with Global Exchange, would later be instrumental in bringing the national NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the oldest and largest African-American civil rights organization in the United States) on board with the Caravan.

The Caravan left San Diego, California on August 12, 2012, and arrived in Washington, DC on September 13th. During the 30 days of the Caravan, the 125 people traveling in two buses, an RV and several cars stopped in 27 cities. They were received by immigrants rights groups, churches, and community

¹⁹ The organizations that came from the US included LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition), NALACC (National Association of Latin American and Caribbean Communities), the Drug Policy Alliance, Presente.org, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Border Angels / Angeles de la Frontera, WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America), LAWG (Latin American Working Group), Witness for Peace, the CIP (Center for International Policy) Americas Program and Students for a Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) and the Angelica Foundation. The coalition in the US would grow to more than 100 groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Mothers against the Drug War, A New Path, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), National Latino Congress, , Veterans for Peace, L.A. Community Legal Center, Hermandad Mexicana Transnacional, School of the Americas Watch, and Annunciation House.

²⁰ For the exact wording of the platform, see http://www.caravanforpeace.org/caravan/?page_id=144

activists with long histories of solidarity with Latin America. As had been the case on the Mexican caravans, the local groups put in a Herculean effort: they housed and fed the *Caravaneros* (at their own cost), and planned the local events, nearly always consisting of a march or demonstration, a forum, and a conversation with local people effected by the drug war, guns, or immigration policy.

Sicilia continued to pursue dialogue with those many consider beyond redemption, most controversially with Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Arizona, and to speak to the root causes of violence in Mexico. Apart from sharing stories and forums with local groups, the Caravan also engaged in non-violent action: buying and then destroying guns in Houston, Texas; protesting in front of DEA offices; and trying to exchange “blood money” at HSBC in New York. Mexican media, US local media and US-based Spanish-speaking media closely covered the Caravan, and in the end, according to a media analysis done by the Drug Policy Alliance, there were over 1,000 reports about the Caravan that appeared in the US press. By their estimates, these reports reached more than 100 million people.

Since the end of the Caravan, progress has been made on the main policies targeted by the Caravan in the United States, most notably the passage of ballot initiatives in Washington and Colorado legalizing marijuana use. Members of Peña Nieto’s administration have said these changes in the way the United States legislates around drug use and possession will “oblige Mexico and the United State to review their policies in the fight against drug trafficking²¹.”

Overall, however, the results of the MPJD’s effort at transnational contention are still unclear. Tarrow has argued that “many transnational coalitions are short-lived” (Tarrow, 2005: 130), citing the successful attribution of similarity as a key mechanism in determining success. The brokering the Movement attempted – to draw a common causal thread and promote a shared identity between victims of violence in Mexico and those suffering from drug, gun and

²¹ Legalización de droga en EU obliga a revisar estrategia antinarco: Videgaray. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=324592>

border violence in the US – was made difficult by language, cultural and political barriers. However, the current political context is perhaps more open to these efforts at frame bridging than ever before: the US public increasingly rejects that drug prohibition is effective and is embracing some form of gun control, and there is awareness and outrage of the violence in Mexico on both sides of the border. It remains to be seen, however, how progress on ending the war on drugs, arms control and immigration policy will map into policy change, and what role this emerging bi-national coalition may play in that change.

3) The MPJD and state-based organization and movements:

I spoke previously of the different types of movements and organizations that have formed in Mexico since the current wave of violence began in 2006. In this section I document how organized family members of people who had been disappeared partnered with local human rights organizations to pursue justice in two neighboring northern states hit hard by the violence of the past six years: Nuevo León and Coahuila. In both cases, the human rights organization working together with victims of violence had begun to meet with their state officials before the emergence of the MPJD. Regardless of whether they joined the MPJD coalition, I argue here that the MPJD fundamentally expanded their political possibilities, enabling them to advance in their chosen advocacy strategy. They did so through the identity shift conferred on them by the MPJD: state and national officials began to see these local groups as part of a powerful, connected national movement, and because of this changed their evaluation of their importance and adjusted their treatment of them accordingly. Importantly, while identity shift occurred for both of these groups, this did not necessarily lead to coordinated action. Rather, the identity shift in and of itself provided expanded political opportunities.

A) Nuevo León

CADHAC, Citizens in Support of Human Rights, was founded in Monterrey, the capital of northern state of Nuevo León, in 1993 by Catholic nun Sister Consuelo Morales. It initially concentrated on documenting and advocacy around human rights abuses suffered by prisoners in the state's many prisons. As violence in

Nuevo León worsened starting in 2010, CADHAC shifted to concentrate on cases of disappearances. This shift has responded to the demand of the people who come to CADHAC to ask for help: in 2009 and 2010, they received fewer than 15 reports of disappearances; in 2011, they received 105 cases, and in 2012, more than 215.

