THE DEMOCRATIZING ROLE OF A FEW DEFIANT CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN MEXICO’S 2000 POLITICAL AWAKENING

By

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THE DEMOCRATIZING ROLE OF A FEW DEFIANT CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN MEXICO’S 2000 POLITICAL AWAKENING

By

Ashley Hudson

August 2018

Chair: Leslie Anderson
Cochair: Kenneth Wald
Major: Political Science

The Catholic Church is an ancient and deeply-rooted institution in Mexico. It arrived with the Spanish colonists in the 1500s. It also had an unprecedented amount of influence in the colonization of Mexico and in the development of local communities and institutions. In the decades leading up to the historic 2000 presidential elections in Mexico, some Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses played key roles in local democratization efforts. Institutionally strong and effective church units essentially fought back against authoritarianism and helped ignite democratization in local areas. While institutionally weak church units were incapable of challenging authoritarianism or promoting democratization due to their limitations and restrictive church-state relationships.

This dissertation will systematically examine the institutional characteristics of Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in different Mexican states. It will evaluate their historical trajectories, as well, and analyze how institutional capacities affected their ability to challenge authoritarianism and promote democratization prior to the 2000 elections.
Figure 1-1. Map of Mexico

In the mid-1990s, the shocking images of masked Zapatista rebels waging war in the streets of Chiapas, Mexico were broadcast around the world. These pictures were then juxtaposed alongside the local Catholic bishop, Samuel Ruiz Garcia, who not only acted as an ally to the movement, but also provided it with a fervent anti-authoritarian voice. This profound case of Catholic Church opposition to the Mexican government helped spark democratic change in Chiapas and Mexico at that time. It also created a paradox for those who had previously labeled the church in Mexico as a government conspirator, who ignored the poor.

Yet, despite various historic examples of Catholic Churches in Mexico challenging the government, there are equally as many cases when churches have remained inactive and silent, regardless of any alleged government abuses. Catholic Churches in Mexico are perhaps
idiosyncratic and influenced by their own peculiar local circumstances, institutional dynamics and histories, which is a situation that clearly requires further examination in order to understand its far-reaching political consequences for Mexico.

This dissertation will delve into this important subject-matter and broadly focus on the actions of a diverse sample of Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, which are the official administrative control centers of the church in each state. It will study the institutional developments of these church units and look at their potential local roles in challenging government authoritarianism, and facilitating democratization in the decades leading up to Mexico’s historic presidential election in 2000. It will also evaluate an assortment of dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, which consistently remained inactive and quiet during this same time period. It will attempt to understand, systematically, the specific conditions, which separate the purported noisy church units from the silent ones, and the local political consequences of this mixed behavior. All thirty-one states in Mexico have Catholic-majority populations.

Mexico’s current process of democratization, at the federal level, was initiated by the country’s 2000 presidential elections. At that time after over 70 years of successive one-party, hegemonic rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party’s (PRI), the National Action Party’s (PAN) presidential candidate, Vicente Fox, won the election. The PRI’s long grip on power in Mexico started to weaken in the 1980s due to economic and political problems in the country, which opened up “windows of opportunity” for local-level actors and institutions to “effect change from below.” In some cases, these actors contributed greatly to Mexico’s democratic
transition in 2000, although the Catholic Church was perhaps the most notable adversary in some areas, which impacted local democratization efforts.¹

During the twentieth century, the Catholic Church was frequently praised for helping to democratize Latin America and other countries in the world. However, it is still unclear exactly how Catholic Churches affected Mexico’s democratization process prior to 2000, or whether churches also somehow helped authoritarianism to persist there. The church has played a pivotal role in fighting authoritarianism in many Catholic-majority countries since at least the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Vatican II met from 1962 to 1965. It was regarded as a “watershed event in the history” of Roman Catholicism, observes Melissa J. Wilde. After Vatican II, the Catholic Church apparently started to focus more on the advancement of human rights, the promotion of social justice, helping the poor and reforming society.²

Yet, despite the assorted democratic triumphs attributed to the Catholic Church after Vatican II, a paradox still remains. That is why has the church vigorously and enthusiastically battled authoritarianism in some places, but not others? This also appears to be the case within Mexico where in some states Catholic Churches actively challenged authoritarian state governments and systems, while in other states they did not and as a result the PRI’s authority remained strong and uncontested there during the twentieth century. The main research question that this dissertation will address is: Why and under what conditions did Catholic Churches successfully challenge government authoritarianism in Mexico prior to the 2000 presidential elections?


Daniel Philpott attests further to the inconsistent behavior of Catholic Churches around
the world and observes that they do not appear to act in a uniform manner. He maintains:

In some places, the Church has kindled a fire of oppositional soul force, with nuns
facing down tanks, candlelight protests winding through medieval streets, a bishop
risking his life by speaking out against a dictator, or a pope celebrating an open-air
mass for tens of thousands under the windows of a communist commissariat. At the
other extreme, Church authorities have languished in coexistence with autocracy,
their defiance tepid. 3

Samuel Huntington insists, however, that the “third wave of democracy” in the 1970s and
1980s was “overwhelmingly a Catholic wave.” He also claims that the changes within the church
after Vatican II were the main reason for this. Huntington maintains that the church changed in
the 1960s. He recalls:

Before the mid-1960s, the Catholic Church usually accommodated itself to
authoritarian regimes and frequently legitimated them. After the mid-1960s, the
Church almost invariably opposed authoritarian regimes; and in some countries,
such as Brazil, Chile, the Philippines, Poland and Central American countries, it
played a central role in the efforts to change such regimes.4

Huntington alleges that as a result of Vatican II there was a “repositioning” of the
Catholic Church “from a bulwark of the status quo,” which usually backed authoritarianism, “to
a force” for democratic change. This he calls a “major political phenomenon.” During the
twentieth century, social scientists “were right,” insists Huntington. Catholicism became a “force
for democracy because of the changes within the church.” 5 Still, key questions remain as to why
only some Catholic Churches challenge authoritarianism, while others clearly do not. The church

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4 Samuel P. Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century (Norman, Oklahoma:

5 Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, 77.
does not appear ultimately to act in a consistent manner in all settings and contexts, which needs to be completely understood.

Examples of the Catholic Church’s mixed response to authoritarianism can be found throughout the world. For instance, it is widely known that the church played a critical role in challenging government authoritarianism in Poland prior to the fall of communism in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. At that time the institutionally strong Polish church helped to unify and build an independent civil society, which eventually stimulated democratization and the fall of the communist regime. ¹ In the Philippines, the Catholic Church also vigorously challenged authoritarianism. In 1986, the church was instrumental in helping to oust the country’s oppressive president, Ferdinand Marcos, who church leaders strongly opposed. The Catholic Church in the Philippines is viewed as a social and political force. It is a strong institution, with an expansive infrastructure and a vast communications and civil society network.⁷

Paradoxically, in countries like Rwanda, the Catholic Church has consistently failed to challenge authoritarianism or promote democratization, even after Vatican II. During the horrific genocide and prolonged civil war in the country in 1994, the church was accused of fanning the flames of the conflict and acting negligently. At that time up to a million people were killed during a 100-day period of fighting among the ethnic majority Hutus and minority Tutsis. The institutionally weak Catholic Church in Rwanda was moreover criticized for lacking legitimacy and being closely tied to the government. ⁸ In Argentina, the Catholic Church has been

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condemned, as well, for ignoring the poor and colluding with repressive authoritarian regimes, particularly during the “dirty war” from 1976 to 1983. The church in Argentina has also been labeled as institutionally weak. ⁹

These assorted case studies illustrate the variations in response to authoritarianism by Catholic Churches within different national contexts. Yet, in Mexico there also appears to be significant differentiation in the church’s reaction to authoritarianism at the local level, and within its thirty-one states. This demonstrates the necessity of examining the church in Mexico not just at the national level, but at the local level as well, and in separate church dioceses and archdioceses. The historical trajectories and institutional characteristics of different churches at the local level also need to be fully understood. This can potentially expose localized behavior patterns and internal church differences, and their impact on local politics and civil society. In the past, vague adjectives like “progressive” and “conservative” have been widely used to describe most Catholic Church behavior, without fully examining the underlying root causes of the church’s actions, which this dissertation will also delve into.

The powerful and expanding Catholic Church first arrived in Mexico via the Spanish conquistadores in the 1500s. For centuries, the church played a powerful role in the development of local communities and institutions in Mexico. In the twentieth century, the church was still one of the only independent societal actors in Mexico that had the potential capacity to challenge the PRI’s corporatist structures and clientelistic networks, which were the government’s main authoritarian tools at that time. Jonathan Fox affirms that “among the many diverse groups that

make up” Mexican society, only the Catholic Church succeeded in remaining a “powerful, autonomous national organization” in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{10}

The PRI was once described as the “perfect dictatorship” in Mexico. It held an iron tight hold on power from about 1929 to 2000, when for the first time a non-PRI presidential candidate won an election. The PRI was the “classic example of a bureaucratic-authoritarian party,” which blocked real democracy in Mexico, insists Jeffrey Klaiber. \textsuperscript{11} For decades, the majority of Mexico’s civic and professional associations were controlled by the PRI. The PRI was essentially “a vehicle for dividing up economic rents among its leaders and supporters.” It co-opted and micromanaged civil society through government-controlled groups.\textsuperscript{12} Its extensive “patronage system” also contributed to its legitimacy, stability and populist loyalty, observes Susan Eckstein. \textsuperscript{13} While Jonathan Hiskey affirms that “one of the most impressive feats” of the PRI’s grip on power prior to the 2000 elections was its ability to “control the local,” and make the story of Mexican politics at that time “a decidedly centralized, national one.” \textsuperscript{14}

The “linchpin” of Mexico’s “vaunted stability” in the twentieth century was a unique set of PRI political institutions and organizations, which “limited competition and choice” in the country, maintains Daniel Levy. The government required societal groups, like rural farmers and other social actors, to join constrictive corporatist groups, which it largely controlled. A


\textsuperscript{11} Jeffrey Klaiber, S.J., The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 239.


\textsuperscript{14} Hiskey, “The Return of ‘the Local’ to Mexican Politics,” 545-547.
corporatist political system is one where interest groups and their agendas are prioritized over individual interests and actions, like voting. During the heyday of the PRI, an independent civil society was considered rare, due to the government’s determined efforts to directly control Mexico’s population through corporatism and clientelism. PRI hegemony “invaded all aspects of public life,” and aggressively blocked independent association at that time.

The PRI was able to not only dominate civil society at the local and federal level, but also control many of the country’s elections through this restrictive process. The PRI’s “clientelistic practices” were essential to the preservation of Mexico’s authoritarian state, observes Neil Harvey. The “right of associational autonomy” was also denied by Mexico’s “institutionalization of clientelism.” Clientelism is defined by Fox as a “relationship based on political subordination in exchange for material rewards.” Mexico’s clientelism produced mostly clients instead of citizens, who were typically “poor people in need of basic services.” The PRI’s system of “authoritarian clientelism” generated enduring patron-client relationships, between the government and the population, as well. Clients were politically subordinate to the government and controlled by the “threat of coercion.”

In order to better understand the different reactions to authoritarianism by Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico prior to the 2000 elections, this dissertation will


employ a bottom-up, localized technique to examining church behavior. This comparative method will be used instead of the classic top-down approach, which international relations scholars usually employ, who view the church as a monolithic, hierarchical and centralized organization tied to the Vatican in Rome. The bottom-up method can better shed light and understanding on the institutional dynamics of different church units and their local conditions, as well as their mixed responses to authoritarianism prior to 2000.

The main unit of analysis for this dissertation will be the Catholic Church dioceses or archdioceses in different states across Mexico. When churches are specifically looked at in this manner there seems to be wide variation in their responses towards authoritarianism. It is important to understand this variation in order to identify how church units can potentially promote democratization or perpetuate authoritarianism at the state and local level in Mexico. It seems clear, however, that specific institutional qualities are encouraging some local church units to create oppositional movements, flourishing and autonomous civil societies and vast infrastructures, which are then emboldening them to challenge authoritarianism and promote democratization.

Thus, a key variable in determining whether a church unit will challenge authoritarianism appears to be its institutional capacity to do so. Traditionally, Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico were not created equally nor were they managed in a uniform manner. They also had different economic, social and historical influences, and they were established in different time periods, sometimes even hundreds of years apart. These factors significantly impacted their institutional developments. Consequently, some church units in Mexico look to be

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institutionally weaker than others. In some cases they were undermined by local and regional forces, or from a lack of autonomy and independence from the government, which meant that they were usually co-opted by elites. Some church units also had difficulty implementing Vatican reforms and in creating church networks and independent civil society organizations. In contrast, the church dioceses and archdioceses that were more likely to challenge authoritarianism before the 2000 elections appear be institutionally stronger and more effective than the ones that did not, which provided them with the capacity to fight authoritarian governments. In order to understand this phenomenon better, the institutional dynamics of church units in Mexico need to be fully evaluated to determine why some are institutionally strong and effective, while others are weak. Once that is established, it is then possible to look at additional factors to understand the reasons why a church unit might challenge government authoritarianism.

A diverse set of case studies will be examined for this dissertation. Six Mexican states and their church dioceses and archdioceses will be analyzed. The state case studies include Chiapas, Guanajuato, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo, and Yucatan. In the states of Chiapas, Guanajuato and Chihuahua, major Catholic Church challenges to local authoritarianism have occurred throughout history, as well as in the decades leading up to the 2000 elections. Alternatively, in Tamaulipas, Hidalgo and Yucatan the dioceses or archdioceses there were largely unresponsive or tolerant of government authoritarianism, before and after the twentieth century, and as a result the PRI’s local power remained solid and uncontested there, which election data reveals.

This study will examine the local conditions which were present when dioceses and archdioceses in some states chose to challenge the authoritarian structures of the state, while
others did not. It will evaluate the historical trajectories of these church units, as well, and their different church-state relationships. The case studies will be analyzed based on low to high-level efforts to challenge authoritarian by the hierarchy of a Catholic Church diocese or archdiocese in different states. A successful high-level challenge is when a church unit consistently promoted regime change in an area and strongly denounced the government, which led to a change in government. A low-level challenge signifies no serious attempt to overthrow the government or criticize it. In some cases the local church might have been aligned with the authoritarian government.

The Catholic Church in Mexico has a “decentralized structure,” maintains Roderic Camp, and each diocese or archdiocese operates with “extraordinary autonomy,” with only “tenuous ties” to the national church in Mexico City. This situation is unique and different from many other countries in the world. It is therefore important to identify and evaluate the characteristics of regional churches in Mexico and their leaderships, who are mainly products of “local, historical and social experiences,” which differ from the country as a whole. Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico are essentially “autonomous units,” and local Catholic bishops are also “products of diocesan environments.” Some church units have moreover “built up a sizable network of educational, religious, and charitable agencies” at the parish or local levels, and these organizational networks actually form their “mobilization potential.” 20

Ivan Vallier argues, as well, that “deep regional divisions and cultural identities” in Mexico makes the national level Catholic Church structure in Mexico City “relatively weak,” with churches at the local level exercising greater control. The church hierarchy in Mexico is

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also not “well integrated,” claims Vallier, and therefore the actions of the laity differ considerably throughout the country.  

Furthermore, between 1867 and 1992, the formal diplomatic relationship between the church hierarchy in Mexico City and the Vatican in Rome was broken, which allowed local church units to develop separate from the church hierarchies in Mexico City and Rome. Transportation and communication issues in the colonial era also created immense distances between the Archdiocese in Mexico City and local church dioceses, which further permitted church units to develop independently.

The institutional qualities of different Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico have largely been ignored by researchers, maintains David Bailey. This is mainly due to the difficulties of evaluating the inner dynamics of churches, yet this situation has led to a false assumption that all church units have the same institutional characteristics in Mexico. This dissertation seeks to dispel this myth and present new evidence to better understand the institutional variations of church units in Mexico, and how this impacts their ability to challenge authoritarianism and promote democratization in their local areas.

Dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico have their own regional histories, as well, and they adopted different roles and responsibilities in their local areas. Some were better at organizing communities, collecting taxes and gaining autonomy from the government, which made them institutionally stronger and more effective. Other church units were consistently plagued by institutional weaknesses, mainly due to local conditions. Some church units, in contrast, have

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always been willing to challenge authoritarianism largely because they were institutionally strong and effective. Church units that are strong and effective typically have autonomy and independence from the government, robust church networks, dense and autonomous church-driven civil societies, social capital and the ability to implement Vatican reforms, which the state case studies reveal. These qualities make church units strong and effective, unlike institutionally weak church units, which generally lack these characteristics, and therefore they are incapable of successfully challenging government authoritarianism.

This present study on Catholic Church dioceses and archdiocese builds on the previous scholarship of political scientists, who have investigated the impacts of different variables, such as economics, history and culture on institutional effectiveness. This dissertation focuses on the institutional dynamics of church dioceses and archdioceses, and how this influences local politics and civil society. Therefore, it is not just a study about the Catholic Church and Mexico. It has broader implications about the conditions necessary for creating effective and strong institutions. In Mexico, the Catholic Church is an expansive and important social actor, yet the institutional qualities of different church units are rarely evaluated or compared.

In the past several decades, there have been various influential studies, which have looked at institutions and their performance. This includes Robert Putnam’s important study *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. In this book, Putnam tried to understand how variables like politics and civic culture affected political institutions. He studied fifteen new regional governments in Italy after power was decentralized from Rome in 1970. Putnam monitored the progress of identical institutions to assess variations in institutional efficacy over time, and how similar institutions performed in different environments. His main
research question was: What are the conditions for creating strong, responsive, effective, representative institutions? 24

Putnam found that Italy’s regions have “deep historical roots,” which are based on centuries of local history and politics, and that this ultimately impacted the effectiveness of institutions. In southern Italy, for example, a history of feudalism, authoritarianism, Catholic Church co-optation and social inequality had produced a region with consistently weak institutions and civic traditions. In the south, life was “riskier” and laws were “made to be broken,” insists Putnam. 25

Northern Italy, on the other hand, has a legacy of republicanism, and political and civic pluralism, which created enduring norms of egalitarianism and democracy there. Civil society was also healthier in the north, in part due to an autonomous Catholic Church, which embraced Vatican reforms. Specific conditions in the north resulted, as well, in the development of social trust and social capital, and institutions functioned better there because people followed the rules. Through historical analysis, Putnam discovered that institutional performance was highest in the areas of Italy where traditions of civic engagement and social capital were strongest, which then stimulated modern-day democratic behavior in those local areas. 26

Amaney Jamal also examines the relationship between civil society and political institutions in her book Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World. Jamal found that in authoritarian-type settings, civic associations are often manipulated by the government, who create patron-client relationships to support their regimes.


25 Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, xiv, 83-152.

26 Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, xiv, 83-152.
She revealed that in this type of environment, civil society is not a harbinger for democracy because civil society is weak and co-opted by authoritarian institutions. This demonstrates the importance of examining different types of political institutions and how their actions can shape local civil society. Jamal observes that civic associations, whether they are churches or sports clubs, typically “reproduce elements of the political context in which they exist.” 27

Samuel Huntington also focuses on institutional dynamics in his book *Political Order in Changing Societies*. He discovered that political institutions have higher levels of institutionalization depending on whether they have autonomy, complexity, adaptability and coherence, which makes some institutions stronger and more effective than others. These concepts will be evaluated later in the dissertation with respect to Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico. 28

The time focus of this dissertation will primarily be on the twentieth century, when the PRI government was confronted by some local church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, but not others. Election data reveals, as well, that accelerated rates of democratization have occurred in the local areas where a church unit consistently challenged the government prior to the 2000 elections. Conversely, in the areas where a church unit was regularly passive and non-confrontational with the government, authoritarianism typically persisted, sometimes well past the 2000 elections. Therefore, the individual actions and behaviors of local church units in Mexico have political consequences, and look to be contributing to the development of democratic and authoritarian enclaves within the country. This is a phenomenon that will be

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examined in this dissertation, as well, via in-depth case study analysis at the local level. A multi-layered evaluation of the institutional histories, characteristics and actions of different church units will also be conducted in order to understand the conditions necessary for creating strong and effective Catholic Church institutions in Mexico, which are capable of challenging authoritarianism. 29

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of ten chapters. The first chapter provided the main research question and an introduction to the research project. It also outlined the importance of examining individual Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, as opposed to focusing mainly on the church hierarchy in Mexico City. It underscored the variations in the church’s response to authoritarianism, as well, and how this can impact local democratization efforts in Mexico. The second chapter provides the theoretical framework, main argument and methodology of the dissertation. It also includes a literature review.

In the third chapter, the history of the Catholic Church and government in Mexico will be evaluated in detail. A comprehensive understanding of Mexico’s history is necessary in order to analyze and interpret the six state case studies in this dissertation. The chapter on history also provides specific information about important events in Mexico’s past, such as the Spanish colonial period, the Mexican Revolution and Mexico’s debt crisis in the 1980s. These key events will be analyzed further in the state case study chapters in an attempt to understand how they influenced and shaped states and their church dioceses and archdioceses differently.

The following six chapters of the dissertation consist of case studies on a collection of Mexican states. The institutional histories, characteristics and actions of different dioceses and

29 Lawson, “Mexico’s Unfinished Transition: Democratization and Authoritarian Enclaves in Mexico,” 267-274.
archdioceses in each state, along with their church-state relationships, will be evaluated. The first three state case studies are on Chiapas, Guanajuato and Chihuahua, where the church has consistently challenged government authoritarianism. The last three case studies include the states of Hidalgo, Tamaulipas and Yucatan, where the church diocese or archdiocese typically failed to challenge authoritarianism. The case studies are ordered from highest to lowest challenges to authoritarianism to provide an opportunity to compare and contrast their histories and institutional dynamics. A brief introduction to the six different state cases is provided below.

**The State of Chiapas**

Throughout history, the strong and effective Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal de Las Casas has challenged the state government in Chiapas. This diocese can be viewed as a model for understanding the capacity of a church unit in Mexico to challenge authoritarianism. In the later part of the twentieth century, church networks within Chiapas’s mostly indigenous communities helped to create a strong oppositional movement to counter the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The diocese also developed independent civil society organizations, which were unaffiliated with the government. They challenged the PRI’s corporatist structure and clientelistic networks in local areas in Chiapas.

The most recent democratic challenge by the church diocese in San Cristobal was its links to the Zapatista rebellion in 1994. This uprising significantly impacted Mexico’s democratization efforts at the end of the twentieth century, not only in Chiapas, but also at the national level. The history and local activities of the diocese in San Cristobal will be outlined in this chapter, as well, and information will be provided on its role in democratization.

**The State of Guanajuato**

Since the colonial era, the state of Guanajuato has been a hub for Catholic Church resistance movements fighting the government. Catholic priests in Guanajuato began the fight
for Mexican independence in 1810. Residents in the state of Guanajuato also actively participated in the Cristero Rebellion from 1926 to 1929, which was supported by the Diocese of Leon. During the twentieth century, Catholicism “more than any other single factor” was what “frustrated the revolutionary project in Guanajuato,” claims Ben Fallaw. Opposition to the PRI in Guanajuato was also largely defined by Catholic “beliefs and mobilized by Catholic organizations.” This chapter will examine challenges by the Diocese of Leon to state and local authoritarianism in Guanajuato, and evaluate the impact on democratization.

The State of Chihuahua

Chihuahua was another key battleground state for a democratic movement that was led by the Catholic Church in the decades prior to the 2000 presidential elections in Mexico. The church in Chihuahua repeatedly challenged authoritarianism, and was the leading local advocate for democratization at that time. Bishops in the state also widely publicized election fraud in the 1980s, which led to democratic gains for the PAN. The church has backed social justice agendas, as well, since the founding of the first diocese in Chihuahua City in 1891. The church also embraced Vatican initiatives and encouraged civic activism through the establishment of Catholic media and civil society organizations, which challenged authoritarianism throughout the twentieth century. This chapter will examine these activities further in Chihuahua.

The State of Tamaulipas

Tamaulipas, unlike the previous three chapters, provides an informative case study of a state where the Catholic Church has repeatedly chosen not to challenge government

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authoritarianism, due to its institutional weaknesses. Tamaulipas was ruled by the PRI until 2016 when a PAN governor finally won for the first time in state history following several PRI corruption scandals. Tamaulipas currently contends with some major societal issues like human and drug trafficking, kidnapping, corruption and extreme crises in governance. 32

Tamaulipas was one of the last provinces to be colonized by the Spanish at the end of the colonial era and the church’s missionary system was largely disregarded there. The church in Tamaulipas continues to be institutionally weak and presents no serious challenge to the government. It also has little autonomy from the government due to its diminished position in society.

The State of Hidalgo

The Catholic Church in the state of Hidalgo offers another key case study of a weak institutional church. The church hierarchy in Hidalgo has typically elected not to challenge the government, despite the PRI’s persistent control there since the party’s foundation. The church in Hidalgo has been undermined and weakened, as well, by business and political leaders. The state was also a strong-hold for anticlericalism and Liberalism prior to the Mexican Revolution. An influx of Protestant miners in the 1800s made Protestantism popular in the state, as well. These factors weakened the church in Hidalgo and made it institutionally incapable of successfully challenging authoritarianism. This chapter will evaluate these important concepts further.

The State of Yucatan

In Yucatan, the Catholic Church is considered very conservative. Traditionally, it has been tied to the upper and elite classes and it was closely connected to the PRI during the

twentieth century. The church in Yucatan does not challenge authoritarianism and it is usually quiet and politically inactive. It also has never mobilized indigenous people to fight for their rights, despite having a very high indigenous population. The church in Yucatan is institutionally weak and largely incapable of challenging authoritarianism. This chapter will look closer at the church in Yucatan and offer an in depth assessment of its historic church-state relationship.

The tenth and final chapter of this dissertation summarizes the dissertation and provides a conclusion. It also offers additional information about the Catholic Church’s impact on democratization in Mexico prior to the 2000 presidential elections. It examines the failures of assorted dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, as well, to challenge authoritarianism and the consequences of this inaction.
CHAPTER 2
THEORY, ARGUMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the theoretical framework and main argument for the dissertation will be outlined. An evaluation of different theories on civil society, institutions and democratization will also be presented. In the later part of the chapter, the methodology of the dissertation will be provided, as well as a literature review to further evaluate important theories for the dissertation.

Theoretical Framework

In the decades leading up to the 2000 presidential elections in Mexico, strong and effective Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses were specifically capable of confronting the PRI and its corporatist organizations and clientelistic networks. These robust church units typically created flourishing and autonomous civil societies in their local areas, and they provided institutional space for oppositional movements to grow. They also frequently spoke out against government authoritarianism, and established hostile church-state relationships to forcefully engage with authoritarian governments in Mexico. These efforts led to long-term or temporary democratic gains in some states like Chiapas, Guanajuato and Chihuahua, which the case studies reveal.

Strong and effective church institutions ultimately had the capacity to be valuable social actors prior to the 2000 elections in Mexico. They had robust church networks, dense civil societies and autonomy from the government. They also created social capital, trust, and unity among diverse populations of people. They possessed vast infrastructures, as well, and they had the capacity to implement church policies and Vatican reforms. Strong and effective church units consistently confronted authoritarian systems in Mexico, and helped stimulate democratization and change in local areas, which had major political consequences.
Institutionally weak Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses, in contrast, were very limited in their ability to act as independent social actors at that time. These church units were often victimized by the government’s authoritarian institutions and corporatist structures. They generally lacked autonomy and were co-opted by the government. They also tended to have weak church networks, deficits in social capital, an inability to implement Vatican reforms, public trust issues and limited church infrastructures and resources, which restricted their institutional capacities. Institutionally weak church dioceses and archdioceses can be found in Tamaulipas, Hidalgo and Yucatan. These church units typically did not try to challenge the PRI’s local authoritarian structures or create dissident movements prior to the 2000 elections, largely due to their institutional limitations and restrictive church-state relationships.

Thus, the institutional capacity of a church diocese or archdiocese is a key variable in determining whether it will challenge authoritarianism. Only those that are institutionally strong and effective can withstand the consequences of their recalcitrant, aggressive behavior. Anthony Gill observes that religious leaders are above all subject to the same type of “concerns and constraints as their secular counterparts.” They are rational actors, who are aware of their institutional limitations and abilities, and they use this knowledge to determine how to act to best attain their goals. ¹

Rational choice explanations for behavior requires an identification of key actors, and an evaluation of their “preferences (or goals), and the constraints they face,” explains Gill. ² Consequently, the clergy needs to assess the institutional capacity of a diocese or archdiocese


² Gill, Rendering Unto Caesar, 49
prior to making any aggressive moves. Church leadership who act “irrespective of their church’s institutional health will find that they are presiding over a weak and irrelevant organization,” insists Gill. ³

Samuel Huntington argues, moreover, that strong and effective institutions have higher levels of institutionalization. Institutionalization occurs when institutions have autonomy vs. subordination, adaptability vs. rigidity, complexity vs. simplicity and coherence vs. disunity. Institutions that have a broad “scope of support” also are more robust. Their level of institutionalization can be assessed by identifying and measuring internal characteristics of institutions, which this dissertation will examine in the case study chapters. Institutions, Huntington asserts, also acquire “value and stability” through a process of institutionalization. ⁴

Huntington’s theory on institutions helps explain why some church archdioceses and dioceses are stronger and more effective than others in Mexico. Weaker church units typically lack autonomy because they are subordinate to local elites and the government. They usually have rigid church structures, as well, and they have difficulty adapting to change. They are also less complex due to their reduced number of subunits and inadequate infrastructures. They consistently fail to implement Vatican reforms, as well, and as a result there is a lack of cohesion and unity between the church hierarchy and them. Weaker church units generally target a small sector of the population, such as the upper class, which further weakens them. ⁵

Robert Putnam conducted an extensive study on institutional performance, as well, in his book *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Putnam found that political

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institutions are largely shaped by history, and “by the social context within which they operate.” Consequently, they have their own “historical trajectories and turning points.” He also concluded that some institutions work well, while others do not. Putnam calls institutions “devices for achieving purposes, not just for achieving agreements.”

Like Putnam’s investigation, this present study also emphasizes history and how it can shape and mold institutions. It offers a comparative historical analysis of different Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, in an effort to understand their institutional characteristics and capacities to challenge authoritarianism and promote democratization prior to the 2000 presidential elections. Putnam, however, saw hierarchical organizations like the Catholic Church as “negatively associated” with good governance and democracy in Italy. He believed that democratic behavior in Italy was instead a product of “singing groups and soccer clubs, not prayer.”

Yet, an analysis of different church dioceses and archdioceses might have provided Putnam with a rare opportunity to see that church units in Italy can impact local politics and civil society in both negative and positive ways. This certainly was the case in northern Italy, where a dense civil society network appears largely to have been a product of a social Catholic movement, which “spawned numerous lay associations” in this part of the country, as noted by Putnam. Alternatively, in southern Italy, it seems that the church was institutionally weak and co-opted by authoritarian forces, which made it incapable of producing an independent civil society or stimulating democratic behavior. Churches therefore are not monolithic. They have the

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capacity to build expansive civil societies and social capital through their vast array of associations and social networks.\(^9\)

An institutional approach to examining civil society and social capital “highlights the fact that institutions both facilitate and restrict opportunities for social interaction.” Robert Wuthnow observes that individuals live within institutions, and analyzing institutions can isolate their roles in civil society formation. He calls this approach more productive than merely measuring the vague and “simplistic” quality of civil society by studying society’s participation in any informal organization. Religious institutions are important creators of civil society organizations, as well, and therefore they also have the potential to stimulate democratic behavior.\(^{10}\)

A healthy and independent civil society is a necessary condition for democracy, insists Larry Diamond. Civil society holds states accountable and stands “between the private sphere and the state.” It is an “organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating,” and at least partially “self-supporting.” Ideally, it is also autonomous from the state, and “bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.” In civil society, citizens can act “collectively” in a public sphere. Diamond sees democracy not simply as a system where elites acquire the power to rule through a “competitive struggle for people’s votes.” He claims instead that democratic governments must be “held accountable” to the people, and responsive to their “passions, preferences, and interests” via a healthy civil society.\(^{11}\)

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\(^{11}\) Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 219-221.
Associational density and “autonomy” are also important requirements for a thriving civil society. Autonomy allows citizens to organize “without fear of external intervention or punishment,” observes Fox. 12 Autonomous organizations have the capacity to create trust and social capital, as well, among members, which is critical because democracy demands “a degree of trust” between citizens.13 Social capital consists of the “resources” individuals obtain from working with others. This includes social networks, such as personal connections, which churches can facilitate.14

Amaney Jamal contends, however, that a large and expansive civil society is not always a harbinger for democracy. She maintains that civil society can also be corrupted by authoritarian institutions and patron-client relationships. It is important therefore to analyze the differences in institutions, and how this can impact civil society development. Jamal notes that in authoritarian settings, governments typically “intervene more directly in associational life,” and they sponsor and promote specific agendas and programs. Regimes are also more “embedded” in authoritarian atmospheres, and leaders “extend their influence” by pushing local associations to support their political mandates. Therefore, associational life in authoritarian settings can’t be “expected to yield the types of democratic values and outcomes,” that it does in democracies.15

Civil society associations can also replicate the authoritarian behavior of the government, and inadvertently support patron-client relationships and clientelism. Putnam observes that authoritarian political institutions survive on “vertical relations of authority,” dependency and


“vertical social networks,” which civil society can reinforce in authoritarian countries. In democratic settings, however, institutions are usually strengthened by a healthy and autonomous civil society. In democracies, civil society also typically supports horizontal networks of civic engagement and cooperation, which encourages good governance.\textsuperscript{16}

In Mexico, church dioceses and archdioceses, which are strong and effective, help stimulate democratic behavior in their local areas. They have robust church networks and healthy and autonomous civil societies, as well as other resources, which were used to challenge authoritarianism prior to the 2000 elections in Mexico. Institutionally weak church units, in contrast, generally did not have the capacity to engage in these types of activities. In their local areas, “vertical bonds of clientelism” were deeply embedded, and the church was normally too institutionally weak and powerless to compete with existing power structures or to foster robust church networks and thriving civil societies.\textsuperscript{17}

In Mexico, religious institutions play critical roles in civil society development, observes Jonathan Fox. Mexico’s first non-governmental organizations were closely tied to the Catholic Church, which managed many welfare and educational institutions. By the 1950s and 1960s, churches played a key role in creating non-governmental organizations, which focused on social and political issues, education, food distribution and health. These kinds of organizations “mushroomed” in some parts of Mexico, particularly after Vatican II and the establishment of Christian base communities.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17} Putnam, \textit{Making Democracy Work}, 148-149.

\textsuperscript{18} Fox, “Mexico’s Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs and Local Government,” 178.
In the 1990s, roughly two-thirds of the non-governmental organizations that engaged in work on electoral transparency and watch dog activities in Mexico were also closely affiliated with Christian denominations, notes Roberto J. Blancarte. Religious institutions can lobby the legislature, as well, to support public policies, and throw their “leadership, resources, and moral authority into a broad national movement for democratic change.” Still, Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses have received very little attention in democratization studies in Mexico, despite their immense potential for shaping local politics and civil society.

In the 1980s, economic and social problems in Mexico also created new space for civil society organizations. At that time, the PRI’s “fiscal capacity” to control local level actors diminished significantly. During the PRI’s domination of Mexico, civil society was largely ordered into patron-client relationships and interconnected vertical networks, but this started to change in the 1980s. Local communities became vital centers for political and societal change in Mexico at that time, after decades of centralized PRI rule.

