

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics)		
Title of case study: Bolstering citizen participation in security matters		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Trevor Stack	Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies	2002-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research led by Dr Trevor Stack has shaped the agendas of local and international actors, helping to empower citizens to respond to the violence associated with organised crime in Mexico. Stack's research has long considered how political concepts such as 'citizenship' are understood in different global contexts. Drawing on comparative ethnographic research in a Mexican State, Stack critiqued government understandings of citizen participation in security matters. This led to local organizations conceiving and enacting more effective forms of participation. Internationally, Stack's research now underpins three briefing papers published by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), an independent, global think tank.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>In the state of Michoacán (Mexico), a crisis in trust towards security institutions exists among civilians, where violent crime threatens citizen security and governance. Criminal organisations have infiltrated police agencies, leaving communities vulnerable to violence and civil society prone to intimidation and infiltration. In 2013, Michoacán was the site of an extreme form of societal response, which included an uprising of armed civilian groups known as <i>autodefensas</i> (self-defence) extending from rural municipalities to the state capital. These <i>autodefensa</i> groups confronted criminal organisations, as well as their allies in government, but many of the groups later engaged in crime and violence themselves [3].</p> <p>Stack observed in earlier research in Michoacán (2007-13) that local organisations were increasingly subject to intimidation and infiltration from criminal groups, often with recourse to violence, seemingly with state complicity [P1, 1]. Stack's ethnographic expertise was complemented by his leadership, since 2009, of the University of Aberdeen's inter-disciplinary Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law (CISRUL), for which Stack secured an EU Marie Curie COFUND grant (2018-2023) [P2]. Core to CISRUL's mission is informing academic and public debate on how such concepts as citizenship, civil society and rule of law are used in public life, and to what effect. Stack's research in Mexico echoed CISRUL's mission in considering how concepts like 'citizenship' featured in local disputes [1].</p> <p>In 2016-2019, Stack led a team project funded by ESRC and the Mexican National Council for Science and Technology on societal responses to crime and violence in Mexico [P3]. Since the aim of the project was to inform and enhance these responses, Stack partnered in Mexico with Co-Investigators at two leading research institutions with a track record of societal impact: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas and El Colegio de Michoacán. In the UK, Stack chose to partner with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), global leaders in policy-relevant research. The Co-Investigators were tasked with ensuring the research underpinned a series of briefing papers to be published by the ODI [2].</p>		

Using a comparative approach, Stack and his research team conducted ethnography across six localities of Michoacán to evaluate the effectiveness of diverse social responses: *autodefensa* groups, local citizen security councils, artist collectives, church-linked initiatives and women's groups [P3]. Stack drew on the findings [2, 3], together with his earlier project [P1, 1] and informed by CISRUL activities [P2, P4], to conclude the following:

1. While government had claimed to combat organised crime by strengthening the police and other security services, state institutions were minimally effective in combatting crime, and they were sometimes complicit with it. By contrast, some of the societal initiatives studied were effective, even if others such as the *autodefensas* were problematic [2, 3].

2. Government often invited 'citizen participation' in security matters, but it paid little attention to what citizens had to say. In particular, state government officials participated together with citizens in Security and Justice Working Groups (SJWG) set up in localities across the state. However, the SJWG were dominated by the officials and citizens had little effective input. In addition, the citizens who participated in the SJWGs were relatively elite, and they struggled to represent the communities most affected by crime and violence [2, 3].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] **Stack, T.** (2018). 'Citizenship and the Established Civil Sphere in Provincial Mexico'. In J. Alexander & C. Tognato (Eds.), *The Civil Sphere in Latin America* (pp. 206-228). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[2] **Stack, T.**, Alvarez, I., Roman, D. *et al.* (2019) The role and impact of local citizen security councils as a challenge to criminal violence, lessons from Michoacán. London: Overseas Development Institute (brief).

[3] **Stack, T.** (2020) 'Civic actors and illicit margins in public policy: the case of Zamora'. In ed. Maldonado, S. *Hacia la justicia cuando escasean las garantías*. Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, p. 35-65.

The quality of the underpinning research is evidenced to be at least 2* by the level of related peer-reviewed competitive grant funding:

[P1] **Stack, T.** 'Broadening the terms: Citizenship beyond the State in Mexico' (02/07-07/07), British Academy (GBP5,600).

[P2] **Stack, T.** 'Citizenship in modern society' (05/11-09/14), UoA Development Trust (GBP137,913).

[P3] **Stack, T.** 'Societal responses to crime and violence in Mexico' (11/16-10/19), ESRC, (GBP332,450).

[P4] **Stack, T.** 'Political Concepts in the World' (01/18-12/22), EU Marie Curie COFUND (GBP810,000).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Local impact was complicated by the presence of criminal armed groups, which had infiltrated state institutions. Nevertheless, Stack drew on the research since 2007 [P1-3] to guide and strengthen local organizations looking to respond to crime and violence, within and beyond Michoacán state. He achieved this by communicating his findings to local security stakeholders, including officials and associations, especially via public forums and local citizen security councils. The UK Co-Investigators ensured the research impacted on international practitioners in development and security, primarily through an ODI roundtable and briefs.