With this increase in disappearances, and especially forced disappearances, a small group of family members of victims came together, independent from CADHAC, in 2010. They asked the State Attorney General's office to meet with them in order to push for advances in the investigations of their cases, and they were granted meeting with Public Prosecutors, the relatively low-level members of the Attorney General's team who are in charge of the investigations. These meetings were described by one victim: "At first we met every 8 days, then every two weeks, then every month, then every two. The Public Prosecutor would always cancel the meetings. And when we did have them, they would listen to us complain about the fact that there were no advances in our cases. Then they would nod their head, expressing sympathy. And that was it. No progress." By the summer of 2011, the family members of victims saw that these meetings were exhausting them, and were not a true route to justice.

The *Caravana del Norte*, the 10-day trip the MPJD undertook in June of 2011 to 14 cities in the north of Mexico, arrived to Monterrey on the evening of June 7th. Despite being five hours behind schedule, 1,500 people awaited the caravan in the central plaza of the city²². After multiple victim testimonies, a smaller commission led by Sicilia and Emilio Álvarez Icaza (the MPJD's de facto head of political affairs) departed for the State Prosecutor's office. Despite it being almost midnight, there the State Attorney General, Adrián de la Garza, received

²² A group of more than 30 organizations in Monterrey came together to welcome the caravan. According to organizers of this event, this group had never come together before: it included groups from the far left, and also non-political citizen organizations. There had been previous marches, but only with the MPJD was it possible to bring together more people from across the political spectrum: on May 8th, 18 organizations and about 1,000 people came together in solidarity with the MPJD, which was simultaneously holding its largest protest in Mexico City. While the coalition broke apart after the Caravan's visit due to their pre-existing differences, the MPJD's national visibility and appeal resulted in bigger protests in Monterrey than had been seen in several decades.

Sicilia and the commission, and agreed to establish investigatory working groups that he would personally oversee to coordinate the investigations into the disappearances of the cases that were brought to him that night.

Though CADHAC was only one member of this coalition of groups, it was the only one at the time with the capacity to provide judicial support for the family members of victims who had been disappeared in Monterrey. Because of this, it emerged as the go-to organization for the many victims that came out of the woodwork following the caravan's visit, as well as the majority of the families that had been previously involved in the working groups with the Public Prosecutors. CADHAC suddenly had more cases than it had ever seen before. They developed a rigorous documentation and judicial methodology to assist with the cases, in which they met with victims weekly to document the advances in their cases. Their involvement with these cases meant that after each meeting with the Attorney General's office, they were in front of the media speaking of the progress in each case. They could also legitimately claim to represent the victims, and began to use this legitimacy to move forward legislation on, for example, criminalizing "forced disappearance" in Nuevo León, which they achieved in November, 2012.

Besides a more mobilized civil society in Monterrey and a higher profile for CADHAC, the MPJD's visit fundamentally altered the dynamics between CADHAC, victims of disappearance and the State Prosecutor's office. Following the arrival of the caravan, the first of the meetings with the Prosecutor's office was held in July 2011, and the twelfth in February of 2013. The meetings had a different dynamic from the start: the State Attorney General oversaw the meetings, and he brought with him a team of investigators and prosecutors. At these meetings, a methodology evolved: the victims, together with the CADHAC or MPJD legal team, present the status of the case, and then suggest concrete investigative steps that need to be taken by the Prosecutors' team to advance the case. At subsequent meetings, the investigative teams and the victims review which tasks were completed, what they yielded, and then together, though usually led by suggestions of the victims and lawyers, they propose the next steps to be taken in the investigation.

CADHAC began in July, 2011 bringing 11 cases before the State Attorney General's Office, and there are now more than 35 cases being attended to in these meetings²³. This methodology has resulted in charges being filed against 40 people for their involvement in the disappearance of family members of CADHAC's members, with at least 14 of those being state employees, and an additional 15 indictments expected in the near future. This work has earned CADHAC international recognition, and their work was featured prominently in the most recent Human Rights Watch report on forced disappearance. In addition to these indictments, in interviews with CADHAC's lawyers, they cited investigatory advances in every case. These investigative advances included things like interviewing witnesses, obtaining cell phone records, and submitting information requests to all prisons and hospitals looking for the disappeared person.

While these cases remain far from achieving "justice," they do represent a departure from the near total impunity most cases of disappearance face. Prior to the MPJD's visit, CADHAC did not perceive that the State Attorney General's office was politically nor judicially committed to investigating these cases. CADHAC views the MPJD's caravan visit, and the subsequent presence of Sicilia and Álvarez Icaza, as having provided the political will to persuade the high-level state actors to come to the table to move the investigations forward. Interestingly, CADHAC also notes that the MPJD taught them the value of dialogue: they were previously skeptical of the state's willingness or ability to pursue these cases. Only with the MPJD's involvement did they trust the state was under enough pressure to produce results.