The expansion of civil society in the 1980s transformed “the structure of politics” in Mexico, following decades of PRI corporatism. New demands for civil society organizations in Mexico also arose from the government’s failure to respond to local emergencies and social crises. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the growth of a “private

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20 Larry Diamond, Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 224.

sector” provided further openings for an independent civil society in Mexico. Meanwhile, the PRI grew “corrupt and complacent” by the end of the twentieth century, and “increasingly lost public credibility,” claims Klaiber.

Concomitantly, the Catholic Church, “went through the opposite” effect. It had previously accepted the need for “lending passive support” to the state. But eventually it completely “abandoned this passivity and began to assume a more assertive role” in civil society. Beginning in the 1980s, the church became one of the most important voices against election fraud and government corruption in Mexico. It was also one of the only institutions that had the power, resources and independence to challenge authoritarianism at that time, and drive local democratization efforts, or become its leading deterrent. It is therefore critical to examine the potential democratizing role of Catholic Churches in Mexico, particularly in the decades leading up to the 2000 elections.

Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico are, for the most part, enclaves of social behavior, which needs to be better understood, as well, in order to assess political activity at the subnational level. Subnational politics is important in Mexico because many states still have only witnessed the PRI win at the state and local level, despite the historic 2000 presidential elections. An examination of Mexico’s subnational politics helps explain the persistence of authoritarianism, along with the potential for democratic behavior in local areas. In the

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23 Klaiber, S.J., The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America, 241.

24 Klaiber, S.J., The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America, 239-241.

following section of this paper, the institutional qualities of strong and effective church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico will be evaluated further.

**Argument**

The institutional dynamics of Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico vary significantly, and this inevitably impacts their ability to challenge local government authoritarianism. Church units that have consistently challenged authoritarianism are institutionally stronger and more effective than those that have not challenged authoritarianism, which the case studies reveal. By comparing and contrasting church units that have challenged authoritarianism, with those that have not, it is possible to identify the specific institutional differences of church units in Mexico.

The Catholic Church is typically seen as a hierarchal, highly cohesive international organization, but the transnational top-down approach to studying the church does not capture the variation of why and when individual church dioceses or archdioceses in Mexico successfully challenged authoritarianism prior to the 2000 presidential elections. Therefore, church behavior needs to be examined at the local or subnational level to better understand the institutional differences of churches in Mexico. Church dioceses and archdioceses, moreover, exist within “domestic structures” and political settings, insists Timothy Byrnes, which the Vatican can’t directly control. Official diplomatic ties between the Vatican and the Catholic Church in Mexico were also broken for about 125 years, which allowed local dioceses and archdioceses to develop separate from the church hierarchies in Mexico and Rome.

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The table below identifies the characteristics of a strong and effective church diocese or archdiocese, which were determined by examining church units in Mexico, which had successfully challenged authoritarianism.

Table 1-1. Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Catholic Church Diocese or Archdiocese

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Dependent Variable:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
<td>Whether a diocese or archdiocese is institutionally strong and effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dioceses and archdioceses that score high in the above categories appear to be institutionally strong and effective, which gives them the capacity to carry out the broad objectives of the church and to challenge authoritarianism, when necessary. The absence of these qualities indicates an institutionally weak church, which ultimately does not perform well, and lacks the capacity to challenge authoritarianism. Qualities of an institutionally strong and effective church unit look to be deeply entrenched and long-enduring. These characteristics will be examined below.

**Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-Optation by the Government or Elite Groups**

A church-state relationship that has a high degree of autonomy and independence from the government and elites is an important requirement for the institutional effectiveness and strength of a church diocese or archdiocese. Institutions that have autonomy also exhibit higher
levels of institutionalization, which makes them stronger and less vulnerable to outside pressures, observes Huntington.\textsuperscript{28} Churches that are constricted or co-opted by the government or elites, usually demonstrate an excessive level of dependency on these entities, and a failure to act independently. Autonomy means that a church unit can operate freely and follow church objectives, without constraints. A fear of censure by the government and elites, on the other hand, appears to be a strong motivator for subordinate church units to remain silent and non-confrontational.

A church unit that is dependent on the state and elites, “ties the church to precarious bases of influence” and “grounds” their activities in a “framework of short-run” goals, which makes them less effective, according to Ivan Vallier.\textsuperscript{29} Church units in Mexico traditionally had diverse roles in Mexican society. Some provided valuable services to local populations and governments, while others did not. Those that didn’t tended to establish more dependent relationships with the government. Some church units were also more successful at controlling local populations, collecting taxes, managing labor pools and protecting areas from wild indigenous tribes, particularly during the colonial era. This made them vital to an area because they carried out critical social and political responsibilities and duties, which the government failed to deliver. This created independence for a diocese, and a more autonomous church-state relationship usually developed, based on the church’s stronger bargaining power with the government.

\textsuperscript{28} Huntington, \textit{Political Order in Changing Societies}, 20-21.

Some church dioceses in Mexico were also considered shadow governments or “quasi-governing” institutions. This was because they played such pivotal roles in governing local communities, while other dioceses did not assume that much responsibility. Consequently, some church units had broad control over local populations, while others did not. Religious orders also managed populations with differing degrees of success, depending on local circumstances.

During the colonial era, one of the Spanish monarchy’s biggest fears was “excessive autonomy” within its colonies, notes Matthew O’Hara. Spain struggled to govern multi-ethnic populations in the new territory, and therefore indirect rule was customary. Thus, under the right circumstances, churches had the opportunity to establish a great deal of autonomy for themselves in Mexico. Archdioceses and dioceses in Mexico were also much larger than the ones in Europe. Due to the vast size of the new territory, religious orders were given a significant “role in the evangelization and spiritual administration” of the colonies. Religious orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits, typically had more independence than the secular clergy because they reported directly to Rome instead of the Spanish Crown.

Whether a church diocese developed a dependent vs. an independent relationship with the state also depended on the time period of its foundation. Colonial provinces that were established late in the colonial era, for example, were usually influenced more by enlightenment principles, compared to provinces that were created early in the colonial process. Enlightenment principles reduced the church’s importance in Mexican society and lessened its overall control, at least temporarily.

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Institutional limitations and existing church-state relationships continue to influence the behavior of local clergy in Mexico. Dioceses and archdioceses that are institutionally weak and more dependent on the government and elites, tend to have quieter and less confrontational clergy, as well as less stability, which the case studies reveal. Institutionally strong and effective church units, on the other hand, generally have more assertive and outspoken clergy, which is necessary to maintain the independence of the church unit.

The degree of autonomy and independence that a church unit has from the government will be measured by analyzing historical data, media reports and other topical literature. These sources of information will be utilized to qualitatively gauge the amount of independence and autonomy that each church diocese or archdiocese had from the government prior to 2000.

**Networks: Strong and Enduring Church Networks, Which Were Typically Developed Prior to State Formation**

Strong church networks, which usually pre-existed the state, appear to be important, as well, for the development of an effective and strong church institution. In Mexico, the Catholic Church created early church networks to build local communities and institutions, and to connect populations to the church. These networks were used to collect taxes, to protect areas, or to create community civil-religious systems, and other local organizations. Some dioceses were more successful than others at establishing strong church networks, particularly during the colonial era, or early in a state’s history. This was largely due to the church’s social role in the area. In some locations the church’s responsibilities were limited, and it had less of an involvement in the upkeep of colonial institutions and community affairs, which diminished its capacity to create strong church networks. In other areas church dioceses had expansive and broad powers, and they developed robust and enduring church networks.
Strong early church networks also created durable traditions of civil society networking in some parts of Mexico. They established “preexisting” social networks, which ultimately provided the infrastructure necessary for future civil society activism. Church units with robust church networks currently have stronger civil society networks. Social networks and civil society organizations, which were established by churches, are frequently used by indigenous populations for social activism in Mexico. Church networks have helped indigenous communities to mobilize and “transcend localized identities.”

Local communities in Mexico, which inherited a “substantial stock” of social capital via strong church networks, are also typically more cooperative and helpful. This is mostly due to the “norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement” in these societies, which church networks helped to facilitate. Areas with weaker church networks, however, tend to have less cooperation, and less indigenous mobilization, even when there are grievances.

The strength of church networks in dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico will be measured by evaluating their intensity, and the different type of church networks that existed in local areas. A historical examination of local church networks will be conducted, as well, through church records and historical data.

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Policy Implementation: A High-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow Church Guidelines

Political scientists have long speculated as to why some Catholic Churches embrace Vatican reforms and church initiatives, while others apparently do not. Dioceses and archdioceses that welcome Vatican reforms appear to have sufficient independence from the government and strong institutional capacities. Some church units fail to implement church reforms, however, largely due to their institutional limitations. Yet, the failure to fully implement Vatican reforms and church initiatives can also be seen as a signal that a diocese or archdiocese is institutionally weak. Churches are supposed to follow the mandates of the Vatican, and when they do not do this there will be institutional costs, and these church units will not function properly.

In the last several centuries, two of the most important Vatican reforms in Mexico include Rerum Novarum and Vatican II. Rerum Novarum was introduced by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. It had far-reaching consequences in Mexico, and it ignited a major Catholic social movement in some parts of the country. It emphasized human rights abuses in rapidly industrialized societies. Rerum Novarum reforms resulted in the establishment of trade unions and other civil society organizations, and increased the participation of Catholics in politics and civil society. Prior to the Mexican Revolution, it also led to the growth of Catholic media and other local civic associations, which were connected to the church. 36

A social Catholic movement began in Mexico during the Porfirio Diaz era, and continued throughout the post-revolutionary period. The movement inspired the Cristero Rebellion and the development of new pro-church political parties, and other church-connected civic organizations.

in Mexico. The pope, via Rerum Novarum initiatives, also notified Catholics that it was “their duty” to get involved in politics and civil society.  

Another important Vatican reform was Vatican II. It was introduced by Pope John XXIII in 1959. It created major changes within the church, and supported human rights reforms, as well as social justice and poverty initiatives. It also stimulated civic and political engagement, mainly through new church-connected civil society organizations. Vatican II reformed the church, as well, and changed its organizational structure. Churches that adopted Vatican II became less elite-centered and more community driven. After Vatican II, new religious groups were also established at the grassroots level via ecclesial base communities. Ecclesial base communities typically offered bible studies courses and prayer groups, and trained lay preachers. These new church networks “revitalized the church at the local level,” particularly in poorer communities. Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, which embraced Vatican II, generally created flourishing and autonomous church-driven civil societies within their local areas.

Vatican reforms were adopted by some church units, but not others in Mexico. Church units that had the capacity to incorporate Vatican reforms prior to 2000 were usually institutionally stronger and more effective. They also had higher levels of institutionalization, observes Huntington. There church units were less rigid, as well, and more adaptable to change.


Vatican reforms also create cohesion and unity between the Vatican and its subunits, which further increases their institutional strength and effectiveness. 39

Whether a church dioceses or archdioceses implemented Vatican reforms will be measured by assessing if a church unit adopted new church policies. It will also look at the level of impact that these reforms had on a church unit via an analysis of internal church dynamics and their civil society networks.

**Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution**

Whether or not a diocese or archdiocese has the public’s trust is another important variable for understanding if it is institutionally strong and effective. Trust is a hard quality to measure, but trust levels appear to vary from church diocese to diocese in Mexico. Church units that have trust typically establish civil societies with horizontal networks of civic engagement, which embrace programs of empowerment and human rights, rather than fostering hierarchical patron-client networks, which can oppress local communities. Putnam maintains that a “vertical network, no matter how dense and no matter how important to its participants, cannot sustain social trust and cooperation.” He also confirms that trust is an “essential component” of social capital. 40

Social capital is defined by Putnam as “features” of social organization, which include norms, networks and trust that can “improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.” 41 Membership in voluntary associations also increases the opportunity for trust to

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develop between members, because it creates enduring bonds between people. Social capital establishes networks and norms of trust, as well, which help link citizens to each other.\footnote{Dietlind Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon, “Are all Associations Alike? Member Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Social Capital,” \textit{American Behavioral Scientist}, Vol. 42, No. 1 (September 1998): 47-51.}

In Mexico, dioceses and archdioceses that were strong and effective prior to the 2000 elections were also more likely to have high levels of social capital. They generally had autonomous civil societies and they fostered horizontal rather than vertical networks of civic engagement. They also typically had more open and inclusive membership systems, rather than simply supporting elite Catholics in society, which erodes the legitimacy of a church unit. Trust levels in church units are based on long-term relationships, which are developed over time. A lack of trust can weaken a church unit, and also lower its level of institutionalization, according to Huntington. \footnote{Huntington, \textit{Political Order in Changing Societies}, 238.}

Past leadership in church dioceses and archdioceses appear to impact trust levels in local church units, as well. Some church leaders served as positive role models, and helped build legitimacy and trust for a church unit, while others mistreated church members and left legacies of mistrust, which is very hard to repair in local areas. History ultimately appears to be extremely important within church dioceses and archdioceses, which the case studies detail.

Institutional trust will be measured through an analysis of the different types of civil society organizations in church units, and whether they facilitated patron-client relationships or community-centered associations, which fostered trust and social capital. Trust will also be measured through a historical analysis of past church leadership.
Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Autonomous Church-Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships

The amount of church-related infrastructure in a diocese or archdiocese, as well as its location, also appears to affect the institutional strength and effectiveness of a church unit. Church infrastructure that is expansive and located throughout the diocese or archdiocese is highly advantageous. It extends the church’s reach and provides outlets for evangelization and new membership. Institutions which are considered more complex are typically stronger and they have elevated levels of institutionalization, observes Huntington. He notes that the “greater the number and variety of subunits, the greater the ability of the organization to secure and maintain the loyalties of its members.”

Therefore, the amount of Catholic Churches and priests in an area is important. Dioceses and archdioceses that are located in capital cities also look to have more opportunities to influence the government and to create stronger institutions.

Civil society organizations can extend the reach of a church unit, as well, and expand the church’s message. Some church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico have built expansive and autonomous civil society networks with horizontal networks of reciprocity, cooperation and social capital. These groups focus on human rights, empowerment and important social and community issues. This helps foster trust and democratic behavior in the church, and in local societies. Church units which have patron-client relationships, and civil society organizations with hierarchical relationships of dependency, are usually institutionally weaker. These types of networks don’t create positive social bonds or empower people. They also do not promote democratic behavior in Mexico.

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Church infrastructure will be measured by evaluating the number of churches and type of infrastructure within dioceses and archdioceses. It will also examine the quality and quantity of church civil society associations, and whether they created patron-client relationships or community-driven, autonomous organizations.

When an Institutionally Strong and Effective Catholic Church Dioceses and Archdioceses Challenges Authoritarianism:

If a Catholic Church diocese or archdiocese is institutionally weak, it will likely not challenge authoritarianism because it does not have the institutional capacity to successfully do this. Institutional strength and effectiveness is therefore required to successfully challenge authoritarianism. The clergy in Mexico also know that there will be serious consequences if they challenge an authoritarian government, which forces weak church units to remain inactive and silent, regardless of local authoritarianism. Institutionally weak churches are typically called “conservative,” as well. An institutionally weak diocese or archdiocese will generally have little autonomy from the government and elites, and an inability to fully implement Vatican reforms. They will also have weak church networks and civil societies, a lack of social capital, public trust issues and inadequate infrastructure. Therefore, it would be reckless for them to challenge the government with these types of institutional limitations.

Catholic Church leaders are above all rational actors, insists Anthony Gill, and they make decisions based on a motivation to maintain the existence of the church. Gill observes that “in addition to proclaiming the word of God, bishops are also bureaucrats.” They exist in a “world of
“scarcity,” and they need to use resources wisely and cost-effectively. Gill claims that “institutional concerns often trump” theology in church decision-making processes.

Institutionally strong and effective dioceses or archdioceses, on the other hand, usually have the capacity to successfully challenge authoritarianism. They have expansive civil societies, ample social capital, vast church networks, autonomy from the government, extensive church infrastructure, and the ability to implement Vatican reforms. They also have higher levels of institutionalization. Therefore, church leaders are emboldened to challenge authoritarianism under these favorable institutional conditions. These strong and effective church units are also typically called “progressive.”

Additional information is required, however, to understand when an institutionally strong and effective diocese or archdiocese might challenge authoritarianism, which is detailed below.

Table 1-2. When Institutionally Strong and Effective Dioceses or Archdioceses Might Challenge Authoritarianism:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Variables:</th>
<th>Effect Variable:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capability: When a diocese or archdiocese is considered institutionally strong and effective.</td>
<td>Whether an institutionally strong and effective diocese or archdiocese will successfully challenge an authoritarian regime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Threats: If there are strong threats by the government or ruling elites to the church’s institutional effectiveness and strength.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Path dependency: If past attempts to challenge the government by the diocese or archdiocese were successful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support: When there is strong support for action from the church leadership and membership.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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46 Gill, Rendering unto Caesar, 11.

Capability
The institutional capacity of a Catholic Church diocese or archdiocese is a key variable in determining whether it will challenge authoritarianism. Only institutionally effective and strong church units will have the ability to successfully challenge authoritarianism.

Threats
Intuitionally effective and strong church units will likely challenge authoritarianism if they are experiencing strong threats by the government or elites to their institutional integrity. They will do this in order to defend their autonomy, their church networks or other key institutional qualities.

Path Dependency
If past attempts to challenge authoritarianism were successful, and the government yielded to a church diocese or archdiocese in a power struggle, this is another factor that influences whether a church unit will do it again.

Support
Strong support from the leadership and membership of a church unit to defy an authoritarian government, is an additional factor for determining if a church unit will challenge the government. Church leaders are rational actors and they will ultimately determine how to act based on a risk assessment of each situation.

Methodology
This dissertation will perform a structured comparison of six states in Mexico, and ask why and under what conditions Catholic Church dioceses or archdioceses in these states challenged government authoritarianism prior to the pivotal 2000 presidential elections. A representative sample of six states will be examined instead of evaluating all thirty-one states in
Mexico due to time constraints. The state case studies include Chiapas, Guanajuato, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo and Yucatan.

Typically, when the Catholic Church is examined it is done so using a top-down strategy, focusing on the national character of the church, and its connection to the Vatican in Rome. This method, however, does not sufficiently address local conditions or the institutional dynamics of individual dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico. It also does not assess the influence of church units on local politics and civil society. A bottom-up, localized approach to evaluating the Catholic Church, in contrast, allows for a more thorough assessment of a diverse sample of local church units within six Mexican states. It also captures the variation of response by different church units to authoritarianism at the local level.

This dissertation primarily utilizes qualitative methods of analysis, but it also relies on quantitative data to evaluate the institutional characteristics of dioceses and archdioceses, and the states that they reside in. Population, economic, and election data were all accessed in order to compare and contrast states and their church units. This data helped explain why some Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses are institutionally stronger and more effective than others, and why some church units challenged authoritarianism, while others did not.

The state case studies for this dissertation were selected largely based on their locations, as well as their political behavior, which was verified using election data. Three states were chosen where the PRI was politically strong and dominant in the 20th century, and sometimes even well into the 21st century, which election data revealed. Three other states were chosen where the PRI was consistently challenged by local opposition political parties or social movements during the twentieth century. This typically triggered democratization and local transitions of power far earlier than the 2000 political elections, which was apparent from
election data. The six states were randomly chosen in different parts of Mexico based on the above criteria, with two states selected in the north, two in the center of Mexico and two in the south. This case selection mechanism was utilized in order to provide a varied and representative sample of Mexican states, which had diverse populations, economies, climates and topographies.

This dissertation also comparatively examines a set of common historic events in Mexico in an effort to understand how these occurrences affected states and their local church units differently. Through this historical method, institutional variations between church units were revealed. It also provided an opportunity to understand how church-state relationships were developed over time.

The common historic events in Mexico that will be examined for each state case study include: 1). The Spanish Colonial Period 2). Independence from Spain and its Aftermath 3). The Mexican Revolution 4). The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI 5). Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA 6). Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico. The evaluation of these historic events also provided a rare opportunity to study the differences that exist between a large collection of Mexican states. Normally studies on Mexico focus on Mexico City or they look at one state and compare it possibly to one other state, which is a very limited approach. It is also inadequate for understanding the vast differences that exist between Mexico’s thirty-one states, and their local Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses.

In an effort to collect qualitative data for this dissertation, I conducted participant observations and ethnographic research in local communities and cities around Mexico for several years. During this time period, I also visited local Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses around the country and I studied their institutional characteristics and histories. I attended church services, as well, and talked to local church leaders and church members. I also
visited civil society organizations, in order to better understand their links to local Catholic Church hierarchies. I evaluated the types of associations that were created by church units, as well, and I questioned church leaders about governmental pressures, and the obstacles that they had faced in the past. I also tried to grasp the historic impact of the church on politics and local civil society in various Mexican states.

While conducting fieldwork in Mexico, I talked to scholars, government officials and local citizens, as well. I also visited many historic museums, archives, ancient ruins, villages, educational workshops and universities. I attended a public address with Pope Francis in Mexico City in 2016, as well. I essentially immersed myself in Mexico, its cultures and routines, and I engaged in deep qualitative research to better understand the dissertation’s subject-matter. I also conducted fieldwork in the states of Guanajuato, Chiapas, Yucatan and Hidalgo. I spent a significant amount of time in Mexico City, as well. I traveled and lived in Mexico over a roughly two year period until 2017. I will briefly describe my field work experiences in each location below.

In Mexico City, I lived in an apartment in 2016 for about three months, although I had visited the city before. During my extended stay there I went to historic museums, different neighborhoods, archives, universities, along with the Catholic Church Archdiocese of Mexico, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the ancient ruins of Teotihuacan. I also took assorted city tours and talked to numerous academics and local residents. I toured the houses of many famous Mexicans, as well, such as Frida Kahlo, Leo Tolstoy and Venustiano Carranza, who was once president of Mexico. Their houses are now museums, which provided a rare glimpse into the lives of these important historic figures. My experiences in Mexico City above all provided the necessary context for understanding the capital and its relationship to the states.
While conducting field work in Guanajuato, I traveled to various towns and cities throughout the state. I visited Guanajuato three times and stayed roughly a week each time. I also went to Dolores Hidalgo, where Mexico’s independence movement from Spain began. There I visited the former home of the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and other important landmarks. I also talked to museum curators, guides and local officials. I traveled to Guanajuato City and Leon, as well, where I visited local Catholic Churches and museums, and talked to members of the clergy. I also went to San Miguel de Allende several times, and visited the home of Ignacio Allende, who was an important independence leader.

I visited Chiapas, as well, on three separate occasions to do fieldwork there. I also lived in an apartment in central San Cristobal del Las Casas for about a month in the summer of 2016. During my stay I also did research in the archives of the local Catholic Church diocese. I talked to church officials at the diocese, along with representatives of various local non-governmental organizations. I stopped by the Fray Bartolome de Las Casas Center for Human Rights, as well, and met with representatives there. I also spent time at the Museo Jtatik Samuel, which is dedicated to the life of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia. I toured a Zapatista village, as well, and explored ancient ruins, like Palenque. I also spent time in Chamula, Zinacantan, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Ocosingo, Tapachula and Comitan, in an effort to understand the state, its people, topography and regional diversity.

In Yucatan, I stayed in the city of Merida for about three weeks, although I had visited the state before. During my extended visit there I took trips to Valladolid, Progreso and Izamal. I also visited the nearby states of Campeche, Quintana Roo and Tabasco. In Merida, I talked with church officials in the Archdiocese of Yucatan. I also toured the Museo Casa Montejo, which is where the Spanish conquistador Francisco de Montejo once lived, who founded Merida. I visited
various mansions, as well, along the majestic Paseo de Montejo, including the Casa Museo Montes Molina, which is where former governor Olegario Molina Solis once lived. In Yucatan, I also went to various historic museums and henequen haciendas outside of Merida. I took several city tours of Merida, as well, and I visited Chichen Itza. I also talked to many scholars, local residents and museum curators about the state, and I visited different universities and historic landmarks, as well.

I later spent a week in the state of Hidalgo in 2017. There I went to the old mining town of Real del Monte and the capital city of Pachuca. I also visited the house of Francis Rule and the first large Methodist Church in central Pachuca. I spent time at the Museum of Mining in Pachuca, as well, and I talked extensively to museum guides about the city’s history. I later traveled to Huasca de Ocampo and visited Tulancingo and the Catholic Church archdiocese.

These assorted experiences in Mexico offered invaluable insight, layers of context and voices to the people and places I was researching. Other data for this dissertation was collected at the University of Florida’s Latin American and Caribbean Collection, which is located in UF’s Smathers Library. This incredible library has a vast collection of books and historic records and archives on Mexico. I collected data in this library for nearly a year. During this time period I accessed Mexican newspapers, tax records, church communications and literary resources, which are listed in the bibliography. The library also has an expansive collection of books and historical resources on states in Mexico, the Catholic Church and politics, which were utilized for this dissertation. Many of the books in this library are hard to find, and they added significant depth to my research.

In terms of the main research question for this dissertation, which again is: Why and under what conditions did Catholic Churches successfully challenge government
authoritarianism prior to the 2000 presidential election in Mexico? The case studies were evaluated based on low to high-level efforts by the hierarchy of local Catholic Church dioceses or archdioceses in each state to challenge authoritarian governments.

In Chiapas there were very high-level attempts to challenge authoritarianism by the local Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal. In Guanajuato, there were high-level attempts, as well. There were also high-level attempts in Chihuahua, but this tapered off at the end of the twentieth century. In Tamaulipas and Yucatan, there were consistently low-level attempts to challenge authoritarianism, while Hidalgo also typically experienced low-level attempts by the local church hierarchy.

An example of a high-level church challenge to government authoritarianism is a successful effort on the part of the hierarchy of the local diocese or archdiocese to oppose the government, with the intention of changing the authoritarian political system. Under these circumstances, the bishop and church leadership would be promoting regime change and aiding the opposition through civil society development and other institutional means, which could then challenge the PRI’s corporatist structure. They would also be making repeated statements against the regime through media and other outlets in order to build opposition to the government. Moreover, they would allow ample space for opposition movements and independent civil society networks to grow.

A high-level challenge to authoritarianism by a church unit does not necessarily need to result in an uprising or a revolution, like what happened in Chiapas. It does, however, include persistent strong efforts by the diocese or archdiocese to change a regime, through all means available to it, which would eventually result in regime change. A low-level effort to challenge authoritarianism, conversely, would be when no serious attempt was made to criticize the regime.
or to remove it. The diocese or archdiocese hierarchy might instead be allying with the authoritarian government and ignoring authoritarianism through its actions and communications. Therefore, they would be making few attempts to disapprove of or challenge the government’s behavior, no matter how authoritarian it acted, which ultimately signifies an institutionally weak diocese or archdiocese.

**Hypotheses**

Several key hypotheses will be assessed in this dissertation, which are included below:

1. Institutionally effective and strong dioceses or archdioceses, which challenge authoritarianism, have the potential to generate democratic behavior in their local areas.
2. Institutionally weak dioceses or archdioceses, which do not challenge authoritarianism, will inadvertently allow authoritarianism to persist in local areas.
3. Institutionally strong and effective dioceses or archdioceses were more successful prior to 2000, at challenging the PRI’s corporatist structure and clientelistic networks in their local areas, compared to institutionally weak church dioceses and archdioceses.

**Literature Review**

**The Political Resources of the Catholic Church**

Throughout history, religious organizations have played important roles in helping to create opposition movements, observes Barry Rubin. Catholic bishops, priests and nuns around the world have participated in nationalist, revolutionary and pro-democratic uprisings. Governments also typically do not want to create international outrage or alienate religious followers by “directly confronting” the church, which makes it “relatively inviolate.” Catholic Churches have an international link to the Vatican in Rome, as well, and this makes international mobilization easier. The church also has access to finances and it manages many schools, radio
stations, lay organizations, and properties. It ultimately presents an “alternative worldview” to the government and is a “powerful force,” which makes it almost a “de facto political party.”

Religious institutions can support political activism, as well, by providing symbols, songs and other narratives to social movements, claims Christian Smith. These resources can also help construct collective identities. Most religions are transnational, as well, and therefore they “create common bonds” between people from different countries, races, and classes. Corwin Smidt maintains that religion can also build social capital, although “relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the role of religion” in social capital formation. Yet, churches are a major part of civil society, particularly in the United States. Religious institutions also provide social support and networking opportunities, and increase social capital via charity initiatives and volunteering.

Generally, when the Catholic Church is analyzed in its capacity as a political actor it is done so through a top-down approach, highlighting the church’s transnational qualities, global goals and Vatican connection. There are disadvantages, however, to using this transnational method. Above all, it does not provide any clear explanation as to why, if the church is able to span borders and spread its messages without restrictions, that the local outcomes and actions of the church are so different.

Timothy A. Byrnes in his book  *Transnational Catholicism in Postcommunist Europe*, encourages researchers to instead examine the local and national character of Catholic Churches,

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and the conditions under which they operate. He observes that “contextual factors” are so important that even the pope, “perhaps the most transnational of all religious leaders, cannot escape their influence.” Byrnes also points out that Vatican II sought to “redress papal” domination of the church, by placing “greater emphasis” on the authority and legal status of local Catholic bishops. Byrnes observes that “no institution, no matter how hierarchal,” can control the “words and actions of literally thousands of locally based” church leaders. It is for this reason that Byrnes calls the church “impressively global and inescapably local at the same time.”

Leslie Anderson’s book *Social Capital in Developing Democracies: Nicaragua and Argentina Compared* also reveals the different local roles that Catholic Churches can play in Latin America. She observes that religion ultimately helped unite Nicaraguans in the 1970s to remove the Somoza dictatorship. They joined church-related civil society organizations, which forged horizontal links within society to fight the authoritarian government. While in Argentina, the Catholic Church was simply “another source of vertical authority and social control” in civil society, which supported the authoritarian government. This demonstrates the various roles that the Catholic Church can play in civil society in different settings, and the enormous impact that this can have on local politics.

In Mexico, other than the government, the Catholic Church was one of the main architects of civil society during the twentieth century. It is therefore important to understand how the church influenced local civil society and politics, and whether the church fostered social capital and democratic behavior or simply reinforced authoritarianism and patron-client relationships. It is necessary, as well, to analyze church dioceses and archdioceses in different

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atmospheres to compare their institutional characteristics, and the different circumstances in which they operate.

**The Study of Religion and Politics**

A number of books have been written in the past several decades on how religion influences politics, despite earlier claims that it does not. Jonathan Fox confirms that the “seminal thinkers,” who founded the social sciences believed that the modernization of society would lead to a “gradual decrease” in religion’s influence. The modernization argument, Fox explains, has had a “far-reaching” impact on the study of religion in the social sciences. Yet, religious institutions and their followers continue to impact politics around the world, and religion “does not seem to be disappearing,” despite theories of modernization and secularization.  

In Mexico, the Catholic Church and the clergy have played pivotal roles in Mexican society, maintains Roderic Camp. Religious groups also make up the largest number of social organizations, while priests have the potential to impact public policies through their church sermons. Camp insists that for Mexican citizens, no institution is “more admirable or more legitimate” than the Catholic Church. It is one of the most “highly esteemed” institutions in the country.  

Past research on the Catholic Church in Mexican politics includes Susan Eckstein’s book *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and the Urban Poor in Mexico*. Eckstein discovered that micromanaging clientelistic behavior was employed by the PRI to co-op and manage the poor in

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Mexico. She also found that the Catholic Church in Mexico City had created an “alliance” with the Mexican government and the PRI. She concluded, as well, that the church in Mexico City is largely co-opted by the government. Yet, this is not always the case throughout the country as different church-state relationships exist there. Some churches in Mexico are co-opted by the government, while others are not. It is therefore necessary to understand the different church-state relationships in Mexico and how they can impact states and local areas.

There are other books that also focus on the Catholic Church and politics in Central and South America. This includes Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith’s book *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru*. They look at the efforts of church hierarchies to transition these countries into democracies. Anthony Gill’s book *Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* also focuses on Latin America and the Catholic Church. He asks why some national church leaders have actively opposed authoritarian regimes, while others have not. Gill attempts to show that the causal connection lies in the degree of religious competition that the church was experiencing at that time from other religious denominations, such as Protestant churches.

Gill argues that national Catholic Church leaders challenge authoritarian governments when there is religious competition and plummeting membership rates. This dynamic creates a “difficult choice” for bishops in Latin America. Under these unfavorable conditions, they can either maintain ties with an authoritarian dictator and risk further decreases in membership, or defend the poor and regain their allegiance. Gill employs a rational choice argument as the foundation for his theory. The problem with Gill’s theory is that it does not account for why the

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church fought authoritarianism in some countries when no religious competition existed, like in Poland. Gill also makes the case for religious competition in Latin America, yet in many of the countries that he refers to the religious competition doesn’t appear very substantial. 57

Guillermo Trejo looks at religious competition as a motive for Catholic Church activism, as well, in his book *Popular Movements in Autocracies: Religion, Repression, and Indigenous Collective Action in Mexico*. He argues that the increase of Protestant churches in Mexico led the Catholic Church to become a major promoter of indigenous protests, so as to protect the church’s religious monopoly there. Trejo fails again, however, to see that there are other factors that explain why the church will challenge authoritarianism in Mexico. Mexican history also reveals that in some Mexican states, like Chiapas, the Catholic Church was always activist, regardless of religious competition. Fears of religious competition, therefore, do not adequately justify the church’s mixed behavior toward authoritarianism in Mexico. 58

Until now, a systematic, comprehensive and conclusive study has not been conducted on the precise reasons for why the Catholic Church has challenged authoritarian governments in some states in Mexico, and why it has failed to do so in others. Or what specific role the church played in Mexico’s democratization process prior to 2000. This dissertation hopes to fill in the gaps of this missing scholarship and provide some compelling observations and conclusions.

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57 Gill, *Rendering Unto Caesar*, 1-60.

CHAPTER 3
CHURCH AND STATE HISTORY IN MEXICO

This chapter provides a summary of the long history of the Catholic Church-state relationship in Mexico, along with a synopsis of twentieth century Mexican politics, with an emphasis on the PRI and the corporatist political system that it created. An understanding of Mexican politics and church history is needed in order to interpret the next six state case studies, which highlight the local and regional effects of this larger history. A knowledge of Mexican history is also necessary to compare and contrast the historical trajectories of church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, and the different church-state relationships that exist there.

The History of the Catholic Church-State Relationship in Mexico

The relationship between Mexico and the Catholic Church is deeply-rooted and dates back to the 1500s. At that time, Spain’s conquest of Mexico was achieved “not just by force of arms,” but also by a “religious force,” confirms John Frederick Schwaller. ¹ The church became an “arm” of Spain’s royal government in Mexico because the Vatican gave it wide ecclesiastical authority in the New World. This agreement, known as the Patronato Real, was ironed out between the Vatican and the Spanish Crown around the 15th century. It allowed Spain to control church taxation and all ecclesiastical appointments, even in the smallest parish churches in Mexico. The Spanish government also had broad control over places of worship, schools and hospitals, and determined the boundaries for church dioceses. As a result, the Crown’s approval was needed before religious structures were built in Mexico. The Crown also had the right to veto papal edicts in its new colonies, explains David Bailey. ²

¹ John Frederick Schwaller, The Church and Clergy in Sixteenth-Century Mexico (Albuquerque, NM: The University of New Mexico Press, 1987), xiii.

