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COMBATING CRIME IN MEXICO

This topic is about modern approach combating crime in Mexico, by the way Mexico one of the most criminal countries in the world. Government fighting crime for help pouring money into poor violent neighbourhoods offering more schooling, jobs, parks and cultural activities to stop them becoming “crime factories”. They are going to improve the quality of the police, end their culture of impunity and create courts with the guts and expertise to convict criminals.

A human hellhole lies under the noses of American tourists driving from California into Mexico. Below the bridge leading into

Tijuana is a dry canal strewn with heroin syringes that is home to countless migrants and vagrants, most of them thrown out of the United States for not having the right papers. Jesus Alberto Capella, Tijuana's chief of police, says their numbers have included about 10,000 ex-convicts turfed out of American jails this year. They live under tarpaulins and in foxholes dug into the side of the canal. The place is a cauldron of violence. It is also a focal point for President Enrique Pena Nieto's strategy of applying what officials call "social acupuncture" to some of the most dangerous parts of Mexico. Felipe Calderon, Mr Pena's predecessor, made fighting organised crime the centrepiece of his presidency. Backed by the Merida Initiative, a \$1.9 billion American aid scheme that has supplied Black Hawk helicopters and X-ray machines to detect narcotics, Mexico's police, army and navy sought to dismantle drug mobs by capturing their bosses. But violence soared: at least 60,000 died, mostly in vicious turf battles between rival gangs.

Troubled by the bloody image this gave Mexico, Mr Pena has adopted a new approach since taking over in December. Its most eye-catching element is to pour 118 billion pesos (\$9.1 billion) into the 220 most violent neighbourhoods in the country (some are in Tijuana), offering more schooling, jobs, parks and cultural activities to stop them becoming "crime factories". Footballers have joined in, providing soccer camps to slum kids who might otherwise want to become hired guns.

These are not new ideas. Efforts to mend the torn social fabric in the most crime-ridden cities, like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, started under Mr Calderon. Mr Pena has given them greater impetus, yet even his government recognises that they will not yield a quick pay-off. Meanwhile, it is under pressure to produce a coherent law-enforcement plan in a country where, according even to official statistics, almost nine out of ten crimes go unreported. Policing is a particular concern. "They are still in reactive mode. If there is a plan to go after drug-traffickers, it's being kept super-secret," says Vanda Felbab-Brown, a crime analyst at the Brookings Institution in Washington. Officials say they have chalked up at least three tangible successes so far. The first is a decline in murders. According to police figures, these fell by 18% in the first eight months of this year. Second, the security forces have started to dismantle the Zetas drug

gang that terrorised Mexico for years. In July the authorities arrested its boss, Miguel Angel Trevino Morales. Mercifully, his capture did not lead to the sort of bloodletting that followed the arrest of drug kingpins in the past.

Third, the government has tried to impose a clearer chain of command by turning the interior ministry into the mother ship of Mexico's myriad federal security agencies. This involves swallowing Mr Calderon's once-omnipotent ministry of public security, and also handling tricky public-order and civil-defence issues such as a teachers' strike and hurricane relief. Officials say the unified security apparatus makes it easier to co-ordinate anti-drug efforts with the attorney-general's office, the armed forces and state governments. Crime experts, however, blanch at the administrative nightmare the government has imposed on itself.

To many, the most tangible success of Mr Pena's government has been getting violence off the front pages of national and international newspapers. But its claim to have cut the number of murders is at least partially offset by a 35% rise in kidnappings in the first eight months of the year, compared with the same period in 2012, as well as a surge in extortion, according to police statistics. And these may vastly understate the problem.

According to estimates by INEGI, the national statistics institute, last year saw 105,682 kidnappings; only 1,317 were reported to the police. There were around 6m cases of extortion; the police put the number at 7,272. Using its own figures, Security, Justice and Peace, an anti-crime charity, says Mexico is currently the worst place for kidnapping in the world, and that more victims are being killed. It says Mr Pena lacks an anti-kidnapping policy and is downplaying the entire crime problem.

Other analysts agree that the government has yet to do anything to improve the quality of the police, end their culture of impunity and create courts with the guts and expertise to convict criminals. It is leaving much of the job to state governors, meaning the results will be patchy at best.

For months, officials have hummed and hawed over how to honour Mr Pena's campaign pledge to create a new federal gendarmerie. This was originally envisaged as turning 40,000 former soldiers into police to patrol troubled rural areas. Political infighting

has reduced this promising idea to a shadow. Officials say the new force will now be only 5,000 strong. In line with the “social acupuncture” approach it will offer haircuts and dentistry as well as security. The resulting vacuum has been filled in parts of Mexico’s poorer south by paramilitary self-defence groups, some in the pay of narcos and others set up to protect their communities from them.

In such circumstances, some experts scoff at Mr Pena’s “soft” approach to crime prevention. They want more petty criminals behind bars before they become murderers and kidnappers. Mr Capella, who has helped knock Tijuana’s police force into better shape, says Mexico needs strong policing to halt the violence as well as social workers who pick up the pieces.

Under the Tijuana border crossing, that may mean sending in police to clean up the area, but also setting up booths to meet people expelled from the United States, offering them papers, psychological support, anti-drug counselling, food and shelter before they become a crime risk. With luck, the sleazy canal may even get a lick of paint, which would do wonders for many Americans’ first impression of Mexico. Whether this is enough to make the country safe is another matter.