B) Coahuila

FUUNDEC, Fuerzas Unidas para Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila, began organizing in 2009. A group of families of people that had been disappeared with the wave of violence came together after the authorities failed to make any

²³ A minority of the cases being brought are cases being managed by the lawyers collaborating with the MPJD. These cases are handled by the MPJD because though the disappearance of the person occurred in Nuevo León, the family of the victim resides in Mexico City, where the MPJD has a presence, but CADHAC doesn't.

significant progress in the investigation of their cases. Like in Monterrey, the victims came together before having an institutional affiliation, and then began to look for assistance. They found a natural institutional ally in the human rights center in Saltillo, Coahuila's capital, the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios. The director, Blanca Martínez, was an experienced organizer – she had been director of the well-established Chiapas-based organization Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, known usually just as FrayBa – before coming to Saltillo.

Like CADHAC, Fray Juan de Larios had participated in the national human rights organization, the Red de Todos de los Derechos para Todos, and had contact with international human rights organizations like Amnesty International, and would go on to send cases to the UN Working Group on Forced Disappearances. They had also begun to meet with state officials to pursue the investigations into the disappearances of their loved ones. In January 2010 FUUNDEC held their first meetings with high-ranking members of the state prosecutor's office to review the case files of the disappeared family members in the group. However, by March of 2010, after just three meetings with the prosecutors' office, FUUNDEC took a step back. Much like the early meetings in Monterrey, FUUNDEC had seen that the authorities were not advancing in their investigations²⁴.

FUUNDEC made the decision that would come to characterize their strategy: since the top judicial authority in the state hadn't made any progress in their investigation, they would escalate the case to his boss: the Governor. In order to obtain this meeting, however, they would have to mobilize. After several different mobilizations, in September 2010 they succeeded in obtaining their first meeting with the governor. At this meeting, they agreed to reestablish the working groups (*mesas de diálogos*), but with significant changes: the governor would be present to oversee the work of his investigators, and each case would

²⁴ Rather, the prosecutors' office would call members of FUUNDEC before their meetings to ask what advances the family members of FUUNDEC had made, and they would then claim these "advances" in the investigations as their own. Interview with FUUNDEC founding member, February, 2013.

be assigned a government “godfather” who would coordinate each case’s investigation²⁵.

Despite these changes, members of FUUNDEC, now numbering more than 85 people, saw few advances in these meetings. After frustrating meetings in October, November and December of 2010²⁶, they asked for the State Attorney General, Jesús Torres Charles, to resign. After the governor announced he would be leaving his job to run the national PRI party, talks broke off temporarily and FUUNDEC again protested, but soon after talks were reestablished with the interim governor, and continued through most of 2011. However, FUUNDEC described the “advances” in these cases as a torrent of paperwork with few real signs of progress.

FUUNDEC began to conclude that underlying the lack of progress in these cases was a lack of political will to investigate, due to the acquiescence and in some cases active involvement of the bosses of those charged with conducting the investigations. This suspicion was later proved correct as one of the lead investigators employed by the Attorney General’s office, along with the former State Attorney General himself, Mr, Torres, were forced to resign because of ties to organized crime²⁷. FUUNDEC concluded that the only way to overcome the lack of investigations at the state level was to have the cases transferred to the federal judiciary, where there was a better chance that their cases would receive the attention of politically independent authorities. In the meantime, they would continue to hold the monthly meetings with the state prosecutors to see if these would yield any results, but they would have low expectations.

²⁵ FUUNDEC later would conclude that these case coordinators were meant to disperse and divide their efforts, but at the time, this was seen as an “excellent” set of advances.

²⁶ In these meetings, the Governor, his Secretary of Government, the State Prosecutor, the Case Coordinator and the Public Minister (the state justice department official in charge of the investigation) met with FUUNDEC. These were marathon meeting: the October meetings lasted from noon until 2am as they systematically went through the 85 cases.

²⁷ Jesús Torres Charles, the former State Attorney General was serving as the Judicial Advisor to the Governor, Rubén Moreira in March, 2012 when it was discovered that his brother, Humberto Torres Charles, was “one of the principal leaders in a network of complicity” in which impunity was guaranteed for the local heads of organized crime. Together with Humberto Torres Charles, Claudia Gonzalez Lopez, a lead investigator with the State Attorney General’s Office, and two policeman were charged with leading this network and forced to resign. “Renuncia consejero jurídico de Coahuila tras escándalo de protección al narco” <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/2012/02/19/nacional/81170>

Just as FUUNDEC was deciding that appealing to federal authorities was their only option to move their cases forward, the MPJD was emerging as a national movement. When the MPJD announced that it would pass through Saltillo on their June 2010 *Caravana del Norte*, FUUNDEC began organizing immediately, with the hope that the Caravan's stop would energize their organization and also bring together a more diverse coalition than had previously existed to work on the common problem of violence in the state. The Caravan stopped in Coahuila only briefly on its way to Monterrey, disappointing local organizers. As the Caravan and MPJD made their way to the northern terminus of the Caravan, FUUNDEC hoped that the problem of disappearances would be central in the political pact that the MPJD and its allies were negotiating in Juarez. After the negotiated pact didn't do this to the extent they had wanted, that was the final straw: FUUNDEC decided not to work with the MPJD.