In return for this broad authority, the Spanish Crown agreed to convert millions of indigenous people to Catholicism, which was considered too laborious a task for the Vatican. Thus, the “crown and the cross” traveled together to the New World. The Catholic Church became a “mainstay” of stability in Mexico, which permitted Spain to rule the sprawling territory for over three centuries. ³

The Catholic Church was the principal Spanish institution in colonial Mexico, second only to the Spanish Crown. The church played an indelible role in the establishment and management of Spanish institutions, traditions and cultures. However, due to the vast size of Mexico, and its poor communication networks, local church dioceses generally operated independent of the church hierarchy in Mexico City. As a Spanish institution the Catholic Church ultimately had to assimilate itself into different local areas and circumstances, and gain legitimacy there. Dioceses and parish churches developed their own relationships with local governments, populations and economies, and they did not have uniform responsibilities throughout Mexico. Church units largely did what was expedient and required of them, in consultation with colonial authorities, so as to adapt into a diverse set of local conditions and circumstances.⁴

A large gap of time existed, as well, between the colonization of the first provinces in Mexico and the last ones several hundred years later. Consequently, in some regions the Catholic Church was instrumental in the Spanish colonization process, while in other areas it was sometimes excluded. This was particularly the case during the enlightenment era, which began around the mid-18th century. At that time anticlericalism started to grow in Mexican society.

³ Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey*, 1-7.
⁴ Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey*, 4-7.
Mexico’s era of colonization lasted roughly from the early 16th century to the 19th century, and new provinces were colonized by the Spanish more or less throughout that time period. In order to spiritually conquer an area, Catholic missionaries had to implement “the same kind of organization, discipline, and order that was needed by any military company,” notes Schwaller. The conquest of different areas of Mexico happened with varying degrees of success, based largely on local conditions, politics and economics, as well as the institutional dynamics of the church.

The long fight for Mexico’s independence from Spain began in 1810. The movement was initiated in Guanajuato by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a local Catholic parish priest. The Catholic Church’s response to the movement, however, was not “united,” and the majority of the Spanish-born high clergy wanted Mexico to remain part of Spain. The War for Independence lasted over a decade and Mexico didn’t become independent from Spain until 1821. The termination of Spanish rule “left a power vacuum” in Mexico. For almost a half a century, “no regime, government, or individual established a legitimate claim to succeed” the Spanish royal government. Major chaos also “ensued” at that time, and Mexico “disintegrated into a loose confederation of autonomous states,” observes Mark Wasserman.

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After Mexico’s independence the relationship between the Catholic Church and Mexico deteriorated significantly. The church continued to have substantial wealth and influence in the new country, and many believed it needed to be stripped of this immense power before a modern, independent Mexico could develop. The clergy also had expansive economic and political powers in Mexico. A large portion of the Mexican clergy in the 19th century were “undoubtedly the wealthiest in the world,” and owned over one-half of all real estate in the country. Jose Sanchez reveals that rents from their land, and fees for religious services and tithes, “all added up to make them wealthy and independent.” Still, not all church dioceses in Mexico were considered wealthy. Dioceses were sometimes struggling financially, depending on local economies, and other historical and institutional factors. 9

Following independence, Mexico was politically and economically unstable for decades. At that time, the still powerful Catholic Church triggered a major anticlerical movement, which was more explosive than other Catholic countries had witnessed. 10 The church’s “extensive financial resources” and expansive institutional presence were determined by many politicians in Mexico to be an “insurmountable obstacle” for the creation of a “secular and independent state,” observes Claude Pomerleau. The church, however, did not want to give up its substantial resources. 11 Two political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, emerged in Mexico at that time, which began to divide the country. The Conservatives sought to buttress the power of the Catholic Church, and maintain colonial institutions. Liberals, on the other hand, wanted major political reforms based on enlightenment principles, which greatly minimized the church’s role

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9 Sanchez, Anticlericalism: A Brief History, 183-185.

10 Sanchez, Anticlericalism: A Brief History, 183-197.

in society. 12 The Liberal party hoped to transform Mexico “from a Hispanic Catholic bastion into a constitutional and secular republic,” explains Brian Hamnett. 13

A new federal constitution was approved by President Benito Juarez in 1857 and his fellow Liberals, which enraged the Catholic Church. The constitution no longer recognized Catholicism as the official state religion. It also banned tithing and nationalized a significant portion of church-owned properties, which divested the Catholic Church of its massive property portfolio. It privatized indigenous communal lands, as well, and abolished slavery. It also secularized education, which the Catholic Church had previously controlled. The new Mexican constitution ultimately tried to separate the Catholic Church from the state for the first time in modern history.14

Liberals at that time were also fervently campaigning for private property rights in Mexico. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century they tried to “dismantle all forms of communal property” and replace it with privately owned lands via the Reform Laws. Liberals believed only personal ownership of property could create wealth and progress in Mexico. Liberals also considered the “communal and seemingly isolationist” way that indigenous populations lived as “atavistic,” and as an obstacle to modernization, observes Myrna Santiago.15 In some areas of Mexico, the Catholic Church and indigenous populations, who lived on communal agriculture

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lands, began to fight for the return of their old rights and privileges after the passage of the new constitution and the Reform Laws.

Tensions over the constitution eventually ignited a war between Conservatives and Liberals in 1857, which many Catholic leaders supported. This conflict was known as the War of the Reform, and it lasted until approximately 1860. The Liberals won the war, but the Catholic Church continued to be very influential. 16 Mexico’s central government also sank into major debt at that time, due to decades of war. The government was forced to borrow money from other countries, like France, to sustain itself, but it soon fell behind in its foreign debt payments. This sparked France’s intervention in Mexico in 1862. The intervention, which was backed by the Catholic Church, forced Mexico to pay its substantial foreign debts. Benito Juarez, however, succeeded in expelling the French in 1867, despite attempts by Archduke Maximilian to take over the country and create a permanent empire there. The Mexican government also started to use expenditures from the sale of church properties to help finance the federal government. 17

In 1867, Mexico and the Vatican ended their long diplomatic relationship due to the extremely acrimonious Catholic Church-state relationship that had developed between them in the country. The split between Mexico and the Vatican remained in effect for nearly one hundred and twenty-five years, until the year 1992. During this time period, the Vatican’s influence was very limited in Mexico. It was only allowed to assign an apostolic delegate to Mexico City, whose main role was to build a relationship with the federal government in a limited and unofficial capacity. The Vatican consistently tried to win back diplomatic recognition from

16 Bailey, Viva Crista Rey, 12-13.

Mexico, while the apostolic delegate worked to avert additional crises in the church-state relationship. 18

In 1876, Porfirio Diaz became president of Mexico. He was also a member of the Liberal Party, but he chose not to enforce the constitution’s anticlerical laws, which helped to alleviate religious tensions at that time. Diaz focused instead on improving Mexico’s economy and he introduced new policies to help the country prosper. Modern railroads were built, oil was discovered, new business enterprises arrived from abroad and commercial agriculture grew. Yet, tensions over land, and other economic and social issues slowly emerged. Eventually Diaz was branded a dictator because he remained president of Mexico for over three decades. At that time, rising public outrage sparked the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910 and lasted for nearly a decade. The long war was experienced differently throughout the country. In some regions the revolution devastated areas and brought major instability, while in other parts there were initially few major consequences. 19

When the Mexican Revolution ended approximately ten years after it began, the country once again implemented rigid anticlerical laws, this time via a new constitution, which was passed in 1917 by the winners of the revolution. In the new constitution, religious education was forbidden, priests were prohibited from criticizing the government, political organizations with religious affiliations were outlawed, and foreign clerics were exiled from the country. 20 The federal constitution also incorporated new agrarian, land and labor laws in Mexico.

18 Chand, *Mexico’s Political Awakening*, 183.


Mexico’s central government identified the Catholic Church as a “political enemy” at that time because of its wealth, power and influence, along with its previous ties to Spanish colonialism and the Vatican. 21 The church in Mexico was “one of the few institutions, and maybe the only one, capable of confronting the state in an organized way,” observes Roberto Blancarte. This was a very intimidating prospect for the Mexican government. The church was also seen by the new post-revolution government as “pernicious,” who believed its influence needed to be completely “eradicated,” according to Albert Michaels. 22 This compelled the government to create a rigorous new method of population control in Mexico via a corporatist structure, to challenge the church’s control of civil society. 23

Following the passage of the new constitution in Mexico, federal anticlerical laws in the constitution were ultimately enforced haphazardly by local governments around the country. They were at times ignored or sometimes rigorously applied, depending on “local leadership and regional conditions,” notes Ramon Chacon. In some states governors went beyond the anticlerical laws, while in other areas these laws were disregarded, mainly at the request of the Catholic Church. 24

Mexico’s new President Plutarco Elias Calles, however, decided to strictly enforce anticlericalism when he was elected president in 1924, although his predecessors had been

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hesitant to do this. Consequently, another major war ignited over the Catholic Church, which lasted from 1926 until 1929. It was called the Cristero Rebellion and resulted in thousands of deaths in Mexico. Catholic bishops also suspended church services at that time, and closed churches. They called for a universal clerical strike, as well, to challenge the government. The Catholic Church hierarchy in Mexico City was also exasperated by the federal government’s decision to regulate the number of priests in the country. The government imposed other harsh religious restrictions on the church, as well. Thousands of citizens fought the federal government at that time to oppose these laws, and many were killed in the three-year battle. 25

During the Cristero Rebellion, a majority of the fighting took place in the center-west region of Mexico, where the church is institutionally strong. This area includes the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan and Colima. The Cristero Rebellion was essentially “an anti-state rebellion,” claims Jennie Purnell. It was “rooted in the defense of local institutions and autonomy in the face of a rapidly expanding and intrusive central state.” In the central-west region, the constitution’s new anticlerical provisions were seen as a major threat to “the integrity of the church as an institution.” They were also viewed as an attack on community values and customs, as well as local political autonomy and regional economic control. The government and Catholic bishops finally reached an agreement to stop the conflict in 1929. 26

In the years following the Cristero Rebellion, a church-state “modus vivendi” was agreed to, which reduced religious tensions in Mexico. The anticlerical laws remained in the constitution, however, although the government rarely enforced them. In 1992 President Carlos

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Salinas de Gortari decided to reverse these anticlerical policies, which had been blamed for “officially sanctioning hostility” towards religious institutions in Mexico. The Vatican and Mexico finally resumed a diplomatic relationship at that time after a 125 year interruption. 27

From the 1940s to the early 1980s, the Catholic Church hierarchy in Mexico City earned the reputation as the “silent church,” because it rarely criticized government policy or spoke out about the country’s “social ills.” This was mainly due to a church-state “modus vivendi” that was agreed to, notes Gill. 28 During the church’s retreat from politics, the PRI was able to consolidate its power with little opposition in many parts of Mexico, and create an entrenched corporatist and clientelistic structure. However, some local church dioceses and archdioceses also increased their institutional power at that time, and the amount of churches in the country more than doubled after the modus vivendi, while priest numbers tripled. 29 In the 1980s, some church dioceses and archdioceses became “important voices of protest,” as well, against government authoritarianism, corruption and election fraud. 30

From the 1970s to the late 1990s, Girolamo Prigione was the Vatican’s apostolic delegate in Mexico. Prigione was “well insulated” from the pressures of Mexican bishops, clergy and laity because his “authority derived directly from the pope and not the Mexican Church,” observes Vikram Chand. He was considered the pope’s “representative” to the Mexican hierarchy, and his main responsibility was to avert church-state conflicts, not manage local churches. 31


29 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 158-159.

30 Klaiber, S.J., The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America, 239-240.

31 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 183-184.
In the latter part of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church hierarchy in Mexico was divided on how to deal with socioeconomic inequalities, human rights abuses and political issues in the country. Some Catholic Churches “sided with the powerful,” while other churches strongly defended the poor. Occasionally, churches also “straddled the fence” and were “caught in the turmoil.” Local dioceses and archdioceses responded to authoritarianism differently. Their institutional capacities and entrenched church-state relationships were large determinants in whether they had the ability to challenge authoritarianism, which will be assessed in the upcoming state case studies.

**The Rise of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)**

After the Mexican Revolution ended in the early 1920s, Mexico went through a long period of political instability. In 1928, President Plutarco Elias Calles created a new political party called the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) to try to stabilize the country, and incorporate the objectives of the 1917 constitution, which prior presidents had failed to do. The PNR under Calles was unsuccessful, however, at integrating labor and peasant groups, and without their support instability in the country continued. 33

When the PNR chose Lazaro Cardenas as a presidential candidate in 1934, he changed the name of the PNR to the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM). The party’s name was modified again in 1946 to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which then dominated the federal government until 2000. Cardenas, who was president until 1940, was finally successful at implementing the reforms of the 1917 constitution, and in integrating alienated social groups into


the political process. He was also able to “co-opt popular movements,” and “subordinate them” to the state. He backed agrarian, land and labor initiatives, as well, which were the goals of the revolution. He also created state-led, corporatist groups to incorporate these movements. 34

Cardenas was the main architect of the government’s new corporatist system, which is a type of political system where interest groups and their agendas are prioritized over individual interests and actions, like voting. The Mexican government then became the official regulator of different government sanctioned groups, which controlled civil society. 35 The PRI was originally modeled after a Spanish colonial institution. It was “authoritarian, paternalistic, and corporatist,” which provided Mexico with the stability it needed during the volatile post-revolution period, notes Joseph Klaiber. The PRI was built upon four basic sectors of society: the peasants, the workers, middle-class professionals, and the military, although the military sector was eventually dropped. The political system created by the PRI ensured that “it alone controlled the state apparatus,” although other political parties in Mexico were allowed to exist. 36

Cardenas’s presidential term was the most significant period in the PRI’s development. He integrated peasants and workers into these newly formed corporatist groups and he nationalized Mexico’s oil and railroads. Other important local industries were also seized by the government during the twentieth century, like the henequen industry in Yucatan. Cardenas created welfare programs, as well, and re-distributed land to the poor through agrarian reforms, although some of this land was of poor quality. He also established a new socialist-style education system, which angered the Catholic Church. His tenure was regarded as a “radical”


36 Klaiber, S.J., The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America, 239-240.
phase in the post-revolution period. He was above all motivated by his profound disappointment of other Mexican political leaders, who he believed had “lost sight” of the original goals of the revolution.  

Cardenas completely reconfigured the “power structure” in Mexico, and channeled authority into the PRI, and its newly formed corporatist groups. He prioritized societal cohesiveness through corporatism, which he hoped would challenge the established control of conservative elites in Mexican society.

During the 1930s, the PRI and the ideals of the revolution were finally institutionalized into the structure of the Mexican government. Eventually the only institution powerful enough to challenge the PRI was the Catholic Church. Mexican political leaders remained terrified of the church, and a Catholic resistance movement was well organized in some parts of Mexico. The PRI focused on controlling civil society via corporatism because they feared a Catholic movement would overthrow the government. The PRI was threatened by the church’s ability to dominate local areas through its church networks and civil society associations.

Corporatism had its origins in the Spanish colonial system, which also divided society into corporatist groups in order to make the population more manageable. Cardenas believed interest groups could then be the “sole legitimate representative of each sector of society,” and

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the president would be the “final arbiter” of these interest groups. This restrictive atmosphere largely blocked public dissent in Mexico during the twentieth century. 41

In order to finance the PRI and its policies, a “protectionist” approach to the economy was adopted by Mexican political leaders during the twentieth century. Trade barriers were imposed to prevent foreign products from coming into the Mexican market. The government also focused on building a strong domestic economy and many industries around Mexico were nationalized. New tariffs, permits and regulations were established, as well, to protect the Mexican economy. This created a “vast state apparatus,” and expanded the government’s role in the economy. An “expanding and intrusive federal regime” developed at that time. By the 1980s, the federal government employed more than 3 million people. 42

In regards to labor, Cardenas supported what he called “workers democracy” through the establishment of state-led corporatist trade unions. In 1935 he helped to create the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which allowed him to control labor in Mexico. By 1938 the group became the most powerful union in Mexico with 600,000 members. The government supplied the union with subsidies and supported their strikes. Cardenas also pushed independent trade unions to affiliate with the CTM, claims Charles Weston. 43

In order to implement a bold set of agrarian reforms, Cardenas set out to re-organize and gain control of rural communities in Mexico. He also hoped to culturally change these areas. Cardenas sent teachers, agrarian agents and rural political bosses (caciques) to the countryside. He instructed them to “overhaul land tenure” agreements and end illiteracy, explains Marjorie


42 Grayson, Mexico: From Corporatism to Pluralism?, 26-29.

Becker. These government agents tended to be anticlerical and radical in their approach to “cultural transformation.” Cardenas himself was “baffled” by Catholic enthusiasts, and he didn’t understand “peasant culture.”

Cardenas established a government-supported group for farm workers, as well. The National Confederation of Campesinos (CNC) was created in the 1930s to advance his broad agrarian agenda. The CNC supported the government’s ejido policies and the communal land distribution program. Ejido recipients were then required by law to join the CNC. The Ministry of Agriculture and the National Ejidal Bank, which provided credits for the ejidos, also worked closely with the CNC to allocate land to rural communities. The CNC became the dominant organization for representing rural farm workers in Mexico.

Cardenas organized the business sector into a special interest group, as well. All business members were required to join the Confederation of National Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Middle class groups were also ordered to join government-supported interest groups. For public workers Cardenas created the group Federation of Unions of Workers in Service to the State (FSTSE).

The corporatist system established by Cardenas significantly increased the “regulatory powers” of the federal government in Mexico, particularly in local areas. New corporatist groups engulfed Mexico’s rural areas and challenged existing power structures there, such as those already established by the Catholic Church. These corporatist groups were also frequently manipulated by local actors. Mexico’s new political structure allowed the federal government to

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choose which social groups could be officially recognized. It also gave the government expansive control over groups in civil society, which the state then financially and politically supported. The system that Cardenas established remained “durable” in Mexico, mainly through PRI leadership until 2000. Corporatist groups still exist in Mexico, and they tend to be managed with top-down leadership styles, using patron-client relationships. Independent groups, which were not affiliated with the government, existed prior to 2000, but their acceptance was largely based on local elite approval. 47

Since Cardenas’s term ended in 1940, the corporatist system that he helped to create has been used by subsequent political leaders to control Mexico’s civil society and working class. The system failed to create “a working class capable of imposing its will” upon the government, insists Weston. Corporatist groups were commonly used to “dominate” the working class, as well, not empower them. The leaderships of these corporatists groups also were typically controlled by the government, which afforded them government backing and subsidies. 48

Throughout the twentieth century, the Mexican government tried to silence independent groups, which challenged the PRI. 49 The Catholic Church, however, was one of the only independent entities in Mexico, which had the power to oppose the PRI. The church was largely against the policies of the PRI at that time, which it viewed as socialist. The church, for instance, regarded the government’s federal land ejido program as a “dangerous revolutionary intrusion into society,” observes Ben Fallaw. 50 The church also criticized the government’s efforts to

50 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 145.
control rural workers and labor via its corporatist groups. Churches initially tried to forbid members from joining government-affiliated labor unions. The PRI, however, fought to integrate “the entire political class,” and control the masses. The Catholic Church was a “formidable rival,” and one of the only institutions in Mexico “that escaped control” by the PRI, claims Jean Meyer.  

Cardenas’s socialist-style policies eventually caused a large gap between the rich and the poor in Mexico. PRI-backed groups also relied on patron-client relationships, which reinforced authoritarianism and clientelism in Mexico. The government’s control of the working class allowed it to maintain low wages for workers, as well. Cardenas’s system mostly produced a subservient working class with little independent power. Corporatist institutions were also used by subsequent leaders to “curtail” agrarian, labor and social reforms in the country. The PRI centralized political power during the twentieth century, and consistently co-opted and incorporated “dissidents.” Its corporatist and patronage networks ultimately allowed it to place “itself into every nook and cranny of society, using a many-branched corporatist network,” claims Tom Barry.  

The PRI’s corporatist political structure was also used to secure votes for the party, observes Judith Teichman. Government-backed groups, such as unions and peasant associations, typically delivered “rank and file votes” for the PRI, at least until the 1990s. If individuals refused to vote for the PRI via their corporatist groups, they sometimes received contract


terminations or threats of job dismissals. The PRI held an electoral monopoly in many parts of Mexico well into the 20th century, while charges of electoral fraud against the PRI were common.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, a series of financial crises forced the Mexican government to finally introduce economic reforms and to make changes to the country’s restrictive corporatist system. President Carlos de Salinas Gortari started to support neoliberalism at that time, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He hoped to link Mexico to the global market and weaken government-backed trade unions and corporatist groups. He also started a rapprochement with the Catholic Church, which had been an enduring enemy of the PRI. Salinas re-established a diplomatic relationship with the Vatican in 1992, and tried to project an image of tolerance by acknowledging traditionally marginalized groups in Mexico.

In order to implement NAFTA, Salinas had to make major changes to the Mexican constitution. To gain congressional support for this, he made a deal with the National Action Party (PAN), which typically supported free trade. However, there were massive protests over the prospective changes to the constitution, and as a result the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas occurred, which was a “catalytic event” in the country. The movement resulted in election reforms and opened up a “window of opportunity to accelerate democratization” in Mexico, maintains Wayne Cornelius. Since 1988, there had been weak efforts to politically reform the Mexican government, but these attempts were mainly done in a “stop-go” fashion. The Zapatista


56 Grayson, Mexico: From Corporatism to Pluralism?, 80-103.

uprising, on the other hand, sparked real political and democratic change in Mexico, which had a major impact on the country.  

The PRI went through a severe “identity crisis” during Salinas’s presidential term because of his “on-again, off-again” reform agenda. Mexico’s corporatist system also was weakened under Salinas due to his support for neoliberalism and globalization. Upon leaving office, Salinas left a “shaky corporatist system,” but failed to create durable new institutions to replace the entrenched corporatist system or to establish a “viable alternative” to it, notes George W. Grayson. Major economic problems also followed Salinas’s term, mainly due to his uneven policies. Salinas created numerous “private monopolies,” as well, from former public corporations in an effort to liberalize the economy, which made the political system unstable. The next president, Ernesto Zedillo, faced major economic and political obstacles when he took over in 1994.

In the twentieth century, other political parties, which were not tied to the PRI, were permitted in Mexico, but they faced challenges. Two of the main alternative parties were the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which were both created to compete against the PRI. The PAN was established in 1939. It embodied Catholic “social forces excluded from political power,” explains Michael Ard. The party was founded by Catholic activists and “disgruntled” PRI defectors.

The creation of the PAN was mainly facilitated by Catholic Church civil society associations. It had wide support from business entrepreneurs, as well, although it was less

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58 Wayne A. Cornelius, “Mexico’s Delayed Democratization,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 95 (Summer 1994): 53-71


popular with workers and labor unions. The PAN objected ultimately to the PRI’s voting methods and corporatist structure. The PAN allowed individual members to join the party, and it became the “democratic alternative” to the PRI, observes Steven Wuhs. 61 It was founded to protest the social policies of Cardenas and to fight against the “continued subordination” of the Catholic Church to the PRI. The PAN strongly criticized voting practices in Mexico, as well. 62 PAN voters were usually wealthy and well-educated, and the PAN was popular in more affluent parts of Mexico like Guanajuato and Chihuahua. 63

Another important alternative political party in Mexico is the PRD, which was founded in 1988 as an alternative to the PRI. It has strong support in states like Michoacán, Guerrero and Chiapas. It consists of an eclectic and pluralistic membership base, which includes socialists, Christians, nationalists and liberals. The party is largely controlled by ex-PRI members and it supports leftist ideologies, as well. 64 Other smaller political parties also exist in Mexico, particularly in areas where the Catholic Church has a wide social network, like in Guanajuato. Alternative political parties played a major role in local democratization efforts in Mexico prior to the 2000 presidential elections.

The next six chapters of this dissertation provide case studies on different states in Mexico and an evaluation of their local politics, civil societies and church dioceses or archdioceses. It also examines the variation in response to authoritarianism by local Catholic Church units in these states.

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CHAPTER 4
STATE OF CHIAPAS:
AN ENDURING CHURCH-STATE CONFLICT LEADING TO THE ZAPATISTA
REBELLION

Facts about Chiapas

Catholic Church Challenge to Authoritarianism: Extremely High Level

Location: Chiapas is located in the far south of Mexico

Population: 3,920,892 (2000 INEGI)¹

Capital: Tuxtla Gutierrez


Colonization and Statehood: Colonized in the mid-1500s and named a state in 1824.

Religion: In 2000 63.8% were Catholic, down from 91.2% in 1970 (2000 INEGI).

Economy: Chiapas is considered one of the poorest states in Mexico despite its vast
natural resources.

Climate and Terrain: The climate fluctuates depending on the elevation. The terrain is
variable. It has cooler mountain regions and flat plateaus, which are hot and humid.

Politics: Since 2000 there has been consistent political change in Chiapas. Prior to 2000
all governors in Chiapas were from the PRI, but since 2000 no governor has been from the PRI.

Table 4-1. Governor Election Results in Chiapas 1994 to 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>2012</th>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>502,898</td>
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<td>538,313</td>
<td>596,231</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>348,650</td>
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<td>544,515</td>
<td>348,506</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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<td>3,922</td>
<td>28,998</td>
<td>185,721</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>17,053</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,415</td>
<td>646,044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Data was collected from the Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografia (INEGI) in Mexico, for the year 2000.
The Catholic Church Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas, in the far southern state of Chiapas, has been at the forefront of countless church challenges to the state government. In many ways it can be seen as a model for understanding the church’s capacity to challenge authoritarian governments and systems in Mexico. The most recent democratic challenge was the church’s connection to the Zapatista uprising in 1994.  

Catholic Church networks within the indigenous communities of central and eastern Chiapas helped create an opposition movement to the local Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) during the twentieth century. These networks produced independent organizations that were not tied to the government, and they challenged the PRI’s corporatist structure in local areas. The Zapatista movement grew out of these church networks, which significantly impacted democratization in Mexico prior to 2000. Dan La Botz calls the Chiapas rebellion in 1994 “the beginning of the end” for the PRI, at least in Chiapas.  

This study looks at why and under what conditions the Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal challenged government authoritarianism in the decades before the 2000 elections. From 1539 to the late 1950s, the diocese in San Cristobal was the only diocese in the state. By the early 1960s there were two other dioceses in Chiapas, which acquired land from the diocese in San Cristobal. Currently, the San Cristobal diocese administers mainly to the Highlands indigenous population near San Cristobal, and in the eastern part of Chiapas.


4 Dan La Botz, Democracy in Mexico: Peasant Rebellion and Political Reform (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995), ix.
During the colonial era, the state of Chiapas was mostly isolated and ignored by Spain because it had no silver mines or profitable commodities to export. Despite this, the church diocese was able to build up strong and enduring church networks, and gain control of the indigenous population. This population later provided a sizable labor force, which was critically needed during periods of economic growth in the state. Chiapas has one of the highest indigenous populations in Mexico. 5

The Catholic Church in San Cristobal was powerful and important in the colonial period. It forged an alliance with local government officials to collect taxes and fees from indigenous communities. After Mexico’s independence, a major battle ignited between the new commercial landowners in the more fertile lowlands part of the state, and the Highlands, which was controlled by the church and conservative elites in San Cristobal. These opposing factions fought for control of the state and the indigenous population. The church and the state government, which was eventually moved from San Cristobal to Tuxtla Gutierrez in the lowlands, developed a contentious and combative relationship, which shaped all future interactions. 6

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the diocese in Chiapas was considered socially progressive and it welcomed Vatican reforms and church initiatives. Rerum Novarum and Vatican II were both embraced by church leadership. The diocese also integrated indigenous populations into its organizational structure. Prior to the elections in 2000, the diocese in San Cristobal trained thousands of lay leaders, who resided in indigenous communities. The leadership of the diocese also regularly spoke out about the exploitation of indigenous


populations in Chiapas and consistently challenged the government. At that time, the economy of Chiapas was rapidly growing, but the living standards of indigenous populations remained very poor. This inequality created anger, which eventually resulted in the Zapatista movement.  

In an effort to examine the development and historical trajectory of the Catholic Church in Chiapas, six common historic events will be evaluated in this chapter. These events include 1). The Spanish Colonial Period 2). Independence from Spain and its Aftermath 3). The Mexican Revolution 4). The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI 5). Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA 6). Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico. Five variables will also be examined to understand the institutional strength and effectiveness of the diocese in San Cristobal and its capacity to challenge authoritarianism in Chiapas.

**Common Historic Events**

**The Spanish Colonial Period**

When the Spanish first arrived in Chiapas in the 1500s they found a complex region, which was separated by geography and ethnicity. Different “ethnic states” occupied their own territories in Chiapas. 

They spoke different languages, as well, but in eastern and central Chiapas indigenous populations communicated mainly in Mayan dialects. Chiapas was a “poor marginal province,” which was isolated in the colonial era. There were no silver mines or profitable commercial exports until after Mexico’s independence. Cacao, cattle, cochineal, and

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cotton were produced there, but they were not made in “sufficient quantity” to generate major
profits or to attract a large number of Spaniards to the area. 10

Chiapas became part of Guatemala in the mid-1500s, although it was annexed by Mexico
following the country’s independence. The diocese in Chiapas, which was founded in 1539, was
one of Guatemala’s first church dioceses in Central America. Ciudad Real was its headquarters
and the province’s principal city, which later became San Cristobal de Las Casas. During the era
of Spanish colonialism, the Audiencia of Guatemala amassed an expansive territory that covered
nearly 800 miles from Chiapas to Costa Rica. 11

The Dominican religious order had a “missionary monopoly” in Chiapas. In 1549, they
were authorized by the Spanish Crown to re-organize indigenous society in Chiapas into
networks of “rural mission towns” or “pueblos de indios.” Friars then moved indigenous
populations from “scattered hamlets” to newly created settlements. In these villages, the
Dominicans had “uncontested social, economic and political control.” 12 The Franciscans also
used a similar re-organizational strategy in other parts of Mexico. Indigenous populations were
then required to build a new village and a Catholic Church. This process was “surprisingly
successful” in Chiapas compared to other areas in Mexico, perhaps because Dominican friars
instead of civil authorities requested it. Once residents were placed into new villages, religious

10 MacLeod, “Dominican Explanations for Revolts and Their Suppression in Colonial Chiapas, 39.
11 Oakah L. Jones, Jr., Guatemala in the Spanish Colonial Period (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma
12 Richard Perry, More Maya Missions: Exploring Colonial Chiapas (Santa Barbara, California: Espadana Press,
officials could then easily evangelize them, collect taxes and supervise their labor activities. \(^{13}\)

Religious orders also managed sugar plantations and cattle ranches in Chiapas.\(^{14}\)

One of the first Catholic bishops in Chiapas was the Dominican friar Bartolome de Las Casas, who was appointed in 1544. He left a very strong and positive impression on Chiapas. He was an “outspoken defender” of indigenous rights, which earned him the title of “protector of the Indians.” He also preached a “humanistic and egalitarian” form of Catholicism, which was largely embraced by the Mayan community in Chiapas. \(^{15}\) Las Casas is still regarded as the “greatest moral figure” in Spanish colonial history. \(^{16}\) He provided moral authority to Chiapas’s Catholic mission and his “spirit” remains within indigenous communities, insists James A. Magner. \(^{17}\)

Various diseases during the colonial era significantly decreased the native indigenous populations in Chiapas. \(^{18}\) The estimated population in 1520 was 275,000, but this was reduced to about 78,000 less than a century later. Population declines, however, were much less in the isolated mountain region of the Highlands in Chiapas, which is outside of San Cristobal. This area also had the coolest temperatures in the province. Chiapas’s topography is separated by mountain ranges, and in the tropical lowlands it is very hot and humid. The lowlands are located in the Central Valley and western part of the state. In the lowlands, population decreases were

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\(^{14}\) Wasserstrom, *Class and Society in Central Chiapas*, 40.

\(^{15}\) Perry, *More Maya Missions*, 15-17.


much more pronounced compared to the Highlands. The higher temperatures and lower elevations of the lowlands ultimately became a breeding ground for disease and infection.  

During the colonial era, ethnic and political divisions also divided Chiapas. Around the Highlands, Mayan factions spoke either Tzotzil, Tzeltał, Tojolabal, or Chol (Lacandon). In the lowlands the population was mainly Zoque and Chiapanecos. Spanish colonizing efforts were focused mainly on the Highland region around San Cristobal because it had a larger population and a better climate for growing Spanish crops and raising cattle. Many indigenous settlements in the tropical lowlands also died out due to disease, which reduced the area’s labor supply and potential for tribute collection.

San Cristobal was the commercial center of the Highlands and where the majority of the Spanish lived. This city became a “small Spanish island within a vast Indian sea,” claims Thomas Benjamin. Land was plentiful in the expansive Highland region, and easily obtainable by both Mayan and Spanish populations, who built estates there. In the Highlands land was not considered very valuable because the commercial economy there was weak.

Catholicism was largely embraced by the Mayan population around the Highlands. By the seventeenth century, it was “well integrated” into native religious practices, confirms Kevin Gosner. The Mayans, however, were not fond of paying the high fees required for church


20 Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*, 43.


services. Yet, parish priests still sanctified “virtually all marriages,” and baptized every child. They also performed funerals, which were costly. Attendance at mass was mandatory, as well, and Catholic Church institutions and clergy became “integral to native political culture.”

Indigenous populations in Chiapas “converted sincerely” to Christianity and with “great devotion,” maintains Robert Wasserstrom. At times, however, this population rebelled when they were provoked by oppressive civil and religious authorities.

A large-scale indigenous rebellion ignited in the Highlands in 1712. This revolt began mainly over fees for religious services, which the indigenous population was reliant upon. Church fees put a heavy financial burden on indigenous communities. A new Franciscan bishop in Chiapas, Alvarez de Toledo, also started a policy of incarcerating people if they did not pay fees for administering the sacraments, although past bishops had forgiven this debt. Toledo raised church fees, as well, and introduced new ones to “enrich himself.”

To retaliate against the bishop’s avaricious behavior, rebels in indigenous communities destroyed Spanish estates and expelled Dominican priests. Leaders of the rebellion also started a separatist movement in the Tzeltal communities of the Highlands. They decided to create their own native priesthood, as well, which was modeled after the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. They also tried to establish a theocratic state and an indigenous church, which mimicked

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25 Wasserstrom, *Class and Society in Central Chiapas*, 70.


Catholicism, yet without the interference of its hierarchy. They demanded an end to tribute payments and tithes, as well, and a return to the “sense of promise” and community, which the former bishop, Bartolome de Las Casas, had inspired in them. 29

The revolt of 1712 ultimately challenged Spain’s monopoly of Catholicism in Chiapas. In the past, Spanish elites, secular priests and religious orders had consistently fought over their share of tribute collection and taxes in Chiapas, despite the poverty there. 30 The 1712 movement, which included 4,000 Indians, eventually became divided due to “factional rivalries,” which were common in the Highlands. Ethnic unity was limited in this area by “localized” identities, which different indigenous communities adopted. Eventually the Spanish were able to end the revolt, and the Catholic Church regained its domination of the Highlands via its charity and solidarity initiatives.31

Throughout the colonial period, various economic institutions were utilized in Chiapas to collect taxes and fees and to organize the indigenous labor force. An encomienda system was initially introduced, but local commercial markets were not very profitable, and therefore this system was not successful there. 32 Another colonial economic institution, which was more effective was the labor “repartimiento,” which forced indigenous communities to provide a specific number of workers for economic and church-related jobs, and in return the workers

29 Wasserstrom, Class and Society in Central Chiapas, 82-85.
32 Wasserstrom, Class and Society in Central Chiapas, 13.
received a wage. Workers typically labored in the fields and haciendas around Chiapas for the labor repartimiento.  