Within Michoacán state: Challenging assumptions about citizen participation and security

In April 2018, Stack presented his research on 'citizen participation' at a meeting of the Security and Justice Working Group in the city of Zamora (SJWG-Zamora), where he had conducted

fieldwork. The meeting was attended by the Michoacán state governor and other officials, alongside Zamora citizen representatives. Stack's research helped to frame a debate on the concept of 'citizen participation', which paved the way for the SJWG-Zamora coordinator to propose more robust citizen participation, in the form of Neighbourhood Police, to which the governor responded positively. This proposal was subsequently incorporated into the manifestos of several candidates in the 2018 municipal election. Although the elected mayor did not enact the Neighbourhood Police proposal, the SWJG continues to pursue the possibility [S1].

At the same 2018 meeting, a neighbourhood association PODEMOZ drew on Stack's research to challenge the governor's claim that security was improving, and to call for effective citizen participation in security matters. In May 2018, Stack and PODEMOZ co-organised a public forum to address security issues. They partnered with Observatorio Regional Zamora (ORZ), a civil association addressing security and corruption. The forum brought together state officials with residents and other associations, including the SJWG-Zamora. Stack, PODEMOZ and ORZ (with another researcher Jenny Pearce) helped the neighbourhood associations to engage better with officials and with the relatively elite SJWG-Zamora members. In the 2018 elections, PODEMOZ put forward a mayoral candidate funded by the SJWG-Zamora coordinator, and included security-related proposals in its manifesto.

Subsequently, ORZ decided to focus on enhancing collaboration between an addiction treatment clinic and state institutions, because Stack's research indicated that *'other topics of collaboration in security matters are unlikely to prosper, since security agencies are generally little receptive to CSOs [Civil Society Organisations], as evidenced by the SJWG meetings'* [S1].

In another Michoacán city, Apatzingán, Stack held public forums in October 2019 with local organizations, neighbourhood leaders and municipal officials, co-hosted with a local security-focused association: the Observatorio Regional de Seguridad Humana de Apatzingán (ORSHA). The ORSHA President observed that 'Stack's research [4] has helped us to see that the SJWG [Apatzingán's Security and Justice Working Group] is limited in its effectiveness because, among other issues, the government officials dominate its meetings, and they are unwilling to listen to the CSO representatives present'. As a result, ORSHA decided to pursue a grassroots response to security which offsets the state-centric approach of SWJG-Apatzingán [S5].

Beyond Michoacán state: Challenging policy paradigms and building capacity through dialogue

In October 2018, Stack and team staged a public forum in Mexico City to bring the project's findings to the attention of policy makers and national social actors. It was attended by senior officials including the Federal Attorney's Office's head of Crime Prevention, and national civil society organisations. Stack's ODI Co-Investigator observed: *'State officials initially sceptical of learning from local-level experiences of societal responses to violence such as those studied in the project, responded positively, expressing their appreciation of learning how local citizen security councils had in some cases improved levels of trust in local police; how individuals and communities affected by violence were using art and performance as one possible pathway to giving voice to the experience of violence; and the merits of working with civil society actors to invest in social resilience'* [S2].

Another public forum was held in May 2019 in Mexico's second largest city, Guadalajara, where civil society was flourishing but was not addressing the issue of security. An exception was the association with which Stack co-hosted the forum, Delibera. Delibera's director explained the forum's impact: *'Not only did [it] give [other local organizations] a rare opportunity to discuss security matters in public, in a relatively risk-free space, but it also allowed them to network with organizations from the state capital'* [S3].

On the strength of the initial impact, Delibera joined with ORZ and other practitioners across Mexico in partnering with Stack in a successful Newton Fund Impact Scheme bid. Though the project starts in 2021, the team met monthly in March-December 2020 to agree on impact strategies informed by the research, and to support ongoing engagement such as Delibera's role in state-hosted debates about police abuse [S1, S3].

International contexts: Informing policy debates and interventions

Discussions of the findings at an ODI roundtable event in November 2018, attended by organizations and officials including the Home Office's lead on Serious and Organised Crime, led to peer-reviewed briefing papers [2]. Stack's ODI Co-Investigator reports: '*The briefs have received positive feedback from individuals in INGOs and government agencies on the timeliness of the research, as international responses to conflict increasingly engage in more sophisticated analysis of what drives and sustains conflict-related violence*' [S2].

In 2019, Stack's other UK Co-Investigator, involved in a Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs scoping project on support for anti-smuggling councils in Libya, observed that 'Stack's team's study of local security councils and *autodefensas* was helpful in designing the approach, as it highlighted some of the challenges likely to arise, and strategies to overcome them'. On the strength of Stack's research, she invited him to act as Adviser for two Rapid Evidence Assessment projects commissioned by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office in 2020 [S4].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Testimonial from Director of Observatorio Regional Zamora, local organisation in Mexico

[S2] Testimonial from Senior Research Fellow at Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

[S3] Testimonial from President of Delibera, local organisation in Guadalajara, Mexico

[S4] Testimonial from Co-founder and Director of ITERU, security consultancy

[S5] Testimonial from President of Observatorio Regional de Seguridad Humana de Apatzingán, local organisation in Mexico