Despite this, however, FUUNDEC asked to be allowed to attend the MPJD's first dialogues with President Calderón in July, 2011. At this meeting, a FUUNDEC member rose to speak, uninvited by the MPJD, at the end of the dialogue and asked for Calderón to meet with FUUNDEC. Calderón agreed, and FUUNDEC achieved the national platform that was key to their strategy of escalating to the national level. They subsequently established working groups including federal investigative officials.

They would do a similar thing at another space opened by the movement: in January 2013, the government held a signing ceremony for the Victims' Law discussed earlier. This time, FUUNDEC-M²⁸ was invited by the Secretary of Government to attend the event. FUUNDEC-M again used this space to ask Peña Nieto personally to meet with them – and he agreed. As a result, in early February 2013 they held talks with the President, the Mexican Attorney General and the Congressional Human Rights Commission. The agreement coming out of these meetings was to establish collaborative investigative teams: the federal

²⁸ In 2012, FUUNDEC, based in Coahuila, forms a national group, FUUNDEM, Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México. Family members of the disappeared from other Mexican states have attended FUUNDEC's meetings with national officials under the banner "FUUNDEM." FUUNDEC-M refers to both FUUNDEC and FUUNDEM.

judicial officials would be in charge, and they are currently devising a protocol to hold the state judicial officials and investigators responsible for progressing in these cases.

As FUUNDEC-M has continued to escalate their cases within the state judicial and executive bureaucracy, they have grown into a powerful, recognized national organization, with over 100 members. While they do not believe progress has made in the judicial status of their cases, they have made advances in bringing the issue of disappearances to the national political stage, and exploring new avenues of generating political will and judicial accountability for state officials who are unwilling or unable to investigate their cases. Their access to federal official has been key to these advances, something facilitated, if by accident, by the MPJD.

4) Conclusion.

2012 saw a wave of electoral mobilization, and the ongoing organization by Mexicans directly and indirectly affected by the violence racking the country since 2006. The MPJD, though no longer bringing the masses into the streets, has continued to play a prominent role in both mobilization and policy advocacy, and achieved important advances by confronting the presidential candidates with the problem of violence, the passing of the Victims' Law, and the Caravan to the US. However, their less visible work bridging identities of those affected by violence in Mexico and opening political space for state-level organizations to demand justice may be their most important.

Using concepts from social movements and contentious politics literature, I have argued that the MPJD has successfully brokered the connection of previously unconnected groups, acting as a catalyst for the formation of a common political identity recognized by both movement participants and authorities. I have discussed the trajectories of two state-based organizations that focus on holding the state responsible for investigating disappearances, FUUNDEC-M and CADHAC. I have recounted their experiences working with state representatives charged with investigating the cases, and made the claim that the MPJD has been an important part of their progress due largely to scale

shift and the consolidation the “victim of violence” as a legitimate political identity.

The first Caravans of the MPJD were efforts in brokering and scale shift. Javier Sicilia, a middle class intellectual whose son was killed by organized crime, led a group of victims and activists throughout Mexico with the message “We have had it,” implicitly and explicitly challenging the Mexican government’s narrative that those dying from the drug war were criminals. The MPJD, together with local and national human rights groups, succeeded in redefining the identity of “victim” as all people affected by the violence in Mexico, regardless of who had victimized them (the state or organized crime), and regardless of class. This identity shift conferred legitimacy on all victims of violence in Mexico, and helped to open political spaces previously closed to them, especially to poor victims of violence. This was demonstrated most clearly in the MPJD’s ability to obligate the federal government to sit down with their leaders and victims. These dialogues with the president and high-level officials, in turn, have led directly to dialogue with the federal and state authorities responsible for the investigation of cases of disappearances, whether groups are formally aligned with the MPJD or not. These efforts to demand legal accountability from the state structures responsible for delivering justice are an important and unprecedented step that hold promise in disrupting the cycle of violence and impunity in Mexico. For these efforts to progress, the kind of local organizing seen in both Nuevo León and Coahuila, and strengthened by the MPJD’s work, will have to continue²⁹.

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²⁹ Field research carried out in Mexico between 2010 and 2013 informed this article. This fieldwork was possible only with the generous support of the Fulbright Garcia-Robles program, the Social Science Research Council, The Law and Society Program of the National Science Foundation, the Inter-American Foundation, and the Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University.

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