The repartimiento system ended in 1633 in New Spain, but it continued well into the eighteenth century in Central America, which Chiapas was then part of. Workers in Chiapas were routinely mistreated and cheated out of their wages due to the repartimiento system. Forced labor lasted longer in Chiapas than other parts of Mexico due to this exploitative system. The repartimiento system relied on native political elites within indigenous communities to manage labor pools. Elites in indigenous towns usually acted as intermediaries between employers and indigenous workers.

The system of repartimiento created “profound transformations” in indigenous communities in Chiapas, claims Wasserstrom. Provincial governors “organized and mobilized a vast native labor force,” which produced cacao, cochineal, cotton cloth and sugar. The indigenous populations in Chiapas also paid an “exorbitant” amount of tribute compared to their counterparts in New Spain. The labor repartimiento system became an “entrenched” institution in Chiapas, which had enduring social and economic consequences.

A system of indirect rule was typically employed by Spanish colonists to manage indigenous communities in Chiapas. Local villages were then self-governed and “traditional local elders” were elected as leaders, who became the “voice of the community.” Local communities were educated about Catholicism via religious brotherhoods called “cofradias.”

33 Washbrook, Producing Modernity in Mexico, 40-43.
34 Washbrook, Producing Modernity in Mexico, 40-43.
35 Wasserstrom, Class and Society in Central Chiapas, 64-66.
36 Washbrook, Producing Modernity in Mexico, 44.
These brotherhoods different saints and celebrated Catholic holidays. Indigenous communities combined local pre-conquest religious practices in Chiapas with Catholicism, and created a hierarchy of religious and civil offices. Through this a civil-religious or cargo system of governance developed in local communities. In line with this system, individuals were elected to entry-level religious or civil offices during their youth. Throughout their lifetimes they slowly advanced to be “respected elders,” who were the local mayors or leaders in the civil-religious system. This system was also utilized in other indigenous communities in New Spain.  

In Chiapas, civil-religious systems became deeply entrenched around the Highland region largely due to the area’s isolation. This created strong and enduring church networks in this area. Indigenous populations typically used the money they earned from local agriculture production to pay their religious fees. In some cases, residents in indigenous communities abandoned their villages in the Highlands and moved to the lowlands if they could not pay church-related debts. The Dominicans and the provincial governors ultimately created a “political alliance” in Chiapas to obtain taxes and fees from indigenous populations.

Independence from Spain and its Aftermath

In 1824, after Mexico’s independence from Spain, the state of Chiapas was established and it exited from Guatemala and became part of Mexico. Mexico’s annexation of Chiapas was engineered by San Cristobal’s colonial elites, who wanted to strengthen their political domination of the state by becoming part of a new country. Local elites also hoped to advance

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37 Klein, *Peasant Communities in Revolt*, 248.


their own interests and maintain their “economic domination” of indigenous communities in the Highlands. Farmers and ranchers, who typically lived in the fertile lowlands, did not support this decision. They instead wanted to remain part of Guatemala and prevent San Cristobal from gaining complete control of the state. A bitter regional rivalry started to fester at that time between the new landowners and merchants in the lowlands, and the conservative elites and Catholic Church in San Cristobal. 40

The antagonism between Highland and lowland elites worsened throughout the nineteenth century. After Mexico’s independence, religious and civil bureaucrats in San Cristobal ruled the state, and they were known as the “Conservatives.”41 Members of the Conservative party were “prochurch,” while elites in the lowlands were usually members of the Liberal party, and anticlerical.42 Chiapas was politically unstable after Mexico’s independence and it was isolated from the central government. This allowed local elites in San Cristobal to acquire significant autonomy from the government in Mexico City. 43

In the nineteenth century, distinct regional differences developed between the lowlands and Highlands in Chiapas. The lowlands had a lower population, but it was also more agriculturally fertile and productive, compared to the Highlands. Its main city was Tuxtla Gutierrez, which was seen as more “economically progressive” than San Cristobal. 44 Elites in


43 Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy*, 43-44.

the lowlands were usually landowners and Liberals. They wanted to create a “new structure” for Mexican society and challenge elites in San Cristobal, who controlled the state.  

One of the greatest “sources of interregional conflict” between the lowlands and Highlands at that time was competition over indigenous labor. As commercial agriculture grew in the lowlands, labor was severely needed there, which was traditionally provided for by the indigenous communities around the Highlands. Yet, San Cristobal elites and the Catholic Church were the “gatekeepers” of this population, and they had control of the area, as well, which became a persistent problem for the lowlands and their labor shortages.  

After Chiapas became part of Mexico, the conservative government in San Cristobal continued to give the Catholic Church “day to day control of Indian affairs” in the state. Parish priests also managed a collection of “native taxes.” They administered censuses and gathered vital statistics, as well, on the local population, like they had done during the colonial era. Elites in San Cristobal essentially “lived on the rents and taxes” of the surrounding indigenous communities, observes Jan Rus.  

The church also amassed “extensive rural properties,” which accounted for at least 30 percent of all properties in the state, notes Charles Hale.  

When the federal Reform Laws passed in Mexico in the mid-1800s, indigenous lands and church properties in Chiapas were privatized. Monastic orders were also banned. Many urban and rural properties in indigenous communities were also sold, and wealthy Liberals usually purchased them. Once the Reform Laws were adopted in Chiapas, some in the indigenous

45 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 13.
communities were forced to move to the lowlands to find work on plantations. The Reform Laws ultimately “shifted the balance of economic and political power” to the lowland liberal towns of the Central Valley, claims Benjamin. Conservatives in San Cristobal, however, continued to fiercely oppose this situation. 49

Throughout the prolonged conflict between Liberals and Conservatives during the nineteenth century in Chiapas, the state capital was moved several times from San Cristobal to Tuxtla Gutierrez, due to fighting over control of the state. One of the biggest opponents to the Reform Laws was Carlos Maria Colima y Rubio, the Catholic bishop of Chiapas, who together with local priests and friars, strongly opposed the Liberal government. The bishop told his followers not to abide by laws that were contrary to God and the Catholic Church. The church in San Cristobal published several “subversive” denunciations of the Liberal government, as well, and openly supported revolt. As a result the bishop, along with the Dominican and Franciscan orders, were temporarily exiled to Guatemala by the Liberal governor in Chiapas. 50

Once the initial conflicts over the Reform Laws subsided in the 1860s, Chiapas’s capital was again returned to San Cristobal, and the Catholic Church and local elites re-established their “domination of the Indians” in the Highlands. However, the indigenous population started to rebel again in this area following repeated urgings from Liberals. Jose Pantaleon Dominguez, who was appointed by Porfirio Diaz as the Liberal governor in 1864, “embarked on an all-out campaign to break” the hold of Conservatives and the church on the Highlands indigenous populations. He did this so that they would no longer obstruct the lowland’s access to Highland labor. The governor also wanted to break the “grip” of the church on native religious practices,

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and force indigenous communities to “abandon the churches altogether,” and perhaps practice Catholicism without priests. He tried to abolish some religious offices of the civil-religious cargo system, as well, which hindered the ability of the church to collect taxes. 51

At this time another separatist religious movement developed in the Highlands, except this time in the Tzotzil communities. Leaders of the movement also elected to boycott the Catholic Church. A parish priest tried to convince them to return to the church, but he was killed. This rebellion became known as a “Caste War” because it involved an aggressive attack of a ladino priest. State troops were then mobilized “to save San Cristobal from a bloodbath.” Once the indigenous communities were restrained, there was eventually a “rapprochement” between Liberals and Conservatives, who decided to “share control” of the indigenous communities in Chiapas. This was a triumph for Liberals, although Chiapas’s central government remained weak. 52

Throughout the Porfirio Díaz era, the federal government tried to impose a program of “modernization” on Chiapas. In the 1890s the state became “one of the most profitable agriculture regions” in Mexico, despite centuries of isolation and non-productivity. At that time, Chiapas was the largest manufacturer of coffee in Mexico, which was mainly produced in the lowlands area of Soconusco. It was also a big producer of chocolate, sugar, bananas and tropical fruits, largely due to government efforts to attract foreign capital to the state. 53

In order to stimulate economic growth in Chiapas, the government sold large tracts of land in the state, usually to foreigners at reduced prices, so they could develop plantations there.


Labor shortages, however, continued to be a major set-back for the state’s development plans. Eventually the state government decided to levy new taxes on the indigenous populations in the Highlands, which they hoped would force them to work on lowlands plantations to pay off their debt. This tactic, however, was largely futile because indigenous communities typically had just enough communal land in the Highlands to live off of. In a final effort to force indigenous populations to work on lowland plantations, the government conspired to reduce community landholdings in indigenous communities. 54

In the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution most of the lowlands land that indigenous populations controlled in the 1880s, and nearly half of the less fertile land in the Highlands, was “expropriated and sold” by the Chiapas government, according to Rus. Indigenous populations were able to retain just enough land to maintain their small communities, but not enough to be self-sufficient. This forced this population to look for work outside their local areas, and to join the Chiapas labor force, which supported the state’s agriculture and economic goals. 55 Debt peonage was also used on plantations to force laborers to work because landowners then held their debt. By the latter part of the 19th century, Chiapas was considered by many to be a “slave state.” 56

Emilio Rabasa, who was originally from the lowlands in Chiapas, became the Porfirio Diaz appointed governor of Chiapas in 1891. He quickly transferred the state capital permanently back to Tuxtla Gutierrez. He did this primarily due to Tuxtla’s growing importance in Chiapas’s economy, and to avoid the “undue influence of the clergy” in San Cristobal. When Rabasa began

his term, Chiapas had no roads and indigenous populations were used “like mules” to transport supplies around the state. Rabasa built the first highway in the state. 57

During his tenure, Rabasa broke up communal lands and ejidos in indigenous villages and created private land. Profits from the sale of these lands were then used for public works projects and to build schools. Consequently, dozens of village ejidos were sold, while large landowners and rancheros increased their land holdings at that time. This situation forced more indigenous workers into debt servitude and to find work in the lowlands. 58

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, the power and influence of the Catholic Church clergy in San Cristobal remained extremely strong. The church was typically seen as a “shadow clerical government” in San Cristobal. 59 Chiapas’s Bishop Francisco Orozco y Jimenez, who was in power from 1902 to 1912, was a prominent “progressive” member of the Catholic social movement, which was ignited by Rerum Novarum. He was, however, a “controversial figure” during the Porfirio Diaz era. He was “hated by Tuxtla and loved by the central highlands,” observes Sarah Washbrook. This was largely due to his role in opposing Liberals. 60

In San Cristobal, Orozco was “considered the defacto leader of the anti-Rabasa” movement and he continually fought to have the state capital returned back to San Cristobal. One of Orozco’s major inspirations was the influential ex-Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas. 61 During his term as bishop, Orozco improved missionary tactics in indigenous communities and learned to speak indigenous languages. He also set up weekly catechist groups in villages, which allowed

58 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 42-52.
59 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 79-82.
60 Washbrook, Producing Modernity in Mexico, 136-139.
61 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 82.
participants to debate important social issues, like debt servitude and seized land. In addition, he regularly condemned the exploitation of indigenous communities by government officials and lowland elites. As a result, he was attacked by Porfirio Diaz’s supporters in the press, yet his local Catholic resistance movement only grew.  

Orozco enjoyed “widespread legitimacy” among indigenous groups and elites in San Cristobal. He established schools and strengthened civil society by creating Catholic associations, such as the Catholic Workers Society and an Association of Catholic Women. He molded the church into an “alternative social organization” in Chiapas, which was mainly dedicated to the indigenous populations. Orozco came from a wealthy Jalisco family and he inherited a significant amount of money at a young age. As bishop he routinely used his own resources for “religious and public improvements.” He also paid for San Cristobal’s first lighting and power system, and for the schools that he had built.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, there was very little mobilization in indigenous communities, despite the significant loss of land and slave-like working conditions in the state. They also did not rise up when the revolution arrived in Chiapas in 1914. This was largely due to the “coercive labor system” in Chiapas, along with “ancient ethnic and cultural divisions” there, which divided indigenous communities. This dynamic prevented broad collective action in the indigenous communities of Chiapas. Benjamin maintains that the “landless and exploited

63 Washbrook, *Producing Modernity in Mexico*, 138-139.
peasantry, in Chiapas…generally were too divided, controlled, and isolated to burn down the old order.” 65

**The Mexican Revolution**

Once the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, old interregional rivalries in Chiapas ignited again between the lowlands and the Highlands. In 1911 there was another attempt by elites in San Cristobal to return the state capital to San Cristobal. 66 San Cristobal elites, along with a “rebel faction” in the Highlands, clashed with the state government in Tuxtla at that time. The rebels, who were mainly from Chamula and other Highland towns, were part of the Christian communities “organized by Bishop Orozco y Jimenez,” notes Washbrook. Indigenous communities in the Highlands opposed the government in Tuxtla Gutierrez because of their attempts to raise taxes and control local communities. There was also resentment over the government’s efforts to lure indigenous laborers away from their villages to work mainly on lowland plantations. 67

The battle between the lowlands and Highlands at that time was defeated within three months following the death of 300 people. 68 However, elites in Tuxtla blamed Bishop Orozco and the clergy in San Cristobal for the revolt. Leaders of the rebellion were “fervent Catholics,” and they carried the Virgin of Guadalupe flag as their symbol. Bishop Orozco eventually called for an end to the conflict. 69 Once the rebellion stopped, there was very little fighting in Chiapas during the early years of the Mexican Revolution. At that time, the old order “clung to power”

68 Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, 52.
and the social structure in Chiapas remained “unchanged.”

The National Catholic Party (PCN) also grew in popularity in Chiapas at that time, which was a political party organized by the Catholic Church.

In 1912, Bishop Orozco was dismissed from his duties in Chiapas largely due to his purported ties to the rebellion of 1911. At that time he became archbishop of Guadalajara, and his bishop position remained empty in Chiapas for more than a year until Bishop Maximino Ruiz y Flores arrived in 1913. However, because of the revolution the new leader spent very little time in the state before being exiled to Guatemala. Another bishop, Gerardo Anaya y Diez de Bonilla, arrived in Chiapas after the revolution, and tried to re-start the work of the church at that time.

In 1914, the Constitutional army arrived in Chiapas from the north, but the lowland’s landowning elites fought them vigorously. They opposed the Mexican Revolution because of their support for the policies of Porfirio Diaz and Emilio Rabasa. General Agustin Castro, who was sent to Chiapas by Venustiano Carranza, tried to “take control” of the state, but instead he experienced major state-wide resistance. Castro also attempted to implement political and social reforms in Chiapas, and he hoped to end debt peonage and impose anticlerical laws there. Ultimately, he wanted to “liberate the masses” from priests and plantation owners. He capriciously limited mass to once a week, confiscated all church properties and made divorce legal, which infuriated the church. Lowland elites were also upset about his newly-imposed labor

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policies. The lowlands elites decided to join forces with a Highlands resistance movement, despite their past frictions, to fight Castro.  

Throughout the Mexican Revolution, local “counterrevolutionaries” in Chiapas were largely successful at blocking reforms there. The revolution and its military officers were not welcome in Chiapas when they arrived in 1914, and they were instead viewed as an “invasion of barbarians.” Chiapas’s isolation and distance from Mexico City had also created a strong tradition of “local sovereignty.” Ranchers and landowners “resented any outside interference,” and Carranza’s newly appointed governors in Chiapas were seen as ineffective. A civil war erupted when revolutionary soldiers invaded Chiapas, which lasted over five years.

In the end, Chiapas was able to avoid the reform agenda of the Mexican Revolution due largely to the determined efforts of the state’s counterrevolutionaries, which is why many say the revolution “never arrived in Chiapas.” The strong resistance movement in Chiapas succeeded in blocking reforms, at least until the mid-1930s when Lazaro Cardenas became president and finally forced political and social change on the state.

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75 Lewis, “Revolution without Resonance: Mexico’s ‘Fiesta of Bullets’ and its Aftermath,” 163.

76 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 122.


The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI

Following the Mexican Revolution, old and enduring systems of “economic exploitation and political domination” were re-created in Chiapas. 79 Tiburcio Fernandez Ruiz became governor of the state in 1920, and he quickly restored the “Porfirian social order,” and prioritized the “landed class.” Worker abuses continued, as well, and national laws that banned debt peonage were not enforced. The “economic needs” of the Highlands were also ignored and the new federal agrarian program was “administered with little enthusiasm.” 80 During the Cristero Rebellion, which lasted from 1926 to 1929, Chiapas “was quiet.” 81

Governor Fernandez Ruiz eventually lost support in Chiapas, and in 1925 Carlos Vidal became governor. He was a socialist, and a member of El Partido Socialista Chiapaneco, which temporarily became the state’s official party. A socialist movement had developed in Chiapas, mainly in the lowlands Soconusco coffee plantation region, where unions began to organize workers. Vidal had the support of socialist clubs, opposition groups and labor unions in Chiapas and Mexico. He introduced new labor laws at that time, and started a land re-distribution program in the state. He also planned to build schools and roads in Chiapas. Mexico’s President Plutarco Elias Calles supported him, as well. 82 However, after Vidal publicly backed an


80 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 149-152.

81 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 185.

82 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 152-166.
opposition presidential candidate against Alvaro Obregon, he and his associates were assassinated in 1927, and the socialist movement was largely abandoned in the state. 83

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Catholic Church was again the target of attacks by state politicians in Chiapas due to the Mexican Constitution in 1917. Raymundo Enriquez, who was the subsequent governor after Vidal, closed down some churches in Chiapas and limited the number of priests in the state. 84 However, the governor was hesitant to fully implement other revolutionary reforms. 85 At that time, land remained “highly concentrated” in a few hands in Chiapas. Agrarian reform had also “barely touched” the state by the 1930s, notes Benjamin. 86 Up until the mid-1930s, indigenous communities around the Highlands also lived as they had since prior to the revolution. Highland indigenous communities were frustrated and discouraged by the lack of agrarian reforms there, observes Jan Rus. 87

In 1932, Victorico Grajales became governor of Chiapas and he decided to initiate a harsh anticlerical campaign. However, he mainly targeted the Catholic Church in San Cristobal. Anticlericalism was used by him as a way to “rekindle the conflict” between the liberals of the Central Valley and the “pious conservatives” in the Highlands. 88 Grajales ordered all churches in the state to be closed in 1933, which continued until 1936. He also expelled Chiapas’s Bishop


84 Lewis, The Ambivalent Revolution, 71-73.


86 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 179.


88 Lewis, The Ambivalent Revolution, 74.
Gerardo Anaya y Diez de Bonilla in 1935, along with other priests in the state. Bishop Anaya had been exiled in 1926, as well, for several years.

When Lazaro Cardenas became president of Mexico in 1934 he finally started to implement the agrarian and labor reforms of the 1917 constitution. Cardenas “intervened” in Chiapas in 1936 and helped install his preferred candidate for governor, Efrain Gutierrez. Governor Grajales had consistently blocked social reforms in Chiapas. Cardenas took control of Chiapas at that time, and the local Party of the National Revolution (PNR), which later became the PRI. Governor Gutierrez also re-opened churches, and he ended the state’s persecution of the Catholic Church. He invited Bishop Anaya back to the state, as well, along with the other priests who had been exiled. Grajales’s strict anticlerical policies were ultimately deemed to have strengthened religious devotion in the state rather than reduce it.

After Cardenas seized control of Chiapas, new federal agrarian and labor laws were implemented in the state. Indigenous populations were also able to obtain ejido land and debt servitude ended. In the lowlands, however, hacienda owners continued to dominate this part of the state. The ejido land that indigenous populations received was also usually of “poor

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quality.” Moreover, land parcels were typically too small to adequately provide for a family or to produce enough food to live on. The ejido land system also started to link indigenous communities more closely to the federal government, who managed the program and provided credit for it. As a result, government agencies became more directly tied to the formerly closed indigenous communities around the Highlands. This development created “more intimate forms of domination” by the government in these local communities, according to Rus.

Since the colonial era, Highland towns and villages had typically been managed by a local and trusted elder or a municipal president, who rose up through the ranks of the local civil-religious or cargo system. However, after the implementation of land and agrarian reforms, the state and federal government infiltrated local indigenous communities in Chiapas. The government also placed loyal bilingual municipal assistants in these communities, who hadn’t participated in the cargo system. These assistants, known as “scribe-principales” descended on local villages and became union leaders, regional representatives of the PRI, and heads of agrarian and labor organizations, which were linked to the federal government. Eventually the scribes joined the cargo system, but they also exploited it for their own gain. The indigenous villages closest to San Cristobal were infiltrated the most by the federal government. Cardenas


also tried to “mobilize political support” for his reforms by gaining backing in indigenous villages, maintains Neil Harvey. 101

After the PRI and the government were deeply entrenched in local indigenous villages in Chiapas, they realized they could control them “by co-opting a relatively small number” of traditional leaders, who were entrusted with federal patronage funds. In exchange for these resources, local leaders were then “expected” to deliver votes for the PRI and keep the peace. 102 By 1965, PRI-connected scribes and their families had the best government jobs, owned the majority of local stores, and a large share of community lands in local indigenous towns and villages in Chiapas. 103

When Cardenas’s presidential term ended in 1940, agrarian reform slowed considerably in Chiapas, but the PRI government “scribes” remained in local communities and maintained their influence there. This created a new “economic elite” in the indigenous villages of Chiapas, who exercised broad powers and had access to federal government resources. 104 The elites or scribes became the “caciques” or bosses of the villages.105

Throughout the twentieth century, Chiapas continued to grow economically. The cattle ranching industry thrived, along with the production of coffee, sugar cane, cotton, hydroelectric


power and natural gas. By the 1970s, revenues increased significantly in Chiapas. This was due to multiple factors, such as improved roads, a rise in international market prices, new machines for agriculture production, and government support for private agriculture. The Chiapas government, however, continued to “serve particular local interests,” which consisted mainly of a small group of wealthy families. Landowners also used their relationship with government officials to try to restrict the distribution of ejido land. At that time, agriculture reforms in Chiapas became a “barely adequate safety” valve to maintain peace in the state. The majority in Chiapas were poor, while a select group continued to control the state, its land and resources.106

In 1960, the legendary bishop, Samuel Ruiz Garcia, began his tenure in the Catholic Church Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas. Mexico’s apostolate delegate to the Vatican, Luigi Raimondi, also created twenty-four new church dioceses in the country at that time. Two of these new dioceses were in Chiapas. The diocese in San Cristobal had been the only diocese in the state since the 1500s. In 1958 a new diocese was established in Tapachula, and in 1964 another diocese was placed in Tuxtla Gutierrez. Consequently, the diocese in San Cristobal started to administer only to the areas around the Highlands and eastern Chiapas. Membership of the San Cristobal diocese therefore became mainly populated with individuals from local indigenous communities.107

When Bishop Ruiz first arrived in Chiapas he visited every town and village in his new district on a mule. He was stunned by the poverty and oppression that existed there, and he decided to change the church’s evangelization methods to reflect local conditions. He also studied indigenous dialects and had bibles translated into local languages so that indigenous

106 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 223-234.

populations could read them. Ruiz started new programs, as well, to better incorporate indigenous populations into the diocese. He was strongly influenced by the egalitarian initiatives of Chiapas’s former iconic bishop, Bartolome de Las Casas, and he wanted to carry on his legacy, like other bishops in the state had done. 108 Ruiz was from Guanajuato and he was raised in a politically active family in Irapuato, which was a “hotbed” of Catholic resistance to anticlericalism in Mexico. His family also supported the Cristero Rebellion, and other important Catholic movements at that time. Ruiz’s politically aware upbringing appears to have prepared him well for his challenging assignment in Chiapas. 109

After Ruiz arrived in Chiapas, he recognized that there was an inadequate number of priests in the diocese, and that the church infrastructure was unsatisfactory. At that time, there were only thirteen priests to administer to the church’s population. The previous bishop, Lucio Torreblanca y Tapia, who was at the diocese from 1944 to 1959, also claimed there was an insufficient number of priests to cover the state’s population. Priests had to travel by horseback and foot to local parishes because of poor roads, which hindered evangelization efforts. 110

Despite priest shortages, Torreblanca was dedicated to Chiapas’s indigenous populations. Long before Vatican II, the Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal was a progressive, social church, which was powerfully influenced by Rerum Novarum. Torreblanca started a pastoral program in 1952, mainly for local indigenous communities, which Ruiz continued. The program

strengthened Catholic Church networks in the state and trained catechists in local indigenous communities. 111

Bishop Ruiz’s pastoral program tried to “re-evangelize” the local indigenous populations in Chiapas. As part of this plan, he placed a Catholic parish priest in the large Highland town of Chamula, which is located outside of San Cristobal. In Chamula, the new priest organized community discussions on various important social issues and he trained lay leaders. He also offered classes on topics, such as farming and childrearing. This initiative created a strong “alternative voice” in Chamula, which eventually threatened the local PRI power structure there. Political bosses in the town also became threatened by the “independent thinking” of the new Catholic mission, and by 1969 the Catholic priest was banished from the town. However, at that time there was already growing opposition to the scribe-principales in Chamula, who were affiliated with the PRI. After the Catholic mission was expelled from Chamula, it re-located to San Cristobal and continued to challenge the “caciques” in the Highlands. 112

The diocese in San Cristobal started another evangelization program shortly after Ruiz’s arrived, which mainly focused on training indigenous lay ministers and catechists in the state. By 1970 over 1,000 catechists had been trained, who worked in local communities around Chiapas. These lay preachers became community leaders, who tackled important political and social issues. The presence of catechists transformed indigenous communities in Chiapas and increased the outreach of the San Cristobal diocese. By 1993 there were 8,000 catechists, who worked in


local communities and acted as political and community leaders. 113 Their actions helped to democratize villages and break the PRI’s local corporatist structure, which was limiting civil society development in Chiapas.

In the 1960s, Ruiz participated in the Vatican II conferences in Rome. Vatican II encouraged church leaders to take part in the “realities and problems” of society, particularly with respect to the oppressed. This left a strong impression on Ruiz. In 1968, Ruiz also attended the Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Columbia, which further inspired him to prioritize the needs of the poor. At that time, Ruiz became fearful of the socialist influences of the PRI in Chiapas, like many Catholic Church leaders at the time. In order to promote progressive social change in Chiapas, Ruiz tried to empower and educate indigenous communities through the “direct intervention” of lay ministers. The church also focused on advancing human and civil rights in Chiapas. 114

The five-hundredth birthday of Bartolome de Las Casas in 1974 provided an additional opportunity for the church diocese in San Cristobal to address local social issues in the state. The governor planned to commemorate the historic occasion, as well. A new monument was dedicated to Las Casas in San Cristobal at that time, and an international panel was organized to discuss his contributions. The tribute also included an Indigenous Congress, which was put

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together by Bishop Ruiz and his pastoral team. The congress focused on land, education, human rights, and health concerns in the state.  

The congress was mainly organized at the grassroots level by the Catholic Church in San Cristobal. Over 1,000 indigenous delegates attended, who represented different communities around Chiapas. Ruiz and church workers tapped into the church’s existing evangelical networks to increase indigenous participation at the congress. The three-day meeting provided a forum for indigenous communities to express their grievances in the state about major social issues. The event was “unprecedented” in Chiapas because these types of community issues were historically ignored by the state government.

The Zapatista movement evolved largely out of the Indigenous Congress in 1974 because it helped to create unity and enduring connections between diverse ethnic communities in Chiapas, which in the past had been deeply divided. It also gave indigenous populations a forum to express their grievances. Most local observers “trace the beginning” of a radical indigenous movement in Chiapas to the 1970s, and the Indigenous Congress, which was organized by the Catholic Church.

The Indigenous Congress was also a “catalyst” for future grassroots organizing in the Highlands and other parts of eastern Chiapas, like the isolated Lacandon Jungle. Catholic priests and catechists were active in the Lacandon area because the PRI’s corporatist structure was weaker there. PRI-affiliated corporatist groups were typically more entrenched in the

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118 Collier, Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, 61-65.
communities closer to the city of San Cristobal. 119 Catholic Church catechists continued to challenge the corporatist and authoritarian structures in local villages and towns in Chiapas throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Eventually these catechists became local religious, political and social leaders, and they established strong local networks, which further challenged the PRI’s dominance of civil society in Chiapas.120

**Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA**

In the 1980s Mexico was hit by a major financial recession, which led to a debt crisis. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) eventually bailed the country out of debt. Mexico also agreed to a structural adjustment repayment package by the IMF, which resulted in reduced subsidies for rural communities in the country. The PRI embraced neoliberalism at that time, and attempted to decrease its reliance on corporatism. Government budgets and subsidies were slashed on healthcare, education, housing, agriculture, and food. The government reduced agrarian reform, as well, and ended many aid programs. Rus observes that “without money to grease the wheels, the patron-client” relationship between the rural areas and the PRI, “ceased to function” properly, and this weakened the party’s control in local areas, like in Chiapas. 121

The government’s financial problems affected indigenous communities around Chiapas differently, depending on their relationship to the PRI. The PRI’s presence in rural communities in the state was largely “tied to state corporatism,” observes Rus. However, in some parts of Chiapas, like the remote Lacandon Jungle, the state and federal government had never fully penetrated the area, which made it more autonomous. In the Highlands, however, the PRI’s

119 Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, 78-79.


control was much stronger. There was also a “repressed” out group there, which was receptive to oppositional political parties, and the church’s catechist movement. People in the Highlands and other parts of eastern Chiapas joined the Zapatista movement in the twentieth century, largely because of their opposition to the PRI’s domination of their communities. The membership of the movement continued to grow throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.  

On New Year’s Day in 1994, after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, thousands of people in indigenous communities in Chiapas started to revolt. They called the trade deal a “death sentence” for the indigenous populations in the state. Once fighting began, the federal government sent thousands of troops to Chiapas, and a few weeks later a cease fire was called and peace talks began. The Zapatista rebellion finally forced a “globalizing Mexico” to acknowledge its “long ignored” indigenous populations.

The Zapatista uprising arose in Chiapas due to centuries of struggle in indigenous communities to obtain land and alleviate poverty and inequality there, explains Jerome Levi. The movement also emerged as a result of local participation in mainly Catholic Church-organized civil society groups, which unified the indigenous population in Chiapas. Popular rebellion and other forms of resistance had also been common in Chiapas since the colonial era. Relations were historically strained, as well, between the non-indigenous elite and indigenous populations in Chiapas, who had few civic rights.

123 Lynn V. Foster, A Brief History of Mexico (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2010), 231.
In preparation for NAFTA, reforms were proposed to the Mexican Constitution. Changes included an amendment to Article 27, which was adopted after the Mexican Revolution. This amendment protected property in Mexico, and allocated communal land for agrarian communities. New amendments to Article 27 permitted communal lands to be privatized in order to mirror the private property rights of NAFTA partners. NAFTA was implemented in Mexico “without public discussion,” according to Paul Rich. 126

NAFTA also eliminated trade barriers and tariffs between Canada, the US and Mexico. 127 It supported neoliberal initiatives, as well, which opened up space for local social movements to grow due to the “retrenchment” of the state” at that time. The Zapatista movement was largely a social movement of neoliberal resistance. 128 Prior to the passage of NAFTA, the Mexican government had privatized hundreds of national companies and removed safety nets for the poor in support of neoliberalism.129

In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) “declared war” on the Mexican government and seized four municipalities in Chiapas, but within ten days the federal government was able to regain control. Eventually, the government called a truce, and decided to


127 Stephen, “Between NAFTA and Zapata: Responses to Restructuring the Commons in Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico,” 76-80.


negotiate with the Zapatistas. The government blamed Bishop Ruiz and his church diocesan pastoral team for the rebellion. The military entered Catholic Churches in Chiapas and accused church workers of hiding rebels and weapons. Bishop Ruiz became the “official mediator” between the Mexican government and the Zapatistas at that time, and he helped to end the conflict.

**Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico**

The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas had major political consequences in Mexico. The EZLN became an “important force” in Mexican politics, and an enduring opponent to the PRI. It helped break the PRI’s stronghold in Chiapas, as well. The Zapatista movement was also a “driving force” in Mexico’s democratization efforts prior to 2000, which helped to unseat the PRI at the federal level for the first time in over 70 years. The movement mainly encouraged “bottom-up democratization” via civil society, and it sparked democratic awareness. It also opened up political space for other important civil society actors to push for democratization in Mexico. Moreover, it resulted in major changes to how political candidates were selected, and elections administered in Mexico. In the past, PRI incumbents had been handpicked by their successors, but eventually government primaries were held to select candidates, and this had major political consequences.

The Zapatista movement also attracted national and international attention due to its broad calls for democracy in Mexico. New non-governmental organizations, support groups and

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131 Tangeman, *Mexico at the Crossroads: Politics, the Church, and the Poor*, 92-98.

civil society outlets were created to promote democracy in Mexico and Chiapas. The movement also caused major changes to the Mexican election process. It resulted in the acceptance of international and community election observers and monitors, as well, and it reformed the federal elections institute and made it independent of the government. The Zapatista movement was part of a “constellation” of small transitions to democracy in Mexico, which occurred before the 2000 elections, and significantly helped to democratize the country. 133

The Zapatistas ultimately saw their movement as a “just war” because of five hundred years of indigenous oppression in Chiapas. They used nationalistic, patriotic and democratic rhetoric to support their cause. They saw the PRI as a “dictatorship” and widely criticized changes to Article 27 of the constitution. 134 During the twentieth century, the PRI controlled most of the local municipal governments in the indigenous towns of Chiapas. 135 But in 2000, Chiapas and Mexico voted the PRI out of office after over 70 years of one-party rule at the federal level. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and other oppositional parties, have won all governor elections in Chiapas since 2000, and the PRI’s power has been significantly curtailed in the state largely due to the Zapatista movement and the efforts of the Catholic Church in San Cristobal.

**The Institutional Capacity of the Catholic Church in Chiapas**

The Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal has consistently challenged authoritarianism in Chiapas. The diocese’s institutional capacity will now be evaluated based on the five variables below.

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134 Tangeman, Mexico at the Crossroads: Politics, the Church, and the Poor, 13, 89-91.

135 Collier, “Reaction and Retrenchment in the Highlands of Chiapas in the Wake of the Zapatista Rebellion,” 19.
Table 4-2. Chiapas I: Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-optation by the Government or Elite Groups**

The Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal played a major role in the colonization of Chiapas. During the colonial era, it created an important position for itself in society because it controlled and managed indigenous communities around San Cristobal. Church leaders successfully re-organized indigenous populations at that time, and collected fees for religious services. This arrangement gave the diocese an unparalleled level of autonomy and independence from the government. Indigenous populations embraced Catholicism and incorporated it into their native religious practices. ¹³⁶

The Dominican religious order also created an alliance with provincial governors to extract taxes from indigenous populations during the colonial era. ¹³⁷ A civil-religious or cargo system was also established in local villages, and the church managed different religious and

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¹³⁶ Perry, More Maya Missions, 16-18.

¹³⁷ Wasserstrom, Class and Society in Central Chiapas, 54-55.
community institutions there. Indigenous communities in Chiapas mainly lived on communal lands in closed, corporate communities, where the Catholic Church played a major role.  

After Mexico’s independence, San Cristobal’s conservative government continued to allow the church to control indigenous affairs in the state. In San Cristobal, elites “lived on the rents and taxes” of the nearby indigenous communities. Once Chiapas became a state, the relationship between the church and the state government, which moved to Tuxtla Gutierrez, became extremely competitive. Significant friction emerged over the church’s control of land and indigenous labor in the state. As agriculture production increased in the fertile lowlands region, the church’s control over the indigenous population around the Highlands began to anger plantation owners, who resented the church’s vast political and economic powers in San Cristobal. In the nineteenth century the battle between the elites in the lowlands and the Highlands intensified. The Catholic Church was considered a shadow government in Chiapas, and fighting between the Highland elite and the state government eventually ignited over control of Chiapas’s labor supply.

The historic power of the Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal has given it immense autonomy and independence in the state, which it has continued to fight for. Its greatest source of influence has been its continued management of indigenous affairs. Historically, Catholic bishops in the diocese in San Cristobal have supported indigenous activism, like the Zapatista movement, which further challenged government authoritarianism in the state. These efforts

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138 Wasserstrom, Class and Society in Central Chiapas, 27-28; Klein, Peasant Communities in Revolt, 248-250.
140 Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 17-20.
141 Washbrook, Producing Modernity in Mexico: Labour, Race and the State in Chiapas, 1876-1914, 136-138; Benjamin, A Rich Land, A Poor People, 79-82.
have resulted in extreme challenges to local, state and federal authoritarianism by the church diocese in San Cristobal, which has ultimately produced democratization in Mexico and Chiapas.

**Networks: Strong and Enduring Church Networks, Which Were Typically Developed Prior to State Formation**

Chiapas has strong church networks, which were developed prior to the state’s formation. A civil-religious or cargo system became deeply rooted in indigenous villages during the colonial era. Church networks and colonial institutions allowed the church to closely engage with indigenous populations. These populations were required to pay fees for fiestas and other religious services, which the church collected through its networks. 142

Catholic Church networks have remained strong and durable in Chiapas largely due to the efforts of the church diocese in San Cristobal. The civil-religious system established enduring bonds between the church and indigenous communities. The church developed Christian brotherhoods, as well, called cofradias. 143 Church networks and civil religious hierarchies allowed indigenous communities to “defend indigenous identity” against constant “colonial assaults,” notes Ruth Chojnacki. 144

After independence, civil-religious systems persisted in the indigenous villages around the Highlands. Church networks helped to create civil society organizations, which were independent of the government. In the early 1900s, Chiapas’s Bishop Orozco used church networks to organize local catechists meetings and he introduced social programs that supported Rerum Novarum. Bishop Lucio Torreblanca y Tapia revitalized these social programs and continued the work of Orozco. He also engaged with indigenous populations and deepened the

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143 Klein, *Peasant Communities in Revolt*, 248-250

church’s networks in indigenous communities. Bishop Samuel Ruiz was involved in this work, as well. Under his leadership the diocese trained thousands of catechists and further extended church networks throughout the state, in accordance with Vatican II.  

Early church networks in Chiapas were strong and powerful, and helped to link the indigenous population to the church diocese in San Cristobal. Church networks were later used by indigenous populations to organize the Zapatista movement, which successfully challenged government authoritarianism in Chiapas.

**Policy Implementation: A High-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow Church Guidelines**

The diocese in San Cristobal has consistently embraced Vatican reforms and church initiatives. It has done this largely because of its institutional strength and independence from the government in Chiapas. Both Vatican II and Rerum Novarum were widely implemented in the diocese in San Cristobal. These reforms also created a way to democratically transform the diocese and local society. The socially progressive policies that were adopted by the church were also instrumental in creating civil society organizations, which forged horizontal networks of civic engagement and social capital, rather than patron-client networks. These groups unified and empowered indigenous communities and created trust among members. They also challenged government corporatism in local areas, and helped to democratize Chiapas in the decades prior to the 2000 elections.

**Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution**

The Catholic Church in San Cristobal has had a large social role in Chiapas since the colonial era, and Catholicism was widely embraced by indigenous populations there. Bartolome

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de Las Casas was one of Chiapas’s first bishops. His acts of humanity towards the indigenous population gave the church enduring moral authority and legitimacy in Chiapas. Las Casas also inspired future bishops to protect the rights of local indigenous communities. He defended indigenous populations, as well, against colonial exploitation, and “set a standard” for their ethical treatment.146

Las Casas helped the San Cristobal diocese to create a high level of public trust, early in its developmental history. Trust levels were further strengthened by the progressive leadership styles of subsequent bishops. The diocese sponsored horizontal civil society organizations, which focused on human rights and social advancement, instead of patron-client relationships of dependency. Civil society groups in Chiapas also helped to establish strong bonds of trust between the church leadership and local communities.

The Indigenous Congress in 1974, which was largely organized by the diocese, further unified the indigenous population in Chiapas, and helped to create the Zapatista movement. Prior to the 2000 elections, the Catholic Church became deeply involved in fighting authoritarianism in the state. This, however, might have inadvertently eroded some of the diocese’s public trust because church membership started to decrease in the latter part of the twentieth century. 147

Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Autonomous Church-Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships

Due to the Catholic Church’s important social and civic role in Chiapas, the church’s infrastructure within the state is extensive. There are a lot of churches in the state, particularly in rural areas, like in Zapatista villages. The first church diocese was also located in San Cristobal,

146 Wasserstrom, Class and Society in Central Chiapas, 16-19; Perry, More Maya Missions, 15-18.

147 Harvey, The Chiapas Rebellion, 78-79.
which was Chiapas’s most important city for several hundred years. This helped the church gain significant influence in the state. 148

The diocese in San Cristobal has been very instrumental, as well, in developing local civil society organizations in Chiapas. Bishop Ruiz helped to create a number of non-profit groups, such as El Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, AC. This was the first human rights organization in Chiapas. It was founded in 1989 by the diocese, and Bishop Ruiz served as its first president. The organization continues to documents and denote human rights abuses in the state. 149 Since its foundation, it has been “a constant thorn in the side of the Mexican government” because it denounces abuses by state and federal officials. 150

Ruiz also organized human rights workshops in the diocese and he created many church-connected groups, which tackled inequality, poverty and important local social issues. The diocese also assisted in mobilizing indigenous communities to fight for their rights and oppose government oppression. 151 The civil society network that the church diocese established, created social space for other civil society organizations to develop in the state, as well.

**Catholic Church Challenges to Authoritarianism in Chiapas**

Additional variables to understand when an institutionally strong and effective church unit will challenge authoritarianism are discussed below in regards to Chiapas.

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Table 4-3. Chiapas II: When a Catholic Church Might Challenge Authoritarianism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Variables</th>
<th>Effect Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capability: When a diocese or archdiocese is considered institutionally effective or strong.</td>
<td>Whether an institutionally strong and effective dioceses or archdioceses will successfully challenge an authoritarian regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Threats: If there are strong threats by the government or ruling elites to the church’s institutional effectiveness and strength.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Path Dependency: If past attempts to challenge the government by the dioceses or archdioceses were successful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support: When there is strong support for action from the church leadership and membership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Capability

The Catholic Church diocese in San Cristobal scores high in institutional effectiveness and strength, therefore it has the capacity to successfully challenge authoritarianism.

Threats

Threats by the government to the institutional integrity of a strong and effective church unit, might result in a challenge to authoritarianism, as well, by a church unit. The institutional integrity of a church unit takes hundreds of years to develop and therefore the church is not likely to relinquish this without a strong fight. The diocese in San Cristobal has frequently sparred with the government when it tried to curtail its autonomy, weaken its church networks or challenge other institutional qualities.

Path Dependency

Historically, the diocese in San Cristobal has successfully challenged authoritarian governments. Thus, the diocese will likely continue to challenge authoritarianism because this is a historical pattern for it.

Support

When there is strong support for action from the church leadership and membership of an institutionally strong and effective church unit, a church unit might also challenge
authoritarianism. There have been mainly progressive bishops in Chiapas, who have elected to challenge government authoritarianism. Church membership have also been supportive of challenges to authoritarianism in the past.

**Conclusion**

The state case study of Chiapas offers an ideal model of an institutionally strong and effective diocese, which consistently challenged government authoritarianism because it had the capacity to do so. Catholic Church networks within the indigenous communities of eastern and central Chiapas were utilized to create an opposition movement against the local Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). These networks assisted in the development of independent organizations, which were autonomous and connected to the church. The church also helped to foster the Zapatista rebellion in 1994, which significantly impacted democratization in Mexico and Chiapas prior to 2000. The case study of Chiapas demonstrates the critical role that an institutionally strong and effective Catholic Church diocese or archdiocese can play in local and national democratization efforts in Mexico.
CHAPTER 5
STATE OF GUANAJUATO:
A HUB FOR CHURCH-STATE CHALLENGES AND CATHOLIC OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS

Facts about Guanajuato

Catholic Church Challenge to Authoritarianism: High level

Population: 4.7 million (2000 INEGI)

Location: It is located in the center-west region of Mexico, northwest of Mexico City

Capital: Guanajuato City

Indigenous Population: There is a low indigenous population at .2 % (2000 INEGI).

Colonization and Statehood: It was first colonized in 1522. It became a state in 1823.

Religion: 96.4% of the population is Catholic (2000 INEGI)

Economy: Guanajuato has one of the strongest economies in Mexico.

Climate and Terrain: Guanajuato is part of an area known as the Bajio, which has fertile soil and optimal weather conditions for agriculture.

Politics: The PAN has dominated Guanajuato politics since the 1990s. The PRI is weaker there than other states in Mexico.

Table 5-1. Governor Election Results in Guanajuato 1995 to 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>409,578</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>604,363</td>
<td>PRI/VERDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>87,438</td>
<td>PRD/PT</td>
<td>119,245</td>
<td>PRD/PT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>723,337</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>1,004,603</td>
<td>PAN/Nueva Alianza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>14,833</td>
<td>VERDE</td>
<td>21,117</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The state of Guanajuato is located in the central-west region, which is commonly referred to as Mexico’s “bible belt” due to the Catholic Church’s strong institutional presence there.

Historically, Guanajuato has been a hub for anti-government Catholic resistance movements. The state is considered a “stronghold” of Catholicism and a place where two institutions, the church and the state, have consistently battled for hegemony. Guanajuato is also home to Mexico’s first non-PRI president, Vicente Fox, who is a member of the National Action Party (PAN). He was governor of Guanajuato in 1885 and became Mexico’s president in 2000.  

In the twentieth century, local Catholic Church challenges to authoritarianism pushed democratic change in the state. The Diocese of Leon’s leadership has also typically supported pro-church movements, and helped to create a strong local civil society network, which was independent of the PRI’s corporatist structure. An assortment of alternative political parties and pro-church groups have arisen out of the diocese’s civil society network, as well. They were also instrumental in opposing the PRI and challenging authoritarianism.  

In Guanajuato, Catholicism, “more than any other single factor,” was what “frustrated the revolutionary project” in the state during the twentieth century, observes Ben Fallaw. Opposition to the PRI in Guanajuato was ultimately defined by Catholic “beliefs and mobilized by Catholic organizations.” The city of Leon is seen as a “symbol of Catholic political and social prestige,” maintains Daniel Newcomer. It is a “bastion of Bajio conservatism and Catholic resistance to

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successive national governments.” Leon also has a “strong ecclesiastical presence.” The PRI viewed the church’s “administrative authority” in Leon as a threat to its “liberal secularization” agenda. The PRI also tried to limit the “ecclesiastical influence” of the diocese in national elections. Yet, local elites in Leon consistently showed a “defiant preference” for Catholicism instead of the federal government’s secular agenda. 4 The Diocese of Leon is a “powerful church” with a “highly organized laity,” notes Adrian Bantjes. 5

From the 1920s to the 1940s, the city of Leon was the focus of repeated attacks by the PRI. The PRI targeted the city’s “Catholic culture” and tried to weaken the church’s domination there. These attacks “never produced” the desired results. The PRI also attempted to re-model the city’s urban design, which had a strong Catholic Church presence. The PRI hoped to modernize the city and “demonstrate control” there. 6 As a result, an anti-PRI movement arose in Guanajuato, along with many pro-church political parties, which politically challenged the PRI.

In the early twentieth century, the Diocese of Leon’s expansive civil society network included six Catholic unions and many “pious” associations. Approximately 15,000 students also attended Catholic schools there. There were nearly 6,000 members, as well, in the group Catholic Action. Catholic Action organized women’s unions, ran the Red Cross and organized catechisms. The Catholic Church in Guanajuato continues to have a “deep presence” in civil society, and the state is recognized as a “spiritual center” by Catholics. 7


The Catholic Church diocese in Leon is institutionally strong and effective, which makes it capable of challenging authoritarianism. For centuries, “social, economic, and geographic forces strengthened the institutional church and encouraged religious participation,” maintains Fallaw. The diocese is also viewed as a “veritable factory” because it has produced the highest number of bishops in Mexico. Chiapas’s long-term bishop, Samuel Ruiz, received his formal training there, as well.  

The church dioceses in San Cristobal, Chiapas and Leon, Guanajuato were both instrumental during the twentieth century in local and national democratization efforts. The most significant contribution to democratization by the San Cristobal diocese was its connection to the Zapatista rebellion. While in Guanajuato, politically active pro-church civil society groups and political parties, created an alternative path to challenge authoritarianism. These groups developed mainly out of the Diocese of Leon’s vast and autonomous civil society network. Several major revolutions also took place in Guanajuato during the nineteenth and twentieth century, but they were earlier than the Zapatista uprising. Thousands perished during the early wars in Guanajuato, and therefore democratization fights were largely channeled into electoral politics and civil society, rather than rebellion, like in Chiapas.

In 1810, Catholic priests in Guanajuato also initiated the fight for Mexican independence, and the Cristero Rebellion began there in 1926. The Cristero Rebellion was a major religious war in Mexico’s central-west region. The conflict was supported by the Catholic Church hierarchy in Leon and its longtime bishop, Emeterio Valverde y Tellez. The Cristero Rebellion was an “anti-state” revolt that was triggered by the new anticlerical laws of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. It was “rooted in the defense of local institutions and autonomy in the face of a rapidly expanding

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8 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 157-159.
and intrusive central state,” observes Jennie Purnell. In Guanajuato, the new constitution was seen as a threat to “the integrity of the church as an institution.” Following three years of intense fighting, the government and the Catholic Church finally reached an agreement in 1929 to end the conflict. ⁹

The Catholic Church was also instrumental in colonizing Guanajuato and in protecting it from wild indigenous populations. During the colonial era, Guanajuato was rich in agriculture, mining, textiles and trade, but it consistently had to fight for autonomy from obtrusive outsiders. The church has been a constant ally in this fight, and it acted as a strong, alternative institution to the state. It helped to create a dissident, Catholic counterculture, as well, which has been buttressed by successive church leadership in Guanajuato. Rerum Novarum and Vatican II were also widely embraced in the diocese in Leon.

This chapter focuses on the Diocese of Leon, which covers the state. It looks again at why and under what conditions the Catholic Church challenged authoritarianism prior to the 2000 presidential elections. In the colonial era, Guanajuato was part of the Diocese of Michoacan. In 1863 it split into its own diocese and became the Diocese of Leon. In 2006 it was named an Archdiocese. In order to understand the church’s development in Guanajuato, six common historic events will be examined to evaluate the church’s historical trajectory and development. These events include the 1). The Spanish Colonial Period 2). Independence from Spain and its Aftermath 3). The Mexican Revolution 4). The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI 5). Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA 6). Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico. Five variables will then be evaluated to examine the institutional strength


and effectiveness of the Diocese of Leon and its capacity to challenge authoritarianism in Guanajuato.

Common Historic Events

The Spanish Colonial Period

When the Spanish first arrived in Guanajuato in the 16th century they found an idyllic location with fertile soil and magnificent silver mines. Local indigenous populations were also fairly small in Guanajuato, which meant that the region’s resources could be easily procured. However, rebellious native tribes from the north, known in this region as “Chichimecos,” regularly invaded Guanajuato and wreaked havoc there. Prior to the colonist’s arrival, Guanajuato mainly served as a frontier or “empty buffer” zone between the “bellicose north” and the settled populations in the south. 11

Militant “Chichimecos” also frequently attacked the road between the northern silver mines and Mexico City, which passed through Guanajuato. This was an important trade route that was utilized to transport silver, and therefore extreme measures were used to secure it. Military posts were set-up and soldiers accompanied armed caravans carrying silver loads. These aggressive security measures, however, only aggravated the Chichimecos further, and the road remained extremely dangerous, which led to enormous financial losses for Spain. 12

After years of war and fighting with the Chichimecos, local political leaders were forced to concede defeat and find an alternative method to secure Guanajuato. Army soldiers were also accused of enflaming hostilities by attempting to coerce rebellious indigenous populations into

slavery. The Catholic Church was eventually given permission to pacify the wild indigenous populations via a religious “peace offensive.” Through this method the church convinced the Chichimecos to settle down and enjoy the “blessings of a tranquil life,” according to Max Moorhead. Catholic missionaries then set-up religious missions and churches in Guanajuato’s conflict zones. They also replaced military officers with church personnel, and weapons budgets were used to pay for religious instruction, food, clothing and agriculture tools for the Chichimecos. This “olive branch” approach proved “more persuasive than the sword,” and hostilities ended in the area, which was a major Catholic Church triumph due to the past failures of the colonial authority to secure the area.

Many early churches in Guanajuato’s conflict zones were in fact combined “fort-churches,” which defended against raids by the Chichimecos, and provided religious instruction. One of the first missionaries to help pacify the Chichimecos in Guanajuato was the Jesuit, Gonzalo de Tapia, who left a “permanent mark” by founding the city of San Luis de la Paz. The church played a crucial role in the colonization of Guanajuato because it secured the area, and allowed its rich resources to be obtained by the Spanish.

The Jesuits first arrived in Mexico in 1572, and a large number resided in Guanajuato. Other religious orders were also present in Guanajuato, such as the Franciscans and Augustinians. Religion became deeply rooted in Guanajuato society early in the colonial era.
due to the church’s vital role in protecting the area. Jesuits also established schools and universities in Guanajuato, which didn’t charge money. The Jesuits excelled at farming and they had the best-operating and most prosperous estates in New Spain. The Jesuits also acquired substantial assets from rich benefactors to maintain their order. Religious orders were technically not permitted to own land, but the Jesuits had “vast holdings,” which the colonial authorities tolerated because their schools benefited society. Jesuit missionaries were involved in commercial activities, as well, and they tried to improve the living standards of local populations.\textsuperscript{18}

During the colonial era, Guanajuato’s silver mines were regarded as the “treasure house” of the world, and a fourth of all Mexican silver was produced there. Commercial agriculture enterprises also developed in close proximity to mining operations. Guanajuato is located in an area known as the Bajio, which is “the most productive” and prosperous agriculture region in Mexico due to its rich soil and excellent climate.\textsuperscript{19} Large estates, called haciendas, were established in the Bajio, which supplied agriculture and livestock to silver mining populations. As the mining industry grew in Guanajuato, the number of haciendas also increased.\textsuperscript{20} The Bajio is commonly referred to as Mexico’s “agrarian heartland.”\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{20} Laura Gonzalez-Martinez, \textit{Political Brokers, Ejidos, and State Resources: The Case of Arturo Quiroz Francia, a Peasant Leader from Guanajuato, Mexico}, PhD Dissertation (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California, Santa Barbara, 1997), 19.

The textile and trade industry also thrived in Guanajuato because important trade routes passed through the area during the colonial era. Guanajuato had independent enterprises and wealth, which gave it autonomy from the colonial authorities. Moreover, wealth accumulated there instead of being “siphoned off” by the “greedy center,” observes Eric Wolf. Church construction was also abundant in Guanajuato, and wealthy miners frequently built churches with their mining proceeds. Guanajuato had the third highest number of churches built during the colonial era, following Mexico and Puebla. 22 Guanajuato was self-sufficient, yet regionally interdependent because it was linked to other important areas in the central-west Bajio region, which also provided resources to local mining populations, as well. This interdependence created regional nationalism. It also allowed “power groups” to develop in the central-west region, which helped to challenge central government interference. 23

In the agriculture rich Bajio region, a majority of the rural population lived as estate dependents because a “provincial gentry” monopolized the best lands in Guanajuato, who were mainly from Spain. Rural estates in the Bajio were also owned by rich miners from Spain. By the end of the colonial era, rural areas became “breeding” grounds for insurgency as disgruntled estate workers started to rebel against their employers. Class issues also divided the countryside and one major source of friction was corn production. Guanajuato’s elite grew wheat and vegetables on the Bajio’s best lands, while corn was relegated to the less fertile, non-irrigated fields in northern Guanajuato. Corn was essential, however, to the “survival” of the rural and poor majority. Eventually, there was a corn crisis due to the insufficient supply, and several


famines occurred in the late 1700s. In some areas of Guanajuato, the Catholic Church was one of the only sources of assistance for the rural poor. 24

At the beginning of the colonial era, workers in Guanajuato were provided with excellent wages to work in local mines and haciendas, but after an adequate work force was established, salaries were significantly reduced. Agriculture workers were ultimately required to live under a Spanish “commercial structure” because they controlled Guanajuato’s rural estates. There were also few designated indigenous villages in Guanajuato with communal land, native languages and cultures, like in other parts of Mexico. Most of the indigenous populations in Guanajuato had migrated there from other areas to work on haciendas and in the mines, and therefore they had no permanent local ties or land. The Catholic Church in Guanajuato helped to create bonds of unity between these disparate groups as Spanish and Hispanic culture dominated there. 25

Mining communities in Guanajuato were also itinerant and ethnically mixed. By the late eighteenth century, a “racially and culturally diverse population” lived in Guanajuato City and in the mining centers nearby. 26 Other parts of Guanajuato also had high levels of “cultural integration,” which was uncommon during the colonial era. In Guanajuato City, indigenous populations, Africans and Europeans, all lived and worked together, and the city did not abide by the “segregationist policies” of the colonial government. This environment produced new forms of “political consciousness,” observes Elizabeth Emma Ferry. 27

26 Angela T. Thompson, “Mexico’s Other Wars: Epidemics, Disease and Public Health in Guanajuato, Mexico, 1810-1867.” Annales de Demographie Historique (1996), 172.
Guanajuato’s population grew at a very fast pace, as well, before Mexico’s independence, due to employment migration. 28 The Bajio was the largest section of the Michoacan Catholic Church Diocese, and its population nearly tripled from 1700 to 1760, and doubled again between 1760 and 1810. 29 In 1810 the small Intendency of Guanajuato, which would later become the state, had the highest population density in New Spain following Mexico City. This was largely due to the abundance of mines and haciendas there. Hugh Hamill, Jr. reveals that the “fantastically rich mines in the hills around Guanajuato made the city one of the most opulent and conservative centers in the New World.” 30

At the end of the colonial era, the church diocese in Michoacan, which controlled Guanajuato, was extremely wealthy. Tithe revenues more than tripled from 1700 to 1800. 31 At that time, local resentment towards Spain grew because it was viewed as a “parasite,” that fed off the wealth of its colonies. 32 Mining and agriculture also produced unprecedented amounts of wealth in the area, although there were periods of economic depression, as well. From 1800 to 1810, droughts and halts in mining production caused economic instability in Guanajuato, and social inequalities increased in society. 33


In an effort to boost revenues and strengthen Spain’s control in its colonies, Spain’s king, Charles III, introduced sweeping Bourbon reforms at the end of the colonial period, which led to the removal of the Jesuits from New Spain in 1767. Their expulsion was widely objected to in Guanajuato. It ultimately left a “cultural vacuum” because of the significant role the Jesuits had played in education and other important areas of local society. Charles III, however, was threatened by the Jesuits wealth, autonomy and power. 34

After the Jesuits were expelled there were riots in Guanajuato. The expulsion was viewed as another “assertion of power” by the colonial government. The Jesuits had offered “a bridge between deadly labor and final salvation” for miners and rural workers in Guanajuato, according to John Tutino. 35 In Guanajuato, the Catholic Church was an integral part of local society because it helped to unify and secure the multi-ethnic region.

Independence from Spain and its Aftermath

The fight for Mexico’s independence from Spain started in Guanajuato in 1810. It was initiated by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Catholic parish priest in northern Guanajuato. Hidalgo gave his famous “Grito de Dolores” speech and then called on local residents to fight against oppression. He was a member of a clandestine group, which plotted an end to Spanish rule. The plan was eventually uncovered by colonial authorities, and Hidalgo acted fast to get the public’s support for revolution. Mexico still celebrates Independence Day each year with a government re-enactment of the “Grito de Dolores.” 36


Hidalgo was raised in Dolores, which is a small town in the northeast part of the state. He spoke several languages, including Otomi, which is an indigenous dialect. He was considered an intellectual, as well. He attended Jesuit schools, which had a reputation for excellence until the secular clergy took them over once the Jesuits were expelled. Hidalgo was inspired by French enlightenment principles of equality and egalitarianism, and he studied books on the French Revolution and liberalism. He also sought an end to the exploitative colonial economic system, which was based on a caste system.37 Hidalgo’s ability to read French evidently “stirred his sympathies” for the French Revolution. It created a desire to fight for political change in Mexico.38

Hidalgo was a creole, which was a person with Spanish parents, who was born in a Spanish colony. Due to Hidalgo’s caste, he had less legal rights in Mexico than a person born in Spain.39

Guanajuato’s early independence movement was made up of various independence sympathizers from Queretaro and Guanajuato, and members of the lower Catholic Church clergy. Ignacio Allende, a captain in the Spanish army, organized the movement with Hidalgo. Allende and Hidalgo anticipated a “rapid victory” against the Spanish. They assumed the “intense hatred and jealousy,” which many Mexicans had for the Spanish, would convince them to support Mexico’s independence. At that time, creoles and other non-Spanish castes were treated like “second class” citizens in Mexico due to Spain’s hegemony. Hidalgo was selected to


38 Magner, Men of Mexico, 207-208.

39 Noll, The Life and Times of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, 3-25.
lead the independence movement because of his connection to the Catholic Church, and ability to attract wide support.\textsuperscript{40}

Hidalgo adopted the popular Mexican religious heroine, Our Lady of Guadalupe, as the movement’s symbol. He then placed her likeness on flags and banners to draw support. This stimulated a “visceral popular response” for the movement. \textsuperscript{41} Guadalupe’s picture became a unifier among indigenous populations, and other ethnicities because it symbolized inclusivity, notes Stafford Poole. \textsuperscript{42} Many rural workers were also illiterate and religious symbols became easy identifiers for them. \textsuperscript{43} The symbol of Guadalupe was utilized by the Jesuits, as well, to represent empowerment and equality. The Jesuits encouraged creoles to believe they were equal to the Spanish, despite the unequal caste system. This unrestricted atmosphere in Guanajuato helped build support for Mexico’s independence movement from Spain.\textsuperscript{44}

The movement had a motley crew of participants from around Guanajuato, and it was open to anyone who wanted to join. The group fought with bows and arrows, clubs and machetes. \textsuperscript{45} Within a few weeks Hidalgo’s “ragged army” consisted of 80,000 people, who marched together to Guanajuato’s capital, where they fought Spanish colonial authorities. The

\textsuperscript{40} Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., “Early Psychological Warfare in the Hidalgo Revolt,” \textit{The Hispanic American Historical Review}, Vol. 41, No. 2 (May 1961): 207-209.


\textsuperscript{42} Stafford Poole, \textit{Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797} (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1995), 218.


\textsuperscript{44} Tangeman, \textit{Mexico at the Crossroads: Politics, the Church, and the Poor}, 23.

\textsuperscript{45} Magner, \textit{Men of Mexico}, 215-216.
leaders of the movement were strongly censured, however, by the Catholic Church hierarchy. 46

The bishop-elect in Michoacán and the archbishop in Mexico ex-communicated them, along with the bishops in Puebla and Guadalajara. Prior to independence, most of the Mexican high clergy were from Spain, and they remained loyal to their native country. 47

Hidalgo was eventually charged by the Mexican Inquisition for insulting the Catholic faith, and he and other leaders were convicted of ecclesiastical crimes. 48 The leaders of the independence movement were later executed, and for ten years their heads were put on public display in Guanajuato City to warn against any future revolutionary activity. 49 The independence struggle continued, however, with one of Hidalgo’s former students, Jose Maria Morelos, who was also a member of the lower church clergy in Guanajuato. 50 Morelos assembled an army of 3,000 men, who were trained in guerilla warfare. For him, Mexico’s independence from Spain was imperative because Spain had taken its wealth, enslaved its population, and suppressed its development. 51 Morelos was a nationalist, and religion continued to be a unifying symbol for the movement. In 1815, Morelos was also executed by the government. 52


47 Magner, Men of Mexico, 220-221.


49 Magner, Men of Mexico, 233.

50 Magner, Men of Mexico, 236-238.


52 Lynch, The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826, 315.
The independence fight persisted after Morelos’s death until Spain finally relinquished control of the country in 1821. The long war devastated Mexico City and many parts of the country, including important cities in Guanajuato. The post-independence years were violent and destructive in the country. Mines were severely damaged during the fighting, as well. Agustín de Iturbide became the first emperor of Mexico in 1822, after switching his allegiance from Spain to become a revolutionary in Mexico’s independence fight. He eventually helped Mexico win independence from Spain.  

Mexico’s battle for independence was mainly triggered by the vast inequalities in Mexican society, which emerged during the colonial era. In Guanajuato, these inequalities were perhaps intensified due to the population’s wealth and heterogeneity. Mexico’s lower clergy were instrumental in the independence fight as they had faced severe discrimination under Spanish rule. The lower clergy, who were typically Mexican, were generally not eligible for high clergy positions and many lived in poverty, while the high clergy from Spain were usually wealthy. This situation created tensions within the Catholic Church in Mexico.  

Rural estate employees were also an integral part of the independence movement, maintains Tutino. He views the rebellion as an “agrarian uprising” because a majority of the rebels worked on Bajío haciendas. In the years prior to the war, working conditions had deteriorated significantly on haciendas, which were mainly owned by Spaniards. Workers were thus angry and willing to fight for the country’s independence from Spain.  

55 Tutino, From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence 1750-1940, 41.
Following independence, Guanajuato was politically and economically unstable for decades. Mexico at that time also became divided by two warring political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. The new constitution in 1857 eventually triggered an armed rebellion between members of the two parties, which lasted until approximately 1860. The new constitution ultimately took significant powers away from the Catholic Church, and it separated church and state for the first time in history. It also banned tithing and legalized divorce. The Liberals were eventually triumphant in the conflict, but Mexico was left bankrupt.

Extreme hostilities over the Reform Laws and the 1857 constitution continued in Mexico for decades. When Liberal President Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada tried to uniformly enforce these laws in 1873, “peasant bands backed by local clergy rose” up in Guanajuato and other states in the central-west region, in what was called the “Religionero Revolt.” The fighting finally subsided in 1877 after Porfirio Diaz became president, and decided not to enforce the anticlerical laws.

In 1863, the Catholic Church Diocese of Leon was created in Guanajuato. Prior to this, the surrounding areas had been part of the Diocese of Michoacan. The founding of the new Diocese of Leon was significant because it gave Guanajuato ecclesiastical autonomy from the expansive Michoacan diocese, which it had been dependent on for centuries. The separation also allowed Guanajuato to manage its own religious affairs. Leon became the “capital of Catholic

56 Hamnett, A Concise History of Mexico, 164-176.
57 Bailey, Viva Cristo Rey, 12-13.
58 Bailey, Viva Cristo Rey, 13-14.
Mexico” at that time. The diocese was also an important hub for Rerum Novarum and the social Catholicism movement, which local bishops strongly supported. 60

Guanajuato’s first bishop in 1863 was Jose Maria de Jesus Diez de Sollano y Davalos, who was a steadfast opponent of the Reform Laws. 61 He and the subsequent bishop, Tomas Baron y Morales, turned Guanajuato into a bastion in defense of Catholic interests while Liberal governments ruled Mexico. 62 The Diocese of Leon had a vast organizational structure, and it also inherited a “strong colonial infrastructure” from the Michoacan diocese. It had a “formidable array of churches, monasteries, convents, schools, and charitable institutions staffed by a sizable, well-trained, and disciplined clergy,” observes Ben Fallaw. 63

From 1909 to 1948 Eme terio Valverde y Tellez was the bishop of the Leon diocese. He was trained in Rerum Novarum, which was the new “social Catholic” doctrine of the Catholic Church. The social Catholic movement was enthusiastically embraced by Valverde. 64 He was a “thoughtful bishop who encouraged catechism, education, and charity during his exceptionally long” tenure, maintains Fallaw. 65

62 Monica Blanco, Historia de Una Utopia: Toribio Esquivel Obregon (1864-1946), (Mexico City, DF: Colegio de Mexico, 2012), 51.
63 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 159.
65 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 159.
Economically, Guanajuato started to grow before the Mexican Revolution due largely to the economic policies of Porfirio Diaz, which helped invigorate the local economy. 66 Agriculture production and manufacturing increased in the state, as well, and new railroads were built. 67 There were a few anti-reelection clubs in Guanajuato prior to the revolution, but the influence of Francisco Madero and his revolutionary ideas were generally weak there. 68

**The Mexican Revolution**

The Mexican Revolution came late and reluctantly to Guanajuato. At that time there were two “radically distinct” revolutionary movements in the state. There was an unsuccessful popular movement led by the military commander Candido Navarro Serrano, who was a “dedicated revolutionary” with a strong following. He mainly focused on the northern part of the state. 69 He was able to gather about 500 men and at one point jeopardize the security of Leon, which was then defended by the military. 70 Navarro led the Francisco Madero movement in Guanajuato, but he failed to challenge the established order and in 1913 he died. 71

There was also another counter-revolutionary movement in Guanajuato, which was controlled by Bonifacio Soto and Alfredo Garcia, who controlled the central part of the state around the Bajio. They had “property and influence” and sought to maintain law and order, and

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their own influence. They also hoped to “shore up the status quo,” instead of changing it. They supported the removal of some Porfirio Diaz officials, but they were essentially conservative and pro-church. Their movement included hacienda owners and people of “good social position.” They were essentially “champions of the conservative interest” in the state, against popular movements, maintains Alan Knight.72

In the Bajio region, there were few traditional indigenous villages and rural protests were not well organized or unified during the revolution, notes Knight. The Bajio instead had open plains, haciendas, ranchos, and populated towns.73 Mexico’s center-west region also mainly consisted of “scattered communities,” held together primarily by “parish networks and clerical authority.” This differed significantly from other parts of Mexico where there were “tightly knit” self-governing communities. Some towns in the central west, in contrast, resembled “petty theocracies” because of the church’s strong influence there. Guanajuato and the central-west region were mainly “wedded to Catholic institutions and dogmas,” according to Knight.74 Guanajuato’s participation in the revolution was therefore minimal because the agrarian, labor and social situation differed significantly there from northern and southern states.75

In 1911, Guanajuato had its first democratic election and a newly formed Catholic Church political party gained popularity. Victor Jose Lizardi, from the National Catholic Party (PCN), became governor at that time. Lizardi held the office from 1911 to 1913. Guanajuato was

an important base of support for the PCN. The PCN was founded to insert “moral and social principles into the public life of the country.” Its membership reached nearly 500,000 and it was the majority party in Jalisco, Michoacan, Guanajuato, Mexico, Zacatecas and Colima for several years. Between 1911 and 1913 it elected 29 members of congress, 4 governors and 4 senators. The PCN was a precursor to the PAN, and other pro-church alternative political parties in Guanajuato.

The National Catholic Party (PCN) was originally supported by President Francisco Madero and Catholic bishops, but after the party won numerous elections in Mexico, Madero stopped supporting it. This infuriated Catholic party leaders, who began a “ferocious onslaught” against him. Catholics initially had been allowed by Madero to create an “ambitious program of social action” in Mexico based on Rerum Novarum, but in time his openness to political pluralism waned. Madero was assassinated in 1913.

From 1913 to 1916 various groups battled for control of Mexico and Guanajuato was politically unstable during this time period. Venustiano Carranza’s revolutionary army arrived in the Bajio in 1913, but they “were not welcome” due to their strong anticlerical rhetoric. At that time, the Bajio was mainly controlled by haciendas and ranchos, and rancheros were largely

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Catholic and “uncommitted” to the revolution. Local “bandits” defended the Bajio against the “abuses” of the Carrancistas, who were notorious for stealing and burning down houses. 

From 1913 to 1914, General Victoriano Huerta seized control of Mexico, but Carranza’s army fought him vigorously. Once Huerta was overthrown, Carranza battled Pancho Villa and Francisco Zapata, who he had once allied with to defeat Huerta. Mexico’s political future was mostly determined by a key military battle in Guanajuato that took place between Villa and Alvaro Obregon, who was the commander of Carranza’s Constitutionalist Army. The Battle of Celaya was fought for several days in 1915 and it was won by the Constitutionalist Army, which eventually gave it control of Mexico. Carranza was president of Mexico from 1915 to 1920. He quickly disbanded the National Catholic Party (PCN), and “forced its members into hiding” because of their past support for Huerta.

Revolutionary fighting in Guanajuato continued until 1919, which took its toll on the Diocese of Leon. Carranza-imposed governors in the state nationalized Catholic schools and hospitals at that time. They also ousted nuns and halted tithe collection. This “armed phase” in Guanajuato, temporarily impoverished the church and “stripped it of much of its social and educational infrastructure.” The church, however, was able to recover in the 1920s largely because the revolution did not significantly alter Guanajuato’s local politics or its socioeconomic structure. The church also had a “broad socioeconomic” following in the state and it remained powerful and institutionally robust at that time. This was primarily due to its “strong influence

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over virtually every social segment in Guanajuato, and even remote rancherias (hamlets),” observes Fallaw.  

**The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI**

The post-Mexican Revolution period in Guanajuato continued to be unstable and volatile. Thirty-four different interim governors ruled the state during an approximately thirty-year period from 1917 to 1949. The state was politically erratic until at least 1949. There were church-state conflicts, as well, and the government was split into two opposing political factions, known as the “red” and “green” parties. The greens were moderates and supportive of political democracy and the philosophies of Francisco Madero. They were backed by important politicians like Alvaro Obregon and Lazaro Cardenas, along with Catholics. This helped the greens stay in power for years and “stall the revolutionary project” in Guanajuato. The reds were more radical and had the support of President Plutarco Elias Calles. This group favored anticlericalism, and agrarian and labor reforms. The greens maintained a strong relationship with the Catholic Church and allowed priests to practice despite federal anticlerical laws. 

After the Mexican Revolution, church leaders in the Diocese of Leon fervently tried to keep the “revolutionary project” out of Guanajuato. Guanajuato’s longtime bishop Valverde forged close alliances with local politicians, and created an “interlocking regional elite” of Catholic notables and politicians in the state, which he relied on to defend the church’s interests. Socialist education was also suppressed at Valverde’s urging, and he “surreptitiously” mobilized church lay organizations against local PRI initiatives.

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In 1917, a new constitution was passed in Mexico by the federal government, which severely restricted the Catholic Church’s power. The federal government, however, initially shied away from enforcing these anticlerical laws. The first major public challenge by the church to the constitution occurred in Guanajuato in 1923. A large shrine of Jesus Christ was erected on top of the mountain, El Cubilete, and an open-air mass was held at that time to commemorate it. The Vatican’s apostolic delegate then a procession of 50,000 religious pilgrims and crowned the shrine, “King of Mexico.” This incident was viewed by the Mexican government as highly “inflammatory” and unlawful under the new constitution. At that time, the apostolic delegate was expelled from the country in accordance with Article 33 of the constitution, which permitted foreigners to be deported in the nation’s interest. 86

In 1924, friction between the Catholic Church and the federal government grew in Guanajuato once Calles became president. Church bishops also continued to fervently speak out against the anticlerical constitution. Calles was determined, however, to weaken the church’s influence in Mexico and to enforce anticlerical laws. 87 He was also terrified of the Catholic Church and its resistance movements, which were located mainly in the states of Michoacan, Jalisco and Guanajuato. Calles and his associates ultimately feared a Catholic movement would overthrow the government.88

Calles provided secret support for the creation of a schismatic Catholic Church in Mexico, which was called the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church. The church was unaffiliated with the Vatican hierarchy, and its aim was to persuade local Catholics to accept a Mexican

88 Buchenau, Plutarco Elias Calles and the Mexican Revolution, 127.
Catholic patriarch that was tied to nationalism and the Mexican Revolution, and not the Vatican. This created outrage in the Catholic community in Mexico, who saw it as a call for action. In 1925, Catholics met and organized the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty (LNDLR), which was a pro-church civic organization that had the Vatican’s backing. It was founded by former members of the National Catholic Party and other Catholic-oriented groups. Its membership was sizeable in Guanajuato and it had the support of the Diocese of Leon. 89

In 1926, the league called for an economic boycott of the Mexican government due to its anticlerical laws. In accordance with the embargo, Catholics stopped driving cars and using electricity, and they bought only essential items in stores. They also avoided amusement parks and non-religious schools. The purpose of the boycott was to economically weaken the federal government because of its harsh policies towards the Catholic Church. In August of 1926, the majority of Catholic bishops in the country also suspended religious services, with Vatican support, to protest the government’s anticlerical laws. 90

From 1926 to 1929 members of the LNDLR led an armed revolt against the Mexican government, which was called the Cristero Rebellion. Guanajuato was at the center of the revolt, which was backed by Guanajuato’s longtime bishop, Valverde. Over 50,000 Cristeros fought mainly in Mexico’s center-west region. In Guanajuato there were approximately 3,000 fighters, who were typically rancheros and workers from Bajio haciendas. 91 The conflict ended in 1929, and mass was held again for the first time since 1926. 92 In the central-west region, the Cristero

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92 Lewy, Religion and Revolution, 408.
Rebellion was essentially seen as a battle for “religious freedom.” 93 Guanajuato’s Bishop Valverde was an “unswerving” friend to the militants and the league, claims David Bailey. 94 Valverde, however, was exiled from Guanajuato by the government during the war. 95

The large ranchero community in Guanajuato and the central-west region actively participated in the Cristero Rebellion. Rancheros, who mainly owned small to medium size private estates, were angered by the new anticlerical laws in the constitution because they denied the church a role in education and other important sectors of society. Rancheros in Guanajuato were “deeply religious people,” and “closely attached to their priests and churches.” In ranchero communities the priest “was often the pivotal, most respected and most powerful member” of society. The rancheros “fought to be left alone in the possession of their lands and the exercise of their religion,” claims Tutino. Rancheros also opposed the government’s ejido land program because of its emphasis on communal rather than private property, which they favored. 96

Initially, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Mexico City supported the Cristero Rebellion.97 The rebellion was very destructive, however, and “extremely costly” for the Mexican government. It was hard to “contain and impossible to completely defeat,” according to Fallaw. The war also “left a bitter memory” in Guanajuato and many “never forgave” the federal government for its treatment of the state. Moreover, eleven church priests were executed during the fighting. In Guanajuato, local residents elected to get involved in local politics at that time


94 Bailey, Viva Cristo Rey, 131.

95 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 160.


97 Lewy, Religion and Revolution, 399-400.
largely to retaliate against the federal government.\textsuperscript{98} New pro-Catholic Church political parties developed in Guanajuato in the 1930s to challenge the PRI.

In the Bajio, Cristero fighting led to the “devastation” of the region, which was a major grain producing area. The country’s cereal production fell by nearly 40 percent from 1926 to 1929.\textsuperscript{99} During the rebellion, 90,000 people were killed due to the federal government’s strong military offensive. The populations of some areas in the central-west region were completely depleted by federal troops. Troops demolished homes and bombed towns, as well, and thousands died. From 1926 to 1929, 2,500 religious refugees departed Mexico, including priests, nuns, bishops and archbishops.\textsuperscript{100}

Amid continued government attacks on the Catholic Church after the Cristero Rebellion, Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, who was an ex-bishop of the Diocese of Leon, called on Mexican Catholics in 1934 to organize within civil society to fight for their religious rights. He claimed they “must not wait for orders from the clergy” to act.\textsuperscript{101} A pro-church “patriotic” Catholic movement developed at that time in Guanajuato, which challenged authoritarianism and the PRI. It drew on “ideological support from the papal ecclesiastics of the period” and the church’s expansive church network in Leon, which had historically supported Catholic social movements.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{98} Fallaw, \textit{Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico}, 159-160.
\textsuperscript{102} Valencia, “The PAN in Guanajuato: Elections and Political Change in the 1990s,” 214.
New pro-Catholic Church civil society organizations also emerged in Guanajuato in response to the Archbishop’s call for action. Some groups were clandestine, as well, and worked underground. 103 One important Catholic group was called the National Sinarquist Union (Union Nacional Sinarquista or UNS), which was formed in 1937 in Leon. Initially the organization was only in Guanajuato, but it quickly spread to other parts of Mexico. It was a Catholic movement, and viewed the Mexican Revolution as a “colossal mistake.” The group received support from the poor, the middle class and agrarian populations in Guanajuato, as well as other parts of Mexico. 104 The UNS’s “most important support base,” however, was in Guanajuato. 105

Like the Cristeros, the Sinarquists were “ardent Catholics” and “disciplined soldiers of a militant theocratic faith,” according to Franz von Sauer. They targeted the “forgotten peasant masses,” who had not benefited from the Mexican Revolution. Similar to the Cristeros, the Sinarquists also “gained their greatest strength” in the Bajio area, where “seventy percent of peasants did not own their own land.” The group pushed for private property ownership instead of communal property, which President Lazaro Cardenas championed at that time. 106

The pro-church Sinarquist movement mainly ignited in Leon because of the strong Catholic “religiosity” there. The movement also had deep connections to the Cristero Rebellion and its membership largely descended from there, claims David Shirk. The group was organized in Leon after continued clashes with the federal government once the Cristero Rebellion ended. 107

103 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 158-159.

104 Michaels, “Fascism and Sinarquismo: Popular Nationalisms Against the Mexican Revolution,” 240-249.


107 Shirk, Mexico’s New Politics: The PAN and Democratic Change, 64.
The Sinarquist movement and the Cristeros “had much in common,” observes Albert Michaels. They both had a strong following in Guanajuato and the center-west region, and “claimed to be fighting for the Catholic faith against the godless” PRI government. The Sinarquists also promoted “democratic ideals,” and endorsed political candidates to run against the PRI in elections.

The Sinarquist movement was deeply-entrenched in Guanajuato. In the early 1940s the group had 75,000 members in the state. It was ordered to disband, however, in 1944 after it was accused of a plot to assassinate President Manuel Avila Camacho. Yet, it continued to grow in Guanajuato even after that time period, and several pro-church opposition political parties in the state developed out of the UNS’s movement, such as the Leon Civic Union (UCL), the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM), the Popular Force Party (PFP) and the PAN.

Before the appearance of the PAN in Guanajuato shortly after it was founded in 1939, pro-Catholic Church political groups, which had links to the Cristero Rebellion, had already established solid local electoral opposition to the PRI. Catholicism ultimately helped prevent the “consolidation of a strong revolutionary state” in Guanajuato, observes Fallaw. Pro-church political parties eventually gained a foothold in the state and helped to create local, state and national democratic change.

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111 Shirk, Mexico’s New Politics: The PAN and Democratic Change, 64.

112 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 158-159.
The PRI, however, went to great lengths in Guanajuato to try to dominate local and state politics, usually through electoral fraud. They focused on Leon because of the church’s historic strength there. The Diocese of Leon is considered the “institutional matrix” of the church in Guanajuato. Its expansive civil society networks helped challenge the PRI via local civic activism. Assorted pro-church political parties in the state also permitted Catholics to fight the PRI via local elections.

In Leon, there was strong public “opposition” to the PRI, observes Newcomer. The PRI was previously called the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) until its name changed to the PRI in 1946. The PRI attempted to remove Catholic symbols in Leon by re-designing neighborhoods, and it replaced religious street names with those of revolutionary heroes. The PRI hoped to demonstrate “state power” in Leon by minimizing symbols of “church power.” This situation created significant church-state conflict, which sometimes became violent in the mid-twentieth century.

In 1946, a major church-state political crisis was ignited in Leon after federal troops killed dozens of anti-PRI protestors, who were disputing the city’s mayoral race that year. Voter fraud was alleged by the pro-church Leon Civic Union (UCL) candidate, who ran against a PRI candidate for mayor. Both candidates declared themselves the winner based on their own vote counts, but the PRI candidate officially won because the party refused to acknowledge the non-PRI candidate’s win. Thousands protested this incident and as many as thirty people were

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113 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 159.
killed after the army stormed the crowd. A climate of “political unrest” remained in Guanajuato after this tragic event. 

In an effort to reduce the political and social turmoil since the election in Leon, opposition political parties were permitted to replace PRI members in some key municipal posts at that time. This decision was known as the “Leon solution.” Opposition political parties grew in popularity in Guanajuato, and various pro-church parties also gained importance. The date of the “Leon massacre” continues to be an important anniversary in Guanajuato. It is remembered as a day of heroism for those who dared to defend their “own destiny.” It was also seen as a “turning point” in state politics. At that time, opposition political parties were finally able to gain political footing in Guanajuato, unlike most states in Mexico, which were consistently dominated by the PRI throughout the twentieth century. By 1964, the PAN won its first major election in Guanajuato. Luis Manuel Aranda Torres, who was a founder of the PAN in Guanajuato, was elected as a PAN representative for the federal Chamber of Deputies.

In the 1940s church-state relations started to improve in Mexico after a “modus vivendi” was agreed to between the church and the federal government. Bishop Valverde, the longtime bishop in Leon, also passed away in 1948. Manuel Martín del Campo y Padilla became the new bishop in Leon. He participated in Vatican II, and as bishop he improved evangelization techniques in the diocese, and introduced new ecclesiastical methods. Under his leadership, religious organizations like Catholic Action and the Family Christian Movement also gained more prominence. He continued as bishop of Leon until 1965.

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From 1966 to 1992, Anselmo Zarza y Bernal was the bishop in Leon. His tenure began after Vatican II, which was a period of deep change for the church. At that time the Diocese of Leon’s civil society network was very politically active and engaged. Zarza had to bar some Catholic civil society organizations in the diocese because they were so militant and politically aggressive. However, there were approximately 48 different church supported groups registered in Leon during his tenure, which were connected to diocese. This created a strong civil society network in the diocese. These church groups were also capable of challenging the PRI’s local networks and corporatist structures. In the 1960s some of these progressive Catholic organizations began to be heavily involved in political and union fights. Catholic groups and organizations, like Catholic Action, became major outlets for social expression in Guanajuato during the twentieth century.  

By the 1970s the PAN became a significant political force in Guanajuato and elections were competitive there. The PAN embodied Catholic “social forces” that had been excluded from political power in Mexico, explains Michael Ard. It was founded in 1939 by Catholic activists, who defected from the PRI. In Guanajuato, the PAN’s popularity was also strengthened because of the importance of the Sinarquist movement there. Leon was the “cradle” of this pro-church movement, observes Valencia.  

By the 1980s, the PAN, the PRI and the PDM all dominated local Guanajuato elections. After 1988, elections were either won by the PAN or the PRI. Voters in Guanajuato were

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supportive of the PAN because of the area’s strong Catholic culture, and the party’s backing of “religious freedom” and state sovereignty, which were important principles in the state. During the 1990s, the Diocese of Leon “played an important role” by helping to legitimize PAN municipal governments. When Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzalez arrived in the diocese in 1992, he increased the church’s participation in politics. The diocese held political workshops at that time to bring awareness to election issues. The Catholic Church continues to have “a strong influence” in local society in Guanajuato. 122

In 1991, after reports of extensive voter fraud in the governor’s race in Guanajuato, the PRI candidate resigned, although he had already been named the winner. The state congress was then forced to select an interim governor. Carlos Medina Plascencia from the PAN was chosen. As governor, Medina started electoral reforms in the state. In 1991 the PAN also won additional municipal elections. 123

**Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA**

During the twentieth century, Guanajuato became a hub for various commercial enterprises like leather, agriculture, food processing, automobile parts, footwear, and textiles. Guanajuato is considered Mexico’s breadbasket. A large assortment of materials are exported to the US from Guanajuato, and other areas of the world. Guanajuato was the first state to develop a network of US foreign trade offices, and it also had trade representatives in China and Europe. 124 The center-west region, like the north, “prospered” from NAFTA. As governor, Vicente Fox

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backed NAFTA and free trade, although the PAN usually supported free trade because it diverged from the PRI’s protectionist economic policies. 125

After the enactment of NAFTA, some food production factories relocated from the US to Guanajuato because of the fertile soil and low salaries there. Many food processing firms in the US opposed NAFTA because it removed trade barriers for Mexican imports and devalued the food processing industry in the US. Eventually it became more lucrative for some American firms to do business in Guanajuato. 126

Following the passage of NAFTA, Bishop Jose Guadalupe Martin Rabago, who was in power from 1995 to 2012, criticized Mexico’s government for ignoring the state’s marginalized farmers. The inundation of American products and food corporations into the Bajio also created social problems there. 127 NAFTA brought new jobs and industries to the region, as well, and the middle class grew in Guanajuato.

**Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico**

Vicente Fox won the 1995 Guanajuato’s race and he went on to win the presidency in 2000. By that time, the PAN’s popularity was firmly rooted in Guanajuato. During the 2000 presidential elections, Fox became Mexico’s first non-PRI president in over 70 years. The election was a “landmark” event in Mexico. It was the first time since the PRI’s foundation that

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an opposition political candidate had won the presidency. Fox first joined the PAN in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{128}

It seems apparent after studying the history of Guanajuato why this state in the central-west region produced the first non-PRI president in Mexico. The institutionally strong and effective Catholic Church diocese in Leon facilitated the growth of an independent civil society, which challenged the corporatist structure of the PRI. Church networks also helped dissident movements and pro-church political parties to grow, which further challenged the PRI. This created democratic change in Guanajuato and Mexico.

**The Institutional Capacity of the Catholic Church in Guanajuato**

Historically, the Catholic Church in Guanajuato has always been institutionally strong and effective, and it has consistently challenged government authoritarianism. The strength and effectiveness of the church will be examined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-2. Guanajuato I: Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{128} Coerver, *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History*, 187-188.
Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-Optation by the Government or Elite Groups

The Diocese in Leon appears to have a high degree of autonomy and independence from the government, which it developed early in its history. Rich silver mines and fertile soil made this area lucrative for the Spanish, but wild northern indigenous populations prevented its colonization. The church was able to pacify this population and secure the area, which gave it an important early position in society. The church developed autonomy and independence from the government due to its substantial importance to colonial authorities. The Catholic Church continues to have significant influence there. 129

The native indigenous population in Guanajuato was also small and this allowed the church to integrate into local society with little resistance. The church was a unifier of diverse populations in Guanajuato and it became a strong alternative institution to the state. 130 Abundant tax revenues from mining and agriculture also generated wealth, and made the church financially strong and independent in Guanajuato. The movement for Mexico’s independence began in Guanajuato, as well, and the church developed a strong local role as an advocate for social justice and democratic ideals. 131

Since the colonial era, leaders of the church in Leon have consistently spoken out against government authoritarianism. This outspokenness has helped the church to maintain its autonomy and independence in the state. The diocese has also supported a vast church-driven 129 Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands*, 7-15.


civil society, which was independent from the government. Pro-church political parties
developed, as well, largely out of local church networks. These groups have also challenged
government authoritarianism and the PRI’s corporatist structures in the state.  
In Guanajuato, political activism goes “hand in hand with civic activism,” and religious and business leaders
have developed strong local networks to oppose the PRI.

**Networks: Strong and Enduring Church Networks, Which Were Typically Developed
Prior to State Formation**

The Catholic Church diocese in Leon has strong church networks, which were developed
prior to state formation. Since the colonial era, the church has been deeply involved in
Guanajuato’s social and political battles. Early networks were developed by churches to secure
the area and to unify the diverse population in Guanajuato. In the Bajio there were few
indigenous villages or civil religious systems. The area was instead dominated by a Spanish
commercial system and Catholic Church institutions. Spanish cultural practices controlled the
region, as well. Catholic Church networks were also strong in ranchero communities, where
religious leaders were pivotal members of society. In Guanajuato, a significant amount of local
resources have been invested in building churches and strengthening church networks. This
ultimately helped to create a strong and effective Catholic Church institution in Guanajuato.

**Policy Implementation: A High-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow
Church Guidelines**

The Diocese of Leon has strongly embraced Vatican reforms and Catholic Church
initiatives, which has increased its autonomy from the government. Guanajuato’s long-time

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bishop, Emeterio Valverde y Tellez, and other subsequent church leaders, were strong supporters of Rerum Novarum, and the social Catholic movement. Valverde, along with most ex-Guanajuato bishops, also backed the Cristero Rebellion. 135 The social Catholic movement in Guanajuato created an atmosphere where Catholics were actively engaged in local politics, and church-driven civil society organizations also flourished in the state.

Vatican II was embraced, as well, in the diocese in Leon. Through this initiative, civil society organizations and alternate political parties developed in the state. This increased the church’s institutional strength and effectiveness prior to the 2000 elections and helped to democratize the state.

**Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution**

It appears that public trust and confidence in the Catholic Church in Guanajuato is high. It has one of the highest membership rates in the country. Public trust in the diocese was likely established for several key reasons. First, the church in Guanajuato was actively involved in the fight for independence from Spain, which gave it moral authority. Hidalgo also remains a very important figure in Guanajuato, and he instilled a sense of pride there. The clergy has supported other social justice initiatives, as well, which has likely increased trust levels for the church.

The Diocese of Leon also has a high number of Catholic Church-connected civil society organizations, which appear to be contributing to the civic and democratic atmosphere in Guanajuato. These groups have likely increased trust in the church because they are civic oriented and don’t rely on patron-client relationships. Instead they have horizontal networks,

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135 Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism*, 26; Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey*, 131.
which focus on citizen initiatives. Pro-church political parties have also developed out of local church networks, which has increased democratic behavior in society.

Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Autonomous Church-Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships

The Catholic Church in Guanajuato has a large quantity of churches and an expansive infrastructure. Many churches were built in the colonial era to help secure the area because of the abundant mining wealth there. Guanajuato also has an extremely high number of priests. 136 When the Diocese of Leon separated from the Diocese of Michoacan, it also acquired extensive church infrastructure. Currently, it has a large number of schools and charitable organizations. The diocese also trains the highest number of bishops in Mexico, which is another indication of its institutional strength and effectiveness. 137

There are many civil society organizations in Guanajuato, as well, which are connected to the Diocese of Leon. These groups have facilitated political and social activism, and at times aggressively challenged authoritarianism. In Leon, the Catholic Church has a “highly developed presence.” It also supports and sponsors a vast and impressive number of “lay cultural, labor and socio-political organizations.” 138 Oppositional political parties have emerged in Guanajuato largely out of the church’s civil society networks. The PAN is also strong in Guanajuato because it appeals to “deep cultural and regional identities” there, which have traditionally been tied to


137 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 158-160.

the Catholic Church. Prior to the 2000 elections, the institutionally strong and effective church in Guanajuato helped to create democratic change in Guanajuato and Mexico.  

**Catholic Church Challenges to Authoritarianism in Guanajuato**

The Diocese of Leon is institutionally strong and effective and capable of successfully challenging authoritarianism. Additional variables are offered below to understand when an institutionally strong and effective church unit might challenge authoritarianism.

Table 5-3. Guanajuato II: When a Catholic Church Might Challenge Authoritarianism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Variables</th>
<th>Effect Variable: Whether an institutionally strong and effective dioceses or archdioceses will successfully challenge an authoritarian regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capability: When a diocese or archdiocese is considered institutionally effective or strong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Threats: If there are strong threats by the government or ruling elites to the church’s institutional effectiveness and strength.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Path dependency: If past attempts to challenge the government by the dioceses or archdioceses were successful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support: When there is strong support for action from the church leadership and membership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capability**

The diocese of Leon is institutionally strong and effective and therefore it has the capacity to challenge authoritarianism.

**Threats**

When an effective and strong diocese or archdiocese is experiencing major threats to its institutional integrity, it will likely challenge authoritarianism. There have been many instances when the Diocese of Leon has challenged government authoritarianism due to threats to its autonomy and institutional integrity.

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Path Dependency

If past attempts to challenge authoritarianism by an institutionally strong and effective church unit have previously been successful, it will likely do this again. In the Diocese of Leon, efforts to challenge authoritarianism have largely been effective and therefore it is liable to do this again.

Support

Historically, the Diocese of Leon has had strong support from its membership and leadership to challenge authoritarianism. Local residents have also consistently voted for pro-church political parties, like the PAN, which demonstrates support for electoral challenges to the authoritarianism.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Guanajuato has consistently challenged government authoritarianism. In the twentieth century, this contributed significantly to democratization in Guanajuato and Mexico. The Diocese of Leon also supported opposition movements and cultivated a politically active civil society, which was separate from the PRI’s corporatist structure. Pro-church political parties developed, as well, out of the diocese’s expansive church networks. These political parties and pro-church groups were instrumental in challenging authoritarianism in Guanajuato and opposing the PRI, which ultimately led to democratization in the state.
CHAPTER 6
STATE OF CHIHUAHUA:
A BATTLEGROUND STATE FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH CHALLENGES TO THE GOVERNMENT

Facts about Chihuahua

Catholic Church Challenge to Authoritarianism: High level challenges throughout the twentieth century, but low level after 1991.

Location: Chihuahua is on the US-Mexico border, south of Texas and New Mexico.

Population: 3,920,892 (2000 INEGI)

Capital: Chihuahua City

Indigenous Population: Low indigenous population at 2.7 percent (2000 INEGI)

Colonization and Statehood: It was first colonized in the 16th century, but colonization was delayed due to rebellious indigenous populations. Chihuahua became a state in 1824.

Religion: 84.6 % were Catholic in 2000 (2000 INEGI)

Economy: Chihuahua has one of the strongest economies in Mexico.

Climate and Terrain: The state has a varied topography with mountains, plains and deserts. It also has a changeable climate due to its mixed topography.

Politics: The PAN won the governor’s race in 1992, which was one of the earliest PAN governor victories in Mexico. The PRI then won all future governor elections again until 2016.

Table 6-1. Governor Election Results in Chihuahua 1992 to 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>338,164</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>497,025</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>561,106</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>600,345</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>400,515</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>386,948</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>416,888</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>423,409</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>517,018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>PARM/CDP</td>
<td>18,758</td>
<td>VERDE</td>
<td>9,314</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>35,376</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The state of Chihuahua is in the northern tip of Mexico, on the US-Mexican border. It is the country’s largest state and one of its wealthiest. It was where the Mexican Revolution began. It was also a major battleground state for a democratic movement that was championed by the Catholic Church Archdiocese of Chihuahua in the decades leading up to the 2000 presidential elections. The church has been at the forefront of political activism at various points in its history. Beginning in the 1980s, bishops in Chihuahua also loudly denounced authoritarianism and election fraud, which significantly impacted local and state politics. ¹

The case study of Chihuahua demonstrates another instance when a Catholic Church archdiocese and its leadership in Mexico challenged the authoritarian structures of the state. This chapter looks again at why and under what conditions the church will do this. The focus will be on the Archdiocese of Chihuahua, which is located in Chihuahua City, and includes the entire state. It became an archdiocese in 1958.

During the twentieth century, the archdiocese in Chihuahua helped create societal space for civil society groups and oppositional political parties, which challenged government authoritarianism. These efforts reconfigured the state’s power structure, which had been consistently dominated by the PRI. Chihuahua is one of several important states for understanding the regional “political transitions” to democracy that occurred in Mexico prior to the 2000 elections. Democratic movements emerged in states like Chiapas, Guanajuato and Chihuahua, at the end of the twentieth century. These “state-level opposition” movements, which the Catholic Church helped to create, ignited political change in the country. In Chihuahua, the growth of a church-driven civil society also helped to trigger political “liberalization,” which

inspired residents to organize and recover public space. Once the PAN started winning local elections, the PRI’s “monopoly control” of Chihuahua temporarily ended in the early 1990s.  

Since the founding of the first Catholic Church diocese in Chihuahua City in 1891, its leadership has embraced a program of social justice. It implemented Rerum Novarum and promoted local civic activism by creating Catholic media and new civil society organizations. The church also supported middle class initiatives and helped society to unite against PRI hegemony during the twentieth century. Democracy was considered important in Chihuahua prior to the 2000 elections, which was primarily due to the archdiocese’s efforts to denounce election fraud and corruption. Economic growth, as well as higher levels of education and urbanization, have produced a larger middle class in Chihuahua, as well.

In no other place was the PRI’s “hold on power more threatened” than in Chihuahua in the early 1980s, insists Vikram Chand. The church ultimately “disrupted” the historic church-state “modus vivendi” in Mexico. Chihuahua’s longtime Archbishop, Adalberto Almeida y Merino, spoke out in 1986 about local government corruption. He remarked:

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3 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 153-162; Dizan Vazquez, “Fundación de la Diócesis de Chihuahua y Su Primer Obispo,” Ponencia Presentada en el Primer Encuentro de Historia y Cultura Regionales, Chihuahua (2008), 6-12.

4 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 23.

5 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 33.

6 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 153-170.
The corruption that has taken over our institutions for some time now is primarily due to the unwillingness of the political system to open itself up to a sincere and authentic democracy. The lack of democracy in a party [i.e. the PRI] reveals a determined desire to exercise power in an absolute and uninterrupted fashion. And absolute power in necessarily limited human hands leads inexorably to corruption.\(^7\)

The archbishop championed fair elections and other important social programs in Chihuahua. After the PAN won elections in all major cities in Chihuahua in 1983, the PRI “bitterly blamed” the Catholic Church for their defeat. The PAN, however, failed to win the governor’s race in 1986 and the church accused the PRI of election fraud. \(^8\) This incident resulted in the creation of a new activist coalition, which brought together different Mexican bishops in the support of democracy. \(^9\) Church leaders in Chihuahua called for the suspension of church services to protest the “massive irregularities” that were present in the 1986 state elections. \(^10\) These various church challenges to authoritarianism helped to democratize Chihuahua and Mexico, and resulted in PAN governor winning the election in 1992.

In this chapter, six common historic events will be examined in order to understand the specific development and historical trajectory of the Catholic Church in Chihuahua. These events include the 1). The Spanish Colonial Period 2). Independence from Spain and its Aftermath 3). The Mexican Revolution 4). The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI 5). Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA 6). Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico. Five variables will then be evaluated to determine if the church is institutionally strong and effective

\(^7\) Chand, *Mexico’s Political Awakening*, 180-181.

\(^8\) Chand, *Mexico’s Political Awakening*, 178.

\(^9\) Chand, *Mexico’s Political Awakening*, 193.

in Chihuahua and whether it had the capacity to challenge authoritarianism prior to the 2000 elections.

**Common Historic Events**

**The Spanish Colonial Period**

For most of the colonial era, Chihuahua was considered a “volatile” region. Wild indigenous raids and rebellions were common, and the local economy was unstable. The area also “struggled to maintain” a consistent population.11 A “culture of warfare” existed in Chihuahua at that time. 12 Until silver was discovered in the 1700s in Chihuahua, the Spanish viewed northern Mexico as only suitable for raising livestock because of its arid climate. Soil was also poor in this region, which limited agriculture production. The Spanish offered large tracts of land to settlers in an attempt to populate the area, but this provoked intense fighting between the settlers and rebellious indigenous populations. The Catholic Church and its missionary system were also used to colonize Chihuahua, and missionaries attempted to force indigenous populations to live in settlements under mostly Jesuit and Franciscan control. This system, however, was largely unsuccessful there due to the volatility of the area. 13

On the northern Mexican frontier, the relationship between the Spanish settlers and the indigenous populations “differed dramatically” from other parts of Mexico. The colonists faced “resolute, savage resistance from nomadic Indians” in Chihuahua. For three centuries northern settlers “lived in constant fear and insecurity.” The Spanish authorities also struggled to secure

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11 Coerver, *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History*, 80


the area because of its isolation. Settlers in Chihuahua had to survive on their own, which created an “ethos” of independence and resistance to centralized Mexican authority. There was “endemic violence and political instability” in Chihuahua throughout the colonial era and after independence. The church in Chihuahua was weak at that time, as well, mostly because the region lacked designated “Indian villages,” which were the church’s strongest “base” of support in other parts of Mexico.  

In 1620, the first Catholic Church Diocese of Durango was established and it controlled parts of the northern region, which included Chihuahua. The diocese in Durango was small, however, and it had a “weak organizational” structure. The clergy were also hesitant to leave the safety of the diocese to venture out into the untamed northern frontier, and therefore the church had only a marginal presence in Chihuahua at that time.  

Indigenous populations in Chihuahua also rebelled when the Catholic Church tried to religiously indoctrinate them and place them in servitude. Indigenous raids and a shortage of priests greatly hindered efforts to Christianize Chihuahua. Indians in the North “fought tenaciously” against colonial projects, observes Ana Maria Alonso. This population was never “transformed into docile subjects,” who could be easily assimilated. Their resistance thus prohibited the type of “servile” labor that was prevalent in other areas of Mexico. Free wage labor was instead common in the northern mines, and workers were less exploited in Chihuahua. Generous benefits were offered, as well, by Spain to settlers of any race or class who were willing to inhabit the treacherous area, which created an eclectic and brave population.  

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In the early 1700s silver was discovered in Chihuahua, which contributed greatly to the economic growth of New Spain. However, hostile Indians continued to wreak havoc on mining operations in Chihuahua until at least the late 1800s, notes Cheryl English Martin. 17 Colonial institutions like the encomienda and repartimiento were also rejected by indigenous populations, who rebelled and “showed little enthusiasm” for them or missionary life. 18 To reduce work shortages, owners of large estates and mines provided lucrative incentives and better working conditions to attract workers to Chihuahua. Laborers in the north were seen as a “breed apart,” as they were typically “divorced from the traditional ties” of their villages in the south, and considered “highly mobile and independent.” 19

In order to protect the frontier and surrounding areas, which were being overrun by mainly Apache Indians, Spain created “military colonies” in Chihuahua in the late 1700s. Settlers in the new colonies were provided with ample compensation to reside there, and they were expected to protect the province and fight the Apaches, who had large armies of men, and rare talents in guerilla warfare. 20 The military colonies were populated with migrants from Spain and central Mexico, along with indigenous populations, who agreed to live there and provide security for Chihuahua. The settlers were a “fighting force,” able to resist the Apaches, and they protected the area for decades. The colonies were “poor, but egalitarian,” with “self-reliant”

20 Alonso, Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico’s Northern Frontier, 33-35.
people and democratic ideals, observes Friedrich Katz. When the war of independence broke out in Mexico, the military colonists fought on the side of Spain instead of Mexico.  

In 1767, when the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico, the Catholic Church in Chihuahua was weakened further. The Jesuits had at one point tried to evangelize Chihuahua, but with little success, and their missions mostly vanished in Chihuahua after they were exiled from Mexico. Other remaining Catholic missions in the province were also abandoned after Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821. In Chihuahua there was no resident priest in many local villages, at that time, and as a result a kind of “dissident offshoot” of Catholicism “with popular roots” developed in some military colonies and villages.  

**Independence from Spain and its Aftermath**

Following Mexico’s independence from Spain, the northern region was left unsecured. Spain ended its protection of the area and it once again became volatile and unstable. Apaches at that time “robbed, murdered, pillaged, burned, and brought indescribable misery” to the area, claims Mark Wasserman. Due to this, mines and haciendas were abandoned and livestock disappeared. There was extreme political, social and economic instability in Chihuahua in the decades after independence because it left a “power vacuum” with no government able to establish a legitimate right to rule there. Consequently, no governor completed a full term in Chihuahua until 1873. Chihuahua population also “switched political allegiances easily” at that time between the Conservative and Liberal party. This was largely due to the weakness of the

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Catholic Church in Chihuahua. Regional loyalties and personal opportunities were also considered more important in Chihuahua than political ideologies.  

During the insecure post-independence period in Chihuahua, the US acquired a significant portion of Mexico’s northern frontier through “annexation, conquest, and purchase,” according to David Weber. As a result, Mexico’s border states of California, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona all became part of the US. Chihuahua “sank to its nadir of economic depression and turmoil” during the mid-1800s and much of Chihuahua was abandoned. There was a drought, a cholera endemic, and the Apaches and other indigenous groups “laid waste” to the region. Meanwhile, the state government barely functioned, and Chihuahua’s mines filled with water and essentially “caved in,” maintains Wasserman.

The Apaches continued to attack Chihuahua until 1886 when they were “officially pacified” and sent to prisons and reserves in the US. Other indigenous groups were also exterminated at that time, while the Tarahumara, who occupied the Sierra Madre Mountains, continued a “passive rebellion” which persists today.

After the Apaches were wiped out, Chihuahua’s military colonies became obsolete because they were originally established to protect the region from this population. Therefore, the government wanted their land back because it had become very valuable. This created outrage in the military colonies. A large pre-Mexican Revolutionary battle over land occurred in

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26 Alonso, Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico’s Northern Frontier, 22-25.
one military colony called Tomochi in the late 1800s. Rebels assembled there and the town became a “festerling sore” for the government. President Porfirio Diaz eventually sent troops to the area, and after a long battle, the occupants of the town were massacred. The village was apparently emboldened to fight the government because of their faith in an unorthodox Catholic religious cult figure named Teresita, who was also known as the Saint of Cabora. Continued tensions over land in Chihuahua eventually helped to trigger the Mexican Revolution. Resentful military colony occupants in the state fervently battled the government throughout the revolution. 27

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a large middle class developed in Chihuahua due to the state’s position on the US border, along with local economic growth. A sizable middle class did not exist in other parts of Mexico at that time.28 Rapid modernization began in Chihuahua in the late 1800s, and the middle class developed from 1897 to 1907, in a period of unprecedented prosperity. Chihuahua’s population grew 124 percent between 1877 and 1910. 29 This growth was mainly due to railroad expansion and foreign investment in the economy, which brought jobs and wealth to the state. Chihuahua’s middle class consisted mainly of merchants, artisans, landowners, teachers, shopkeepers and railroad employees. 30

Workers in Chihuahua were among the first in the nation to organize into labor unions called “mutual societies,” which were created prior to the Mexican Revolution. These groups


30 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 74-76.
also organized worker strikes when local employment conditions deteriorated. Mutual societies arose mainly due to the social Catholic movement, which flourished in Chihuahua at the end of the 1800s. 31

Chihuahua’s first Catholic Church diocese was established in 1891 and Rerum Novarum was adopted by its leadership, which greatly impacted local politics and civil society development in the state. Bishop Jose de Jesus Ortiz Rodriguez was its first bishop, and he was considered a progressive man. He held the post from 1893 to 1901. Prior to the foundation of the first diocese, the Catholic Church was weak and disorganized in Chihuahua. There also were social, political and religious challenges for Catholicism there. Anticlericalism and the Reform Laws had limited the church, as well, and there were Protestant churches and other religious influences in the region. In the past, there was also a shortage of Catholic priests in Chihuahua, and church parishes were isolated and poorly supervised. Many priests were also viewed as lax in their duties, and some communities were seen as spiritually neglected before the establishment of the first diocese. 32

The new Catholic Church diocese significantly changed social dynamics in Chihuahua. It was founded in the Porfirio Diaz era, which was a brief period of Catholic Church growth in the country. The first bishop in Chihuahua created an innovative organizational and administrative structure for the church, along with a new system of tariff collection. The bishop also networked with diverse groups of people in rural areas, and used inventive and modern modes of communication to spread Catholic messages. He placed Catholic missions in the rebellious Tarahumara communities, as well, which had been without spiritual guidance since the Jesuits

31 Salmeron, “Catolicismo Social, Mutualismo y Revolucion en Chihuahua,” 75-85.
left in 1767. Ortiz also founded various Catholic magazines and he established a printing press. He created numerous Catholic schools, as well, and a seminary to train priests, along with many Catholic charities and civil society associations.  

Rerum Novarum, which was fully embraced in the new diocese, was a socially “progressive” papal initiative that tackled human rights issues in rapidly industrialized societies at the end of the 19th century. This Vatican reform was introduced in the same year as the new church diocese in Chihuahua. The Vatican initiative called on industrialized societies to improve working conditions. Pope Leo XIII also published four encyclicals on church-state relations, which advocated for a more “liberal” school of social Catholic thought.  

It urged Catholic workers to “organize their own associations for mutual protection and support,” through the development of trade unions and other professional groups. It also encouraged Catholics to “return to the public square” and become more involved in politics.  

Rerum Novarum was a “turning point” in the history of the Catholic Church. At that time the pope also criticized “exploitative capitalism” and socialism. The embracing of Rerum Novarum by the new Catholic Church diocese in Chihuahua, significantly influenced its agenda and development. Other Mexican dioceses at that time were perhaps hindered from embracing Rerum Novarum or implementing its transformative reforms, due to institutional limitations and restrictive church-state relationships. Some bishops were also suspicious of Rerum Novarum and

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36 Edwards, “Messages Sent, Messages Received? The Papacy and the Latin American Church at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 6.
didn’t think its proposals were appropriate for their dioceses. Yet, there was strong support for Rerum Novarum in the Chihuahua diocese, and as a result the church welcomed social justice initiatives, and supported middle and lower classes objectives, rather than focusing on the aspirations of the upper class, like some dioceses in Mexico.  

During the Porfirio Diaz era, the Catholic Church in Mexico underwent a “de facto recovery.” The number of churches built at that time nearly doubled. In this liberal environment, Chihuahua’s new Bishop Ortiz was able to create an amicable relationship with the state and federal government. The church was also regularly praised by Chihuahua’s governor, Miguel Ahumada, for its efforts to pacify local indigenous populations. Ahumada was the governor of Chihuahua for more than ten years until 1903. The governor and the bishop forged a relationship of mutual respect and the bishop frequently asked him to help people in need. The bishop created a social and community-oriented diocese, which successive bishops appear to have followed. Ortiz was active in various national Catholic congresses, as well, which tried to improve the “social and economic” conditions of Mexican laborers.

Chihuahua’s first Catholic Church diocese was also founded at a time when politics and economics were largely controlled by one powerful family in the state, the Terrazas-Creel clan. They built a “vast economic empire,” which consisted of mining, cattle, manufacturing, banking

38 Tangeman, Mexico at the Crossroads, 29.
and land. Financially, they were on par with the American tycoons of the era. The family amassed their wealth by purchasing cheap land in Chihuahua during periods of instability, and they also bought former church properties after the Reform Laws. Both Luis Terrazas and his son-in-law, Enrique Creel, were governors of the state at different periods prior to the Mexican Revolution.

During his tenure as bishop, Ortiz established several important Catholic media outlets in Chihuahua, as well, which eventually became major venues to express government dissatisfaction. He chose his private secretary in the diocese, Silvestre Terrazas, to be editor and director of La Revista Catolica, which was a weekly Catholic newspaper. In 1899 Silvestre created his own newspaper called El Correo de Chihuahua, which was “Catholic and moralistic” in tone, yet it became one of the country’s leading newspapers. El Correo was a “repository for complaints” about Chihuahua and neighboring states. Its editorials criticized the unjust and corrupt behavior of politicians and elites in the state, like the Terrazas-Creel clan. Silvestre was a distant cousin of Luis Terrazas, who at that time was the largest landowner in Chihuahua. Silvestre became the main adversary to the Terrazas-Creel clan. He also advocated for a strong labor movement and he was an honorary member of various labor associations in Chihuahua.

Silvestre Terrazas publically endorsed social Catholicism and Christian democracy in his newspaper editorials. As a Catholic he was strongly influenced by Rerum Novarum and the social Catholic movement, which the local diocese in Chihuahua vigorously promoted. He

42 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 5.

43 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 44; Salmeron, “Catolicismo Social, Mutualismo y Revolucion en Chihuahua,” 76-80.


ultimately took part in politics via journalism, and Catholicism was backed and politicized by Silvestre to ignite support for political action.  

In 1910, Silvestre Terrazas joined the Mexican Revolution because he viewed the old regime under Porfirio Diaz as violating “principles essential to the preservation” of a Catholic and independent Mexico. Silvestre was both “conservative” and revolutionary at the same time, notes Robert Sandels. His viewpoint was “nationalistic and protective of Catholic and Mexican values.” He also backed revolutionaries like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

There is a strong connection in Chihuahua between the social Catholic movement and the Mexican Revolution. Social Catholicism inspired prominent local Catholic leaders like Silvestre Terrazas to participate in political and community issues. Chihuahua’s revolutionary movement was backed, as well, by the Catholic press, and other independent civil society organizations, which were supported by the church’s growing network. Silvestre pushed for political activism in his editorials and supported anti-reelection clubs, which grew in Chihuahua at that time. He also publicized land issues and other citizen complaints. Catholicism was as socially and politically strong in Chihuahua as it was in central Mexico prior to the revolution, asserts Jean Meyer. The widespread acceptance of Catholicism in Chihuahua did not occur, however, until after the first church diocese was created in 1891.

The Mexican Revolution emerged in Chihuahua mainly due to the severe economic problems, which began to occur there around 1907. A financial crisis in the US caused mineral


49 Jean Meyer, De una Revolucion a la Otra: Mexico En La Historia (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 2013), 336.
prices to plunge at that time, and this greatly affected Chihuahua’s economy. Mines closed and
the economic downturn also created massive unemployment. People who were out of work in
1910 started to join the Mexican Revolution.  

A new local land law in Chihuahua in 1905 also created civil unrest. The law permitted
municipal lands, such as housing lots and agriculture plots, which were usually occupied by rural
populations, to be sold if inhabitants could not produce a legitimate title for it. Land at that time
had become increasingly valuable in Chihuahua. If no title could be presented, the government
seized the land and then sold it typically to wealthy landowners. Small landowners and
residents of landholding villages joined the Mexican Revolution in 1910 “in response to the
theft” of their land by hacienda owners, observes Wasserman. 

The Mexican Revolution

During the Mexican Revolution the state of Chihuahua became a “hotbed” of
revolutionary activity and the first battles to overthrow Porfirio Diaz started there. A
revolutionary movement was also created via local anti-reelection clubs, which united people
against Diaz. In Chihuahua, there was frustration, as well, over the lack of economic
opportunities in the state, and this increased the popularity of dissident political groups.
Chihuahua’s independent and entrepreneurial spirit also likely explains the “greater willingness”

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50 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 127-128.
52 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 104.
to risk rebellion there, explains Wasserman. The main leaders and supporters of the Mexican Revolution in Chihuahua were from the growing urban and rural middle class. People in Chihuahua also had an “innate dislike of the central government,” according to Chand. 

Abraham Gonzalez, who had been the leader of the anti-reelection movement in Chihuahua, became the state political leader of the Mexican Revolution. He came from a middle class background and was a merchant and a rancher prior to the revolution. He was also governor during the revolution. This made Chihuahua the only state in the north to have a non-hacienda owner governor during the revolution. For the duration of the revolution, the Catholic Church diocese in Chihuahua was largely abandoned.

Pancho Villa, who was from Chihuahua, led the revolution’s military operations in the North. He was considered an outlaw, with a “hot temper,” and a penchant for “bloody revenge.” Historians, however, still disagree about his true character and motives. After the revolution he became the governor of Chihuahua, and he was once a prospective presidential candidate for Mexico. Villa was “like Robin Hood” because he “fought for the poor, gave them alms,” and “blessed their children,” maintains Haldeen Braddy.

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In terms of the Catholic Church, Villa was “ambivalent.” Initially he was candid about his disdain for priests, but later he became a “defender of the church.” Villa was not particularly anticlerical, however, notes Gerald O’Rourke. He wasn’t an atheist either, but he had his own ideas about religion and he believed there were good and bad priests. The newspaper editor Silvestre Terrazas ultimately convinced Villa not to destroy Catholic Churches during the revolution and to respect religion, which for the most part he adhered to. There were, however, instances when Villa targeted clergy, but this was rare. Villa generally listened to Silvestre Terrazas, who had an immense impact on him.

Pancho Villa and Silvestre Terrazas became allies before the revolution. Their relationship developed after Silvestre defended Villa in his editorials. Villa “never forgot” this and he became a “steadfast friend.” Villa “protected” Silvestre and never “turned against him” or “allowed anyone to touch him,” claims Margarita Terrazas, Silvestre’s daughter. Villa also had “great respect” for Silvestre.

As editor of Mexico’s largest opposition paper, Silvestre was the “principal logician and intellectual supporter” of the Mexican Revolution in Chihuahua, according to Katz. He was respected by the middle class, and his newspaper was considered the “conscience” of Chihuahua. For Villa, Silvestre’s backing was a key to “gaining middle-class

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support” in the state. 65 Silvestre’s newspaper voiced the “aspirations and attitudes” of the middle class in Chihuahua. 66

Chihuahua’s revolutionary movement was largely driven by the middle class, along with workers and peasants. The movement was considered different in Chihuahua, compared to other northern states, because it was not led by hacienda owners. In Chihuahua, the middle class detested the Porfirio Diaz regime because it restricted their “freedom and upward mobility,” notes Katz. The Terrazas-Creel clan also had a political and economic monopoly in Chihuahua prior to the revolution, and therefore they had little incentive to take part in it. 67

Chihuahua ultimately had a larger non-elite base of support for the Mexican Revolution than any other place in Mexico. The wealthy elite, on the other hand, also acted as a “single, homogenous group” in the state and strongly opposed the revolution. 68 Chihuahua’s upper class elite were the first in the country to attempt a counterrevolution, which failed. When Villa was governor of the state in 1913 he confiscated the land and properties of Chihuahua’s richest residents, including the assets of the Terrazas-Creel clan. He used funds from the sale of these properties to support the revolution and his army. This made Mexico’s northern army, the Division of the North, strong and powerful. 69

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66 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 154.
68 Wasserman, Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 4-6.
The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI

After the Mexican Revolution ended, Chihuahua’s economy was in ruins and a “restless peace” remained. 70 Transportation, communication, agriculture and commerce were all destroyed there. To generate revenues, gambling became economically important in the 1920s because it provided direct funds for the state government. The mining industry at that time was also largely controlled by foreign-owned companies. By the mid-1920s, the main leaders of the revolution in Chihuahua, like Pancho Villa and Abraham Gonzalez, had been killed and their movements died with them. 71

Chihuahua continued to be politically unstable for decades. Half a dozen different governors served between 1920 and 1930 and none of them finished their terms or created a “substantial or lasting” power base. The state also wasn’t considered one of the “laboratories” of the revolution, where major social, political, and economic changes occurred during or after the revolution. 72

In the 1920s, politics in Chihuahua was “torn by factionalism and rebellion,” similar to the “tumultuous” era prior to Porfirio Diaz’s term. Villa made the region unstable, as well, because he fought local governments until he was assassinated in 1923. 73 A “highly centralized” political system was established in Mexico City at that time to force the country’s stability. It created a strong presidential system with a central government, and a robust state-sponsored political party under the PRI. The PRI controlled civil society and reduced social discontent by


72 Wasserman, Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910-1940, 34-49.

73 Wasserman, Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910-1940, 74.
forcing social groups to join constrictive corporatist groups. The party was also initially very anticlerical. 74

The Catholic Church in Mexico suffered immensely during the Mexican Revolution. Bishops were exiled or imprisoned, and priests were tortured. Churches were looted or destroyed, as well. 75 Chihuahua’s Catholic Church, on the other hand, was largely unscathed. There was also a reluctance in Chihuahua to introduce local legislation to restrict clergy numbers and other church activities, despite the new Mexican constitution. 76

From 1926 to 1929, during the Cristero Rebellion, Chihuahua’s long term Bishop Antonio Guizar y Valencia forbade Catholics from engaging in armed conflict. He threatened excommunication if any Catholic took up arms. Silvestre Terrazas rejected rebellion in his newspaper editorials, as well. The reluctance to endorse fighting was likely because up until the mid-1920s, the church in Chihuahua had experienced wide freedoms in the state. 77

In 1926, Governor Jesus Antonio Almeida changed this position after pressure from Mexico’s President Plutarco Elias Calles. Almeida introduced a proposal to vastly limit the number of clergy in the state. Consequently, a bitter debate broke out in the Chihuahua legislature, and there were also protests. 78 In an editorial, Silvestre Terrazas insisted that Chihuahua did not have a problem with religion, and that if it was restricted it would only lead to intolerance and hatred. 79

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74 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 14.
75 O’Rourke, La Persecucion Religiosa en Chihuahua: 1913-1938, 17.
76 O’Rourke, La Persecucion Religiosa en Chihuahua: 1913-1938, 33.
77 Salmeron, “Catolicismo Social, Mutualismo y Revolucion en Chihuahua,” 104-105.
78 O’Rourke, La Persecucion Religiosa en Chihuahua: 1913-1938, 33.
79 O’Rourke, La Persecucion Religiosa en Chihuahua: 1913-1938, 34-35.
Governor Almeida’s term, however, was brief, due to the state’s political instability at the time, and successive governors in Chihuahua were generally less harsh to the church, at least until 1932 when Rodrigo Quevedo took office.  

Quevedo was the first post-revolutionary governor to complete a four-year term in Chihuahua. He had “excellent connections to Calles” and the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), which later became the PRI. He was also a “radical anticlerical” governor.

Quevedo began “quietly and secretly” expelling priests from the state. He limited the number of priests to one per one hundred thousand residents at that time, and ordered priests to halt religious activities, which enraged Catholics. Catholics went to court to protest these harsh anticlerical laws after Quevedo further reduced the number of priests permitted in the state. Quevedo and the leaders of the PNR were surprised when the courts sided with Catholics, and prevented priests from being deported, which allowed Catholic services to resume. Quevedo “retaliated” by urging the legislature to drastically reduce the number of priests in the state. The PNR, which later became the PRI, sought to limit the Catholic Church’s power in Mexico because it was threatened by any organization that could jeopardize its political hegemony. The Catholic Church was “capable of confronting the state in an organized way,” insists Roberto Blancarte, and this was a very frightening prospect for PRI political leaders at that time.

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84 Blancarte, “Recent Changes in Church-State Relations in Mexico: An Historical Approach,” 794.
At the end of Quevedo’s term in 1936, he hand-picked his successor, Gustavo Talamantes, to become the next governor of Chihuahua. Talamantes “followed the traditions being set in Mexico City,” but he also had his own ideas. He was anticlerical like Quevedo, but he tried to restore the trust of the government in rural areas. Conflicts between Catholics and anticlerics persisted, however. In 1937, a priest named Pedro de Jesus Maldonado was savagely beaten and killed in Chihuahua. After this tragedy, thousands of Catholics marched and rioted, and demanded an investigation into the killing. Catholics were outraged, as well, over a new state law that allowed only one priest per 200,000 residents. A group of Catholics wrote to President Lazaro Cardenas at that time to protest their poor treatment in Chihuahua.  

The Cardenas government eventually stopped enforcing strict anticlerical policies in Mexico, and the church was once again tolerated, providing it did not interfere in politics. Cardenas claimed the objective of his administration was social and economic transformation not to err like previous governments, who saw the religious question as highly problematic. Moreover, after a long court battle, the Supreme Court in Mexico ruled that the state law in Chihuahua limiting the number of priests to one per 200,000 was unconstitutional. The government then increased the number allowed to five. The pressure that Catholic’s put on the state and federal government in Chihuahua ultimately appears to have helped the church there.


86 Michaels, “The Modification of the Anti-Clerical Nationalism of the Mexican Revolution by General Lazaro Cardenas and its Relationship to the Church-State Détente in Mexico,” 44.

87 O’Rourke, La Persecucion Religiosa en Chihuahua: 1913-1938, 80-82.


89 O’Rourke, La Persecucion Religiosa en Chihuahua: 1913-1938, 82.
In 1940, when Manuel Avila Camacho became president of Mexico, a new peaceful era of Catholic Church-state relations began in Mexico. Avila was Catholic and he mainly ignored the anticlerical laws of the constitution. Under Avila’s leadership, a church-state “modus vivendi” was forged, which ended decades of conflict between the government and the church. The government ultimately required calm at that point in order to promote its new economic policies in the country.90

In the 1940s, Chihuahua was finally politically stable, and Mexico “successfully consolidated” itself under PRI control. The local Catholic Church and the government in Chihuahua also found a way to co-exist. The diocese celebrated its fiftieth year in the state in an atmosphere of “complete liberty, marked by the clanging of church bells, public acts of worship, and extensive press coverage,” notes Chand. 91

As the PRI gained control of politics in Chihuahua, the National Action Party (PAN) also found backing in the state following its foundation in 1939. The PAN focused on local level support, like municipal elections, which helped municipalities become more independent at that time. The party, however, “struggled” to get its candidates elected due to the PRI’s domination of the state until at least the 1980s. 92

In Chihuahua, the local business sector became an important voting bloc in local elections. There were large business owners in the state, along with small to medium-size business owners and entrepenaurs. Control of these different business groups became critical for

90 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 157.
91 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 19, 162-163; Wasserman, Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910-1940, 66-67.
winning elections in Chihuahua. Large business owners typically aligned with the PRI because they had stronger ties to the federal government. Small and medium-size entrepreneurs, in contrast, were usually more “economically independent” from the federal government, and they frequently supported the PAN. They were also usually from the middle class. Middle class interests had consistently found strong support from the Catholic Church in Chihuahua.

In 1956 middle class business entrepreneurs helped the PAN to organize a major campaign for the state governor’s race. They also contributed financially to the party at that time. Prior to their joining the PAN, the party had been electorally “weak and poorly organized” in Chihuahua. Luis Hector Alvarez was a PAN candidate for governor in 1956, and he also ran for president of Mexico in 1958, although he lost both races. Alvarez was later the PAN candidate for other political races in Chihuahua, as well. He was “steadfast” in his efforts to end the PRI’s long hegemony in Chihuahua, and he routinely spoke out against voter fraud. He was young and aggressive, and part of a new generation of Panistas, observes Franz von Sauer. He pushed for political and social democracy, and social justice, which matched the agenda of the Catholic Church in Chihuahua. He campaigned for municipal autonomy, as well, and a separation of government powers.

Alvarez’s “biggest obstacle,” however, was Mexico’s political geography at that time. The country was a “patchwork of fiefdoms, each controlled” by PRI political bosses, who

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wanted to stamp out “political dissidence,” claims Julia Preston. The PRI politically dominated Chihuahua until at least the early 1980s. 96 From 1946 to 1979 the PAN did not win any mayor races or governorships in the state, and it only won a handful of federal elections. 97 The PAN blamed election fraud for its defeats, but party members continued to participate in state elections, despite decades of losing. 98 Election data reveals, however, that the PAN faired “significantly” better in Chihuahua than the rest of the country prior to the 1980s. 99

In the 1960s, the Archdiocese of Chihuahua began to strongly support Vatican II. Adalberto Almeida y Merino, who was the archbishop from 1969 to 1991, attended all of the Vatican II councils and actively promoted its principles. The Catholic Church in Chihuahua continued its traditional commitment to social justice under Almeida’s leadership. The archdiocese focused on disadvantaged populations and was actively involved in developing civil society. Almeida also supported Christian base communities, social action groups, charities, hospitals and orphanages. The archdiocese brought awareness to important political issues, as well, like corruption and one-party hegemonic rule. It also offered seminars and workshops on political and social issues and it used media to spread societal messages. These local efforts helped to challenge authoritarianism and promote democratization at that time. 100

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97 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 33.
99 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 103.
Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA

By the 1970s, the economy in Chihuahua was flourishing due to the growth of maquiladoras in the state, which are foreign-owned assembly plants that are popular along the Mexican border. The maquiladora economy “defied the national downturn” as the debt crisis pounded Mexico in the early 1980s.  

A quasi two-party political system started to develop in Chihuahua by the early 1980s, and both the PRI and the PAN were politically powerful in the state, along with some smaller political parties. Chihuahua was fertile ground for a transition of power from the PRI in the 1980s after it had been controlled by the party for decades. Local PRI critics in Chihuahua condemned the unresponsiveness of the central government at that time, and the excessive amounts of taxation in the state, as Chihuahua’s economy thrived.

In Chihuahua, PRI-backed labor unions also found less support in the state, which helped reduce the central government’s control of labor there. Only about 13 percent of workers in the maquiladora industry were unionized in Ciudad Juarez, compared to about 100 percent of the workers in some parts of Tamaulipas, for example, where the PRI’s control was largely uncontested. Chihuahua’s location on the US border also meant that foreign investment in the state was high, which further weakened the PRI’s corporatist structure in Chihuahua.

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In the 1980s, Mexico’s debt crisis, “rekindled age-old hostility” and regional mistrust in Chihuahua of the federal government. Northerners blamed the crisis on the mistakes of “corrupt and power-hungry politicians” in Mexico City, who were “artificially imposed” on the north. 105 Chihuahua was also physically closer to the US, and this made it less dependent on Mexico’s federal government. The PAN underscored these types of local issues in Chihuahua. 106 The growth of maquiladoras created more small and medium-size business entrepreneurs in the state, as well, who frequently joined the PAN, and helped it to “redefine” its strategies at that time. They also provided it with financial resources and business savvy. 107

By the mid-1980s, “local business chambers” in Chihuahua were largely controlled by small and medium-size business entrepreneurs, who were largely pro-PAN. These independent groups were organized outside the PRI’s power structure. They publicized voter fraud and some accused the government of “mismanaging” the economy. The Employers Confederation of the Mexican Republic (COPARMEX) was one of the “most independent and radical” business organizations in Chihuahua. It was “politically active” and led by entrepeneurs who also supported the PAN. PAN members in the state were typically young and well-educated. They also networked with different non-PRI affiliated civil society organizations to mobilize support for the party. 108

105 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 27-29.
In 1983, the PAN finally won six state capitals in Chihuahua. After this win, Manuel Bartlett Diaz, who was Mexico’s secretary of the interior under the PRI, spoke out about the grave danger of the PAN in Chihuahua. He called the rise of the party a “national security” threat, and he blamed the victory of the PAN on a “treasonous alliance” between businessmen, the Catholic Church hierarchy in Chihuahua and conservatives in the US. 109

During the 1980s, the PAN created an “opposition stronghold” in Chihuahua. 110 The PRI, however, started to revert to “traditional practices” to win elections. In the 1986 elections, the PRI’s candidate Fernando Baeza Melendez won as governor, but charges of voter fraud were widespread. To address this situation, Chihuahua’s Archbishop Almeida used a “radical strategy.” 111 He insisted that election fraud had occurred, and he argued that “civil disobedience was justified” if voters wanted to protest the results. In a statement he declared: “The Church will not guard its silence or complicity before electoral fraud because it pertains to a sin as grave as stealing or abortion.” 112 In Mexico, “no single church action politically compares” to what the archbishop did in Chihuahua in 1986, insists Roderic Camp. 113

When government officials in the state refused to respond to the archbishop’s election criticisms in 1986, the archbishop threatened to suspend mass, which hadn’t occurred in Mexico since the Cristero Rebellion in the 1920s. This created a major crisis in church-state relations in


111 Camp, Crossing Swords: Politics and Religion in Mexico, 64; Ard, An Eternal Struggle, 143.


113 Camp, Crossing Swords: Politics and Religion in Mexico, 64.
Mexico. The Mexican government launched a media campaign at that time and showed the pope chastising priests for interfering in politics. The government also met with Girolamo Prigione, the Vatican representative in Mexico, and demanded he stop Almeida. Almeida, however, refused to withdraw his boycott unless the pope ordered him to end it because in Canon Law the pope was his only superior. Eventually, the Vatican insisted that Almeida keep churches open because it jeopardized the modus vivendi in Mexico.

After the disappointing 1986 governor election, members of the PAN in Chihuahua used hunger strikes and protests to publicize voter fraud, which the local Catholic Church backed. Luis Alvarez, then the PAN mayor of Chihuahua, conducted a forty-one day hunger strike with other PAN members. They also blocked bridges between Texas and Chihuahua, which drew international attention. The PAN would likely have won the governor’s race in 1986 if the elections had been fair, observes Chand. The PAN was expected to win the municipalities that it had won in 1983, but instead the PRI won those municipalities and also most of the mayor positions, which the PAN was expected to win.

After the electoral setbacks of the 1980s, Chihuahua became one of the first states in Mexico to elect a PAN governor in 1992. The election was the “cleanest on record” in the state, notes Chand. This was largely due to the efforts of the church to publicize voter fraud and push for fair and clean elections. The PAN also “audited” the state’s voter registration list and worked

to correct other election vulnerabilities prior to the 1992 election. The growth of independent business groups, which backed the PAN, helped the PAN candidate to win, as well. These groups challenged the PRI’s corporatist and clientelistic structure in the state.  

The passage of NAFTA in 1994 also created growth in Chihuahua and foreign investment increased there. The borderland areas of Mexico ultimately experienced “increased prosperity” after NAFTA. Many of the displaced, landless populations in the south also came north to find work at that time. This, however, put increased pressures on infrastructure, the environment and local governments in the north.  

**Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico**

In Chihuahua, the Catholic Church’s promotion of “electoral democracy” in the latter part of the twentieth century significantly impacted democratization in Mexico and Chihuahua. It also caused major tensions in the church-state relationship, and disturbed the historic modus vivendi in Mexico.  

In 1992, the PAN won not only the gubernatorial elections, but also a majority in the local congress, and the mayoral elections in all major cities in Chihuahua. Small and medium-size business entrepreneurs provided strong support, as well, for the PAN in 1992, even though large business owners in the state generally backed the PRI. During the elections in 1983, many large business owners in Chihuahua had also supported the PAN due to their opposition to the economic policies of the PRI at that time.  

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In Chihuahua, local business entrepreneurs were critical to the PAN’s victory in the 1992, but as a voting bloc the business community tended to vote pragmatically, and in accordance with their own fiscal interests. Large business entrepreneurs, for example, typically supported the PRI in Chihuahua because they had stronger “economic and personal links” to the federal government, while small and medium size business owners usually aligned with the PAN to promote their own local interests. This group also had weaker ties to the central government and complained of government discrimination. It appears that small and medium size business owners, however, might have become politically disengaged during the 1998 governor’s race or they changed their support to the PRI, because the PRI won the governor’s election in 1998. Archbishop Almeida also retired in 1991 and the PAN lost a key ally at that time.

When Chihuahua’s rebellious Archbishop Almeida retired, Jose Fernandez Arteaga became the archbishop in Chihuahua. He remained archbishop until 2009. The new archbishop’s approach to managing the archdiocese was very different from his predecessors. Fernandez lessened the archdiocese’s support for Vatican reforms, like Vatican II, and he also reduced the number of church-supported civil society groups. His actions minimized the institutional capacity of the Catholic Church in Chihuahua at that time. Due to this, the clergy in the archdiocese started to protest these changes, and they wrote a book to document their concerns after the Vatican failed to respond to their complaints. Once the PRI won back the governorship


of Chihuahua in 1998, the leadership of the church in the archdiocese was uncharacteristically quiet.  

The Institutional Capacity of the Catholic Church in Chihuahua

Historically, the Catholic Church in Chihuahua has been institutionally strong and effective, and it usually challenged government authoritarianism during the twentieth century. The strength and effectiveness of the church will be examined below.

Table 6-2. Chihuahua I: Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-Optation by the Government or Elite Groups

During the colonial era, and after Mexico’s independence, the Catholic Church’s efforts in Chihuahua to evangelize the local indigenous population were largely unsuccessful. Catholicism was weak in Chihuahua because of the area’s isolation and lack of security. The church ultimately failed to create an important social role for itself in society at that time. The

instability of Chihuahua also hindered its economic and social development. Fighting in Chihuahua finally stopped at the end of the 1800s, after a successful military campaign. At that time the area began to prosper economically. 126

The first Catholic Church diocese in Chihuahua was established in 1891, which was several decades after Chihuahua became a state. The diocese was founded at the same time as Rerum Novarum, which the church in Chihuahua embraced. This decision strongly impacted the diocese and its future growth. Due to Rerum Novarum, the first bishop in Chihuahua established a strong civil society network, as well as media outlets. The bishop also promoted social justice initiatives, which created new support for the church in Chihuahua. Through this the local Catholic Church established independence and autonomy at that time from the government. The church also focused its evangelization efforts on the state’s emerging middle class, rather than the wealthy, which gave it greater legitimacy in society.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, the church continued to support middle class initiatives, which remained a guiding principle for it. The church in Chihuahua embraced other Vatican policies, as well, like Vatican II and it was a strong advocate for democratization in the state. The government in Chihuahua also relied on the church to help calm indigenous populations following Mexico’s independence. Through these different community programs, the church diocese established a more or less autonomous church institution in Chihuahua, which was capable of challenging authoritarianism, at least temporarily. 127

Networks: Strong and Enduring Church Networks, Which Were Typically Developed Prior to State Formation

In the colonial era, strong church networks were never fully developed in Chihuahua due to the area’s insecurity. The Jesuits and other religious orders, however, tried to evangelize indigenous populations, and put them in closed communities, but they were largely unsuccessful at this. Colonial institutions, like the repartimiento and encomienda systems, were also not embraced due to the region’s volatility. Strong church networks were therefore never fully established during the colonial era. Instead church networks were created after the foundation of the first church diocese in 1891, through more modern methods, like Catholic media and civil society organizations. 128

Before the establishment of the first diocese in Chihuahua, the Catholic Church in the state was viewed as weak and disorganized. It was managed by the diocese in Durango, which was very small and had a “weak organizational” structure. The clergy also had only a minor presence in Chihuahua at that time, and therefore church networks weren’t fully developed until after Chihuahua became a state. 129

Policy Implementation: A High-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow Church Guidelines

The Catholic Church leadership and its membership in Chihuahua enthusiastically championed two very important Vatican reforms, which included Rerum Novarum and Vatican II. Rerum Novarum created a social Catholic movement in the state at the end of the 19th century. It also helped to establish trade unions and civil society organizations, and local Catholics started

to participate more in politics. The new diocese encouraged civic activism, as well, and this ignited the Mexican Revolution in Chihuahua. The state’s first bishop also improved working conditions in the state. Other bishops, like Nicolas Perez Gavilan, continued these efforts. The long time bishop, Antonio Guizar y Valencia, who reigned from 1921 to 1962, encouraged social activism, as well. 130

Vatican II was also implemented in the diocese, which became an archdiocese in 1958. As a result, human rights, social justice and poverty initiatives continued to be embraced by the archdiocese. Vatican II modernized the archdiocese, as well, and stimulated civic and political engagement. It also produced new social networks and created a rich associational life. Eventually a democratic movement was stimulated in the archdiocese, which was led by the church. During the long tenure of Archbishop Almeida, who was archbishop from 1969 to 1991, control of the state by one political party was regularly criticized by the Catholic Church. The archdiocese also organized workshops on election fraud, and supported local democratic initiatives. Almeida attended all four sessions of Vatican II and was strongly influenced by it. 131

Archbishop Jose Fernandez Arteaga, who took over in 1991, changed his predecessor’s church policies. The new archbishop at that time ended support for some Vatican reforms and reduced church backing for various civil society organizations. This weakened the institutional effectiveness and strength of the Archdiocese in Chihuahua at that time. It also demonstrates the important role that Vatican reforms can play in local democratization efforts, and the negative impacts if church leadership lessens support for them.

130 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 160-170.

131 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 160-182; Sabet, Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border, 89-99.
Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution

The Archdiocese of Chihuahua has a long history of supporting social justice initiatives and middle class issues, which has helped it to build public trust and legitimacy in society. The creation of egalitarian and horizontal civil society organizations, which promoted human rights, also fostered public trust. The championing of important Vatican reforms by the church leadership was effective, as well, for building trust. The church’s community-centered civil society network ultimately weakened the hegemony of the PRI, and its patron-client networks in Chihuahua, at least temporarily. This undoubtedly increased the credibility of the Catholic Church in the state. The decision, however, by Archbishop Jose Fernandez Arteaga to stop implementing some Vatican reforms and to weaken the church’s civil society networks, has likely eroded the Catholic Church’s public trust in the state.

Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Autonomous Church-Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships

The Catholic Church infrastructure of the archdiocese in Chihuahua is fairly extensive in relation to its population, particularly in comparison to other states. The archdiocese is also located in Chihuahua City, which is the capital of the state. This ultimately allowed the church to be more influential in state politics.

Historically, church leaders in Chihuahua have also backed civil society growth. This atmosphere of civic engagement has created support for oppositional political parties and independent civic groups in Chihuahua. These organizations challenged the political hegemony of the PRI in Chihuahua during the twentieth century. After the 1980s, Chihuahua became a two-

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party state and both the PRI and the PAN were strong there. The church’s expansive civil society networks ultimately helped stimulate democratization in the state. Civil society in Chihuahua has taken on “public problems and worked to hold the government accountable.” The church has also introduced “new norms” that support an autonomous associational life. This challenged the PRI’s dominance of civil society in Chihuahua, and its “norms of clientelism,” maintains Sabet.134

**Catholic Church Challenges to Authoritarianism in Chihuahua**

The Archdiocese of Chihuahua was institutionally strong and effective during the twentieth century, and capable of successfully challenging authoritarianism. To understand when an institutionally strong and effective church unit might challenge authoritarianism, additional variables will be discussed below.

Table 6-3. Chihuahua II: When a Catholic Church Might Challenge Authoritarianism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Variables:</th>
<th>Effect Variable:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capability: When a diocese or archdiocese is considered institutionally effective or strong.</td>
<td>Whether an institutionally strong and effective diocese or archdiocese will successfully challenge an authoritarian regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Support: When there is strong support for action from the church leadership and membership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Path dependency: The extent to which past attempts to challenge the government by the dioceses or archdioceses were already successful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Threats: If there are strong threats by the government or ruling elites to the church’s institutional effectiveness and strength.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capability**

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Archdiocese in Chihuahua was institutionally strong and effective. This allowed it to consistently challenge authoritarianism.

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134 Sabet, Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border, 84-93.
The institutional capacity of the archdiocese started to erode, however, after 1991 when a new archbishop took control of the church. He changed the traditional social justice focus of the church, and appears to have institutionally weakened it. It is difficult to predict whether the institutional capacity of the church will be weakened in the future further. However, there will likely be less challenges to authoritarianism if the church’s institutional integrity continues to be undermined.

**Support**

In the twentieth century, the leadership of the archdiocese in Chihuahua consistently challenged authoritarianism. However, support for this started to wain toward the end of the twentieth century due to institutional changes within the church.

**Path Dependency**

Past attempts to challenge authoritarianism during the twentieth century were largely successful in Chihuahua. Therefore, it is likely that the archdiocese will challenge authoritarianism again under the right leadership and circumstances.

**Threats**

Past threats by the government and elites to the institutional integrity of the Catholic Church in Chihuahua have resulted in extreme challenges to authoritarianism by the local church. However, in 1991 when a new archbishop arrived in Chihuahua, he apparently voluntarily weakened the institutional capacity of the archdiocese. It remains to be seen how the church will respond to future threats under different leadership.

**Conclusion**

In the decades leading up to the 2000 political elections in Mexico, the Catholic Church in Chihuahua was at the forefront of a democratic movement, which helped to create political and social change in the state. The local archbishop also widely publicized election fraud in the
1980s, which led to democratic gains for the PAN. Since the founding of the first diocese in Chihuahua City in 1891, the church in Chihuahua has typically followed an agenda of social justice. The church also embraced Vatican II and Rerum Novarum, and other Vatican initiatives. It encouraged civic activism, as well, through the creation of Catholic media and independent civil society organizations. These activities challenged the corporatist and clientelistic structure of the PRI during the twentieth century and helped, at least temporarily, to advance democracy in Chihuahua and Mexico.

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135 Chand, Mexico’s Political Awakening, 153-154; Sheppard, A Persistent Revolution: History, Nationalism, and Politics in Mexico Since 1968, 97-104.
CHAPTER 7
STATE OF TAMAULIPAS:
WHERE A WEAK CATHOLIC CHURCH AND OPPORTUNISTIC CRIMINAL FACTIONS CONVERGE

Facts about Tamaulipas

Catholic Church Challenge to Authoritarianism: Low level

Location: Tamaulipas is located in the northeast part of Mexico

Population: 2.8 million (2000 INEGI)

Capital: Ciudad Victoria

Indigenous Population: Low indigenous population at .6 percent (2000 INEGI)

Colonization and Statehood: It was colonized in 1747 and it became a state in 1824.

Religion: 82% Catholics (2000 INEGI)

Economy: Tamaulipas has a strong economy.

Climate and Terrain: The soil is good for agriculture and it has a variable climate.

Politics: There was little political change in Tamaulipas during the twentieth century.

The PRI continued to dominate the state long after the 2000 presidential elections. In 2016 the PRI party finally lost its first governor’s race to a PAN candidate after several corruption scandals within the local PRI.¹

Table 7-1. Governor Election Results in Tamaulipas 1992 to 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>421,234</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>484,567</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>621,692</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>678,521</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>486,124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD/PAN</td>
<td>163,697</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>141,380</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>78,333</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>31,361</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>17,324</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARM</td>
<td>37,782</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>234,986</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>339,573</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>339,535</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>721,049</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFCRN</td>
<td>6,682</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>11,182</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>16,208</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>13,208</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>8,281</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tamaulipas, in Mexico’s northeast corner, has been called the “land of mafias” and “primitive” political practices. It was mainly a one-party state until 2016 when the PAN won the governorship for the first time in state history following several local corruption scandals within the PRI. Until then the PRI had continuously monopolized Tamaulipas state elections since the party’s foundation in the 1920s. Tamaulipas has a high crime rate and grapples with major societal issues like narcotics trafficking, kidnapping, corruption and other extreme crises in governance.  

Tamaulipas offers a state case study where the Catholic Church has repeatedly chosen not to challenge government authoritarianism, largely because of its institutional incapacity to do so. In the colonial period, Tamaulipas was also one of the last provinces to be colonized by the Spanish. Colonization did not occur there until the enlightenment era in the mid-18th century, which was several hundred years after many Mexican provinces. As a result, a completely different colonization strategy was used there, and the church’s missionary system was for the most part, intentionally excluded from this process. 

Tamaulipas’s colonization plan differed, for example, from the one in Chihuahua, where a church missionary system was institutionalized during the colonial era, yet it was largely unsuccessful due to the area’s volatility. In Tamaulipas, on the other hand, a church missionary system was never completely introduced, and only a few Catholic Churches were built at that time. As a result, the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas remains institutionally weak and it does not

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present a challenge to the government. It is also less entrenched in the state, and the clergy have very little political influence or power, observes Carlos Salinas Dominguez. The church has no autonomy or independence from the government, as well. Vatican initiatives like Vatican II and Rerum Novarum have mostly been unsuccessful there, as well. Consequently, the PRI experienced little opposition from the local Catholic Church when it set out to dominate the state and its institutions during the twentieth century.

The PRI’s hegemony in Tamaulipas represents the “highest level of dominance by the PRI and official-sector representatives” in Mexico, maintains Salinas. Government-connected labor unions and their leadership ultimately controlled the state prior to the 2000 elections. Wealth in Tamaulipas is also largely derived from “public-sector” activities or “illicit” acts like smuggling and drug trafficking. Moreover, the PRI experienced little political competition in Tamaulipas prior to the 2000 presidential elections. The PRI was actually modeled after the Socialist Border Party (PSF), which was a local Tamaulipas political party.

This state case study focuses mainly on the Diocese of Tamaulipas, which was created in 1870 in Ciudad Victoria. It was later moved to Tampico. In 1958 the diocese was divided into two dioceses in Tampico and Matamoros. In 1964, a diocese was created in Ciudad Victoria, and in 1989 one was also established in Nuevo Laredo. However, these dioceses also don’t typically challenge authoritarianism largely because of their institutional powerlessness in the state.

This chapter looks again at six common historic events in Mexico to understand the specific development and historical trajectory of the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas. These

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**Common Historic Events**

**The Spanish Colonial Period**

Tamaulipas is located on the Gulf of Mexico, in the northeast corner of Mexico. It shares a land border with Texas and was largely ignored by the Spanish during the colonial era, although several unsuccessful attempts were made to colonize it. Wild indigenous tribes, however, prevented further exploration in this region. There were also few incentives for the Spanish to venture into this part of Mexico because it didn’t appear to have mineral wealth or any marketable commodities. The harbor in nearby Veracruz was also the official trading port for the Spanish, and therefore the development of Tamaulipas seemed unnecessary. 7

Tamaulipas, along with areas in southern Texas, were part of what was known as the colonial province of Nuevo Santander, until its name was changed after Mexico’s independence. Nuevo Santander was finally colonized in the mid-eighteenth century due to fears that it could be invaded from the north by the French or another foreign power. The area was therefore developed primarily for security reasons and to access the land for cattle ranching, which was common in neighboring states. 8

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Prior to the mid-eighteenth century Tamaulipas’s population was small and diverse. The northeast corner of Mexico was also a refuge for rebellious indigenous groups from other parts of Mexico, who defied Spanish authority. An assortment of wild indigenous tribes, who spoke 30 different languages, inhabited the province. There had previously been little development in Tamaulipas and there was no common language. Indigenous tribes in Tamaulipas were mainly considered “barbarous,” and the province was mostly just a “sore spot” for Spain because it contained the “fiercest and boldest” indigenous tribes around, notes Lawrence Francis Hill.

In 1747, Jose de Escandon y Helguera, who was a rich nobleman in the Spanish military, finally colonized Nuevo Santander. He was also governor of the province for the next twenty years. Escandon devised a new colonial settlement strategy and administrative system for the province, which had not been used previously. Nuevo Santander was to be populated with non-indigenous “rational” people from other states, while families were specifically invited to live there. This method, which Escandon persuaded colonial authorities to support, was inspired by enlightenment principles, which were gaining popularity at that time.

Since the 1500s, Catholic Church missions and their presidios had been widely used to pacify and indoctrinate indigenous communities throughout the Spanish colonization process. But in Nuevo Santander this responsibility was given instead to an incoming civilian population, who also provided the new province with security. Consequently, the church’s role in the colonization process of Nuevo Santander was minor, and economic and security objectives were

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Santander: A Study in Spanish Colonization (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1926), 53-55; Osante, “Colonization and Control: The Case of Nuevo Santander,” 230.

9 Hill, Jose de Escandon and the Founding of Nuevo Santander: A Study in Spanish Colonization, 48-52;

prioritized over indigenous evangelization. Church missionaries then needed to compete with civilians for the use of land and other resources, rather than having a privileged status like in other Mexican provinces. Nuevo Santander’s colonization strategy was ultimately deemed to be more economical than the church’s missionary tactic. 11

Nuevo Santander’s settlement plan was strongly opposed by the Catholic Church and its missionaries because it diminished their authority there. The church was above all accustomed to managing colonization processes in Mexico. Spain, however, had grown frustrated with the church’s colonizing efforts because they often failed to fully assimilate indigenous communities into mainstream society or guarantee Spanish control of the land, observes Patricia Osante. 12 Nuevo Santander’s new colonization strategy, in contrast, prioritized “rapid economic development” at a reduced cost to the Spanish royal treasury, which was experiencing financial set-backs at that time. New settlers in Nuevo Santander were then required to demonstrate to local indigenous populations how to behave and live a civilized life, which had previously been the Catholic Church’s main responsibility. 13

In Nuevo Santander, Escandon created a military-style government, and a work force was transferred to the area from outside the region to avoid having to rely on the native population for labor needs. Indigenous and non-indigenous populations were then placed together in mixed settlements, under the protection and authority of military unit captains. 14

Wealthy landowners and high ranking military men were sought out, as well, to invest in the new province. These rich financers were offered land, and political and economic control of designated areas, along with a stake in new commercial networks, which Escandon planned to create. Wealthy benefactors also helped to pay the relocation expenses of families, who made up the bulk of the new population. To increase the population in the new province, some criminal offenders were invited to live in Nuevo Santander, as well. These convicts were then promised amnesty in the new region by Escandon. As a result, new inhabitants to the province were occasionally labeled as lawbreakers and vagabonds.

In order to control Nuevo Santander and its people, Escandon relied on land. Rich investors were provided with titles to generous amounts of land for their own commercial enterprises, while ordinary families and low-ranking soldiers, who protected the new communities, were sometimes denied previously promised land titles. Indigenous populations and missionaries were deprived of land titles, as well. Ultimately, land was a means for Escandon to control the population and to ensure that available terrain remained a potential lure for newcomers.

The system Escandon set-up in Nuevo Santander was hierarchal and elitist. It essentially exploited lower income non-indigenous families and indigenous people for the benefit of wealthy men. Subsequently, from the beginning, a group of rich, large landowners and high-ranking military men controlled Nuevo Santander, and established elite status for themselves there. Meanwhile, the economic standing of the other settlers was poor, and they were largely

controlled by intimidation. The majority of the population in the new province was also forced to work for low-pay on the haciendas and plantations of wealthy landowners because they had no private land or means to earn an outside income. If they rebelled, they risked being exiled from the province or killed by the military. 18

Nuevo Santander’s military regime, which was also managed by powerful and rich men, handled all civil and criminal matters. Settlers were “subject to the tyranny” of these “prominent men,” explains Osante. Elite men were also their employers and they received a severe reprimand if they tried to protest or relocate to another province, which was forbidden. This ultimately created an authoritarian system in the new province. Escandon then placed complete control of Nuevo Santander into the hands of a group of “elite” men, who were loyal to him only. 19 Escandon also created a municipal system for the province, but only members of the military regime were selected to be its representatives. This created a very “disciplined following among the inhabitants of the colony,” maintains Omar Valerio-Jimenez. 20

To uphold the legitimacy of the colonizing mission in Nuevo Santander, a small quantity of Franciscan missionaries were also permitted into the province, to evangelize a limited number of natives. In accordance with Spanish law, colonizers were required to “spread the gospel,” but Catholic missionaries in Nuevo Santander remained under the military’s control, and they did not own land during the colonial period. Missionaries were also only allowed in certain areas where a sufficient number of natives had already assembled so that they could then be used as workers on estates. Churches, moreover, were not permitted to charge money for religious services. They

were instead provided with a basic government stipend to administer the sacraments. As a result, Catholic missionaries had little control over indigenous populations or land in Nuevo Santander. They were instead subordinate to the “military authority,” and they lived without the privileges that religious orders were accustomed to in other parts of Mexico. This stripped the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas of autonomy and independence from the earliest days of the province. 21

Nuevo Santander’s religious missions were also frequently robbed and pillaged by native populations, who generally refused to live there. 22 Escandon interfered, as well, in the missionaries’ evangelical work. He wanted to conserve money and so he put restrictions on their work. Missionaries bitterly complained about this and accused Escandon of preferring extermination and “military subjugation” to evangelization because of his apparent distain for their program. Due to this, the missions of Nuevo Santander “failed miserably” to convert the local populations, according to Valerio-Jiménez. 23

Until the end of the eighteenth century, the closest bishopric to Nuevo Santander was also the distant Catholic Church diocese in Guadalajara, and the ties between these two regions were tenuous. However, in 1777 the church decided to put a new diocese in Lineras, Nuevo Leon, which could then service the Nuevo Santander area. The new diocese was temporarily linked to the Archdiocese in Mexico City. Once the new diocese was operational, church officials started to recommend local laws for Nuevo Santander to limit gambling and liquor sales and to reduce crime. The new diocese also tried to block the “infiltration of anti-clerical” reading material in Nuevo Santander, which was ubiquitous. Social problems in the new province were ultimately

blamed on the historic “laxity of ties” between the province’s local parishes and the diocese in Guadalajara. 24

After Escandon’s term as governor ended in Nuevo Santander, subsequent to twenty years of service there, the military and wealthy landowners continued to control the province. In 1794, elective municipal offices were eliminated and a more “direct form of military rule” was established there. At that point military captains were simply appointed by the governor from among the upper class landowning population. These wealthy men alone then served as the governing officials of local towns. 25

**Independence from Spain and its Aftermath**

In the early 1800s, Nuevo Santander began to support Mexico’s independence from Spain because of a “widespread dissatisfaction” with Spain’s fiscal policies. Local administrative officials in the province, however, continued to publically back Spain because they were required to. Yet, Spain’s economic policies in Nuevo Santander were extremely unfavorable. The Spanish banned international trade there and required an obligatory financial contribution to the army. They demanded high taxes, as well, which put an “economic strain” on the population. Therefore, popular support for Mexico’s independence grew at that time. 26

In Nuevo Santander, strict trade regulations also encouraged smuggling operations to develop due to the province’s location on the Gulf of Mexico and US border. There was an abundance of raw materials there, as well, because it had excellent soil and water availability.

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Yet, residents were still very limited in their ability to market their products because international trade needed to go through Veracruz. Veracruz was the official Spanish port, which was a considerable distance from Nuevo Santander. 27

Once Mexico was independent from Spain, trade regulations in Nuevo Santander were liberalized and a seaport was opened in the northern town of Matamoros. The province’s name was also changed to Tamaulipas and it became a state in 1824. 28 The post-independence period, however, was tumultuous in Tamaulipas, and attacks on the northern border by wild indigenous populations intensified. The Mexican central government was also weak at that time and border security was insufficient. Residents on the border were urged to arrange for their own protection, which created resentment towards the new central government in Mexico City. 29

In the post-independence period, the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas continued to be institutionally weak, like it had been in the colonial era. The lengthy battle for independence also created a priest shortage in the new diocese of Lineras, and the surrounding areas lacked clerical supervision. The church treasury was depleted, as well, because of the difficulties of collecting the tithe at that time, and the termination of Spanish financial support. The Mexican government also borrowed funds from the Catholic Church and failed to repay it, which further undermined it. 30


In 1870 a new Catholic Church diocese was established inside the state of Tamaulipas. It was located in the capital city of Ciudad Victoria and it was supervised by the Archdiocese of Monterey in Nuevo Leon. The first bishop in the Tamaulipas diocese was Jose Maria Ignacio Montes de Oca y Obregon, who spoke several languages and was regarded as a scholar. Prior to his tenure in Tamaulipas, he was an honorary chaplain for Archduke Maximilian during the era of the French intervention in Mexico. 31

The diocese’s second bishop, Giuseppe Ignazio Eduardo Sanchez Camacho, arrived in Tamaulipas in 1880. His term occurred during the aftermath of the Reform Laws, which was a volatile period in Mexico. The new bishop in Ciudad Victoria, inexplicably, sided with the Liberal party and publically encouraged church members in Tamaulipas to support the Reform Laws, although he did not receive Vatican authorization to do this. He also condemned and “attacked” Mexico’s “national devotion” to Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is a sacred religious figure in the country. He became a very controversial person and after 16 years as bishop he was removed from his post by the Vatican. He was also accused of heavy drinking, womanizing and supporting anticlericalism. His term was ultimately an extremely scandalous period in the Tamaulipas diocese. 32

Tamaulipas’s first few bishops were considered part of a “new generation” of church leaders in Mexico, who were promoted during Porfirio Diaz’s presidency. These bishops shared Diaz’s fondness for Mexico’s “modernization,” and they tried to transform the Catholic Church.

The Tamaulipas diocese, however, developed a high bishop turnover rate, which led to instability there. Subsequent bishops in Tamaulipas included Filemón Fierro y Terán, who became bishop in 1897, and died in the middle of his term in 1905. He tried to improve the infrastructure of the Tamaulipas diocese during his tenure and built several schools in Ciudad Victoria, which were operational until the Mexican Revolution. Jose de Jesus Guzman y Sanchez was bishop from 1909 until 1914, although he also died during his term. 34

Following Mexico’s independence, Tamaulipas was plagued for decades with major financial problems. The state’s border towns along the Rio Grande became “economically stagnant,” and there was an influx of immigration to the US. At this point, parts of northern Nuevo Santander were annexed by Texas, which in the 1840s became part of the US. To tackle the serious economic problems on the northern border, the governor of Tamaulipas decided to create a free trade zone or “zona libre” in 1858. The free trade zone, which was on the border between Tamaulipas and Texas, was six to eight miles wide and allowed foreign goods to pass into Tamaulipas, duty-free. 35

Tamaulipas’s free trade zone was condemned by the US because they believed it encouraged smuggling and reduced the amount they could collect for import duties. Once the zone was created, Americans established businesses on both sides of the border to avoid paying duty fees. Other “illicit trade” operations also developed at that time there, and the border became a “base for smuggling” products between the US and Mexico. Consequently, the local


34 Carlos Gonzalez Salas, Historia del Seminario de Ciudad Victoria (Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas: Universidad Autonoma de Tamaulipas, Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1993), 26-31.

economy on the border started to flourish. Customs officials, however, were regularly criticized for permitting smuggling operations to grow. Smuggling had been widespread in Tamaulipas since the colonial era, but it started to really thrive as a result of the free trade zone. Porfirio Diaz finally closed the free trade zone in 1905. However, while the zone was operational, it helped to establish smuggling networks on the border, which are still used today for drug trafficking and other criminal activities.

During the Porfirio Diaz era, assorted attempts were made to improve Tamaulipas’s economy. The construction of a new railroad line in the area was finally completed in 1890. It ran between San Luis Potosi, a state east of Tamaulipas, and a new seaport in Tampico, Tamaulipas. Materials could then be rapidly shipped via the railroad from the haciendas and mining centers to the port, and sold internationally for high profits. Revenues were expected to make Mexico one of the richest countries in the world.

A significant amount of land was required, however, to build the railroad. Consequently, communal indigenous lands were seized under local land laws. Government officials also manipulated these laws to acquire additional land for roads and railroad tracks. The privatization of land contributed to the increase of textile mills, cattle ranches, sugar mills and tobacco plantations in the area. Land privatization created major local friction, as well, because land was seized from mainly indigenous communities when they could not produce a legal title for it. They then had to pay high rents and taxes in order to remain on their old land, which forced

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38 Mark Saad Saka, For God and Revolution: Priest, Peasant, and Agrarian Socialism in the Mexican Huasteca (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 73-79.
many to work as laborers on local haciendas. A major rebellion occurred in the late 1870s in San Luis Potosi due to government land seizures for the railroad. The rebellion lasted five years and was finally ended by federal troops after concerns that it could destabilize the entire northeast region. 39

After the railroad was completed, oil was discovered by foreign oil companies in the 1890s near Tampico, and refineries were quickly built in the area. Eventually thousands of barrels of oil a day started to be shipped to the US. By 1900, the American company, Standard Oil, controlled most of Mexico’s energy market. They owned refineries in Tampico, Veracruz and Mexico City, and also monopolized Tampico’s trade networks because the Mexican Central Railroad was managed by company executives. Oil exploration in Mexico was mainly conducted by foreigners from the US and Britain. One American oil baron, Edward L. Doheny, bought hundreds of thousands of acres to build refineries and to search for oil in Tamaulipas and the Gulf Coast region. Doheny established the Huasteca Petroleum Company in 1906 and became one of the richest men in America. Other foreign oil companies also bought land adjacent to pipelines in Tamaulipas in order to hunt for oil. 40

In the early 1900s, the city of Tampico in Tamaulipas became Mexico’s main oil export city. Between 1910 and 1919, Mexico was the second “most productive” oil country in the world. Tampico was Mexico’s largest port and perhaps its richest and most important international city, as well, because of oil. The business community was so strong in Tampico that it controlled local politics and the city’s development. Tampico elites supported Porfirio Diaz

39 Saka, For God and Revolution: Priest, Peasant, and Agrarian Socialism in the Mexican Huasteca, 73-144.

instead of Francisco Madero before the Mexican Revolution ultimately because he backed their business interests. Municipal offices in Tampico were also normally filled with members of the wealthy elite, who continued to champion capitalism even after the revolution started in 1910. 41

Prior to the start of the revolution, the Catholic Church in the Tamaulipas area remained institutionally weak. The church’s presence in the state was “historically limited,” insists S. Lief Adelson. In Tampico, the church played a “minor role” in local society. Tampico only had one Catholic Church, despite massive population growth after oil was discovered there. At that time in Tampico, “attempts to establish rural chapels in two worker neighborhoods were met with scant enthusiasm,” observes Adelson. This was largely due to a lack of funds to rent church space, along with strong anticlerical attitudes in the state. Prominent landowners and merchants in Tamaulipas also had more influence in local communities than religious leaders. 42 Moreover, the atmosphere in Tampico in 1907 was considered “singly liberal,” and there was only one priest and one Catholic Church for a population of 20,000 at that time. Elected government positions in Tamaulipas in the early 1900s were also sometimes filled by Protestants. 43

Due to the high number of foreigners in Tampico and its international ports, Protestant churches proliferated in the city prior to the Mexican Revolution. There was also a large “Protestant society” there. Tampico was considered a center for “protestant infiltration” into the Huasteca region, observes Mark Saad Saka. Protestantism also grew in the cities of Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria, where there were other Protestant churches. Protestantism offered a viable

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41 Ocasio, Capitalism and Development: Tampico, Mexico, 1876-1924, 127-142.


alternative to Catholicism, which was historically weak in Tamaulipas. 44 In 1900, the state of Tamaulipas had the fewest number of Catholic Churches in Mexico. 45

The Mexican Revolution

In 1910, the Mexican Revolution came externally to Tamaulipas, unlike other states in the north. This was mainly because “social, economic, and political tensions” did not transpire in Tamaulipas during the Porfirio Diaz era. Francisco Madero was also only popular with a small sector of the working and middle class in Tamaulipas. The state’s upper class, on the other hand, didn’t have any “genuine enthusiasm” for Madero, and workers were not organized enough to establish a “political base” for him in the state, according to Heather Fowler-Salamini. 46

Tula, which is in the southwest part of the state (in the Huasteca region), was the only area in Tamaulipas that had any revolutionary activity. Workers in Tampico were “restless,” as well, but they were mostly trouble-free during the revolution.47 Masonic Lodges also existed in Tampico, but their influence didn’t mobilize local workers, who were mostly foreigners. After the revolution, however, local oil workers in Tampico supported the unionization of the industry, and the nationalization of Mexico’s oil.48

During the Mexican Revolution, and even after it ended, landowners and commercial elites continued to dominate Tamaulipas, and the political and economic system there remained

45 Purnell, Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico, 93-95.
largely unchanged. Several factors contributed to the lack of popular uprisings in Tamaulipas at the time of the revolution. These included: “a sparse rural population, a strong landowning oligarchy, a business sector tied to foreign capital, divisiveness within the labor movement, and the lack of a tradition of regional political autonomy,” confirms Fowler-Salamini. 49 Added to this list could also be an institutionally weak Catholic Church, which never challenged the government in Tamaulipas nor mobilized the population.

In 1914, Venustiano Carranza’s Constitutionalist army occupied Tampico, and close to 25,000 soldiers were stationed there during the revolution. The army created a semi-circle around the city to protect it. Pancho Villa was seen as one of the biggest threats to Tampico, but once he was defeated, the city was considered safe. 50 When Carranza took control of the state, his generals jailed Catholic priests and seized Catholic Churches, schools and seminaries in Tampico and Ciudad Victoria. 51

Tampico was one of Carranza’s “main trophies” because it contained the bulk of Mexican oil. To protect oil reserves during the revolution, foreign oil companies hired armed militias, and US troops were sent to Tampico, as well. Once the Constitutionalsists had command of the oil fields, Carranza vied for more economic control of Mexico’s oil, which was mainly foreign-owned at that time. Carranza believed oil was Mexico’s property, but this was a complicated legal issue that needed to be resolved at a later time. After Carranza became president of Mexico in 1917, he supported new laws in the constitution, which allowed the


50 Ocasio, Capitalism and Development: Tampico, Mexico, 1876-1924, 144-163.

government to have greater control of the oil industry, but it wasn’t until later in the century that oil was nationalized. 52

Once the Mexican Revolution ended in Mexico, the “rural oligarchy” continued to be “unscathed” in Tamaulipas, and they still controlled the northern and central parts of the state. Foreigners, who had purchased land mainly for oil extraction or railroad construction, were also unaffected by the revolution. The landless rural population in the south, central and northern part of the state did not “mobilize” either during or after the revolution, and therefore there was little discord in Tamaulipas at that time. 53

The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI

When the revolution ended in Mexico in the 1920s, the country was economically weak and politically unstable for decades. The city of Tampico, however, was one of the few cities in Mexico that was still thriving due to its lavish oil wells. The extreme wealth of the city “seemed to never stop,” particularly as oil demands increased during World War I. Oil production reached its peak in 1921, although the Mexican government and foreign oil companies continued to battle over oil profits. 54

At that time, oil workers started to strike due to their poor treatment by foreign oil companies. Workers were allowed to strike under the new terms of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. However, military authorities frequently ended strikes with gunfire or arrests. In the late 1930s, the Mexican government finally nationalized oil, and this ended Tampico’s rapid

52 Ocasio, Capitalism and Development: Tampico, Mexico, 1876-1924, 144, 145-200.


54 Ocasio, Capitalism and Development: Tampico, Mexico, 1876-1924, 172-224.
development. Many foreign oil companies left Tampico at that time for other oil producing countries, although there had previously been hundreds of oil-related companies in the area.  

After the Mexican Revolution ended, Tamaulipas began a long experiment with “socialism.” The movement, however, was mainly led by middle-class politicians in Tampico. They sought to gain political power “through monopoly control,” without creating a “true mass-based” socialist movement in the state. Tamaulipas’s socialist movement was largely “hegemonic,” maintains Fowler-Salamini. It was initiated by Emilio Portes Gil, who was a Tamaulipas native. He eventually became governor of the state in 1925, and he was also president of Mexico following the assassination of President Alvaro Obregon in 1928.  

Until the early 1920s, military leaders usually dominated state politics in Tamaulipas. However, in 1922 Portes Gil created a political party in Tampico and recruited people from the middle class to join it, who were primarily from other states. In 1924, Portes Gil’s new party was named the Socialist Border Party (PSF) and he ran for governor at that time. Tamaulipas’s socialist movement differed from others within Mexico because its popular base was very weak. It supported social reforms and regional political autonomy, but it was not seen as “homegrown.” The socialist movement in Tamaulipas was instead created “by a skillful politician, who brought many of his associates to Tampico” from other parts of Mexico and Cuba, observes Fowler-Salamini. Portes Gil also built his “political base” largely on patron-client relationships, and he


did not view socialism in economic terms. He saw it instead as mainly a means for “social harmony” among the classes. 58

Local socialist movements had started to develop around Mexico after the Mexican Revolution to pressure state governments to make reforms in accordance with the new constitution. These movements were usually local rather than national initiatives, and therefore there were “many variations” of socialism in Mexico. Local socialist movements typically sought to establish a “party of the state” and to forge regional autonomy. They also acted to reform education, agriculture, land and labor in local areas, and to limit the social and political influence of the Catholic Church in Mexico. 59

Tamaulipas’s Catholic Church, in contrast, was already institutionally weak. In fact its historic powerlessness there appears to have potentially hindered worker movements in Tampico amid continued labor problems after the revolution. The “lack of church influence in Tampico” also likely “thwarted” the mobilization of “working class communities” in the state, observes Kevan Aguilar. The church could have potentially organized the population through its Catholic unions, but this never occurred in Tamaulipas. In Tampico, the church’s influence was so minimal that at one point there was reportedly only one parish priest for a population of 100,000 people. 60

The Catholic Church continued to play an extremely minor role in Tamaulipas society throughout the twentieth century. In Tampico, for example, church attendance was very low, and it had “limited influence,” observes Adelson. When Tampico’s population reached over 100,000

in 1918, daily attendance in its one Catholic Church was just 50 to 100 people. A large portion of Tampico’s population were also migrant oil workers and foreigners, who apparently were not Catholic. In 1922, Tamaulipas’s only Catholic Church diocese was re-located from Ciudad Victoria to Tampico because Tampico became the largest and most important city in the state. José Guadalupe Ortíz y López, who was bishop of Tamaulipas from 1919 to 1923, helped transfer the diocese, but he suddenly died in 1923.  

In 1844, a Catholic Church was first built in Tampico. It was enlarged in 1854, but unexpectedly collapsed in 1917. The reconstruction of the church was very slow, however, due to a “lack of support” from the community, although patrons still gathered in a small section of the dilapidated church. In 1922 Estelle Doheny, the wife of the American oil tycoon, along with several other people, made donations to the church project in Tampico. The cathedral in Tampico was eventually re-built and it opened again in 1931, following major reconstruction. Estelle Doheny was a Methodist, but her husband, Edward, was Catholic. However, they both resided in Los Angeles, California.

By the early 1920s, there were many popular and fashionable international social clubs in Tampico, which were unaffiliated with the Catholic Church. There was the British Club, the Chinese Club and the Colonial Club for Americans, and many country clubs and casinos, where the foreign community socialized and networked. Tampico also had ten movie houses in 1920 and a theater, which held international plays and musicals. The city had excellent hotels, as well,

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62 Juan Fidel Zorrilla, Gobernadores, Obispos y Rectores (Cuidad Victoria, Mexico: M. A. Porrua, 1989), 35.
and ships “continuously left the port” of Tampico for Europe, the US and other foreign destinations. At that time, the atmosphere in Tampico was very diverse and there were many international influences there. 65

During the Cristero Rebellion in Mexico, which lasted from 1926 to 1929, Tamaulipas experienced few church-related problems or religious protests, according to Portes Gil. He claims that there wasn’t a “single rebel” in Tamaulipas at that time, and he called the state “one of the most liberal” in Mexico. Portes Gil, who was the state’s governor then, enacted a new law which required all priests to be Mexican and to register with the government. He also limited the number of priests to 13, which he later concluded was more than the nine that existed there previously. The public apparently accepted these local changes. Catholic priests, however, protested bitterly about the difficulties of living in the state. They also complained of having little influence there, and they found it hard to financially support themselves. One priest in Ciudad Victoria declared at that time: “We barely live; we can scarcely sustain ourselves.” 66

Once Portes Gil became president of Mexico, he negotiated an end to the Cristero Rebellion in 1929. He did this by convincing the church hierarchy that the Mexican government would no longer interfere in religious worship. Portes Gil concluded, however, that the only states in Mexico that had uprisings during the Cristero Rebellion were ones where the Catholic Church dominated. In Tamaulipas, however, the Catholic Church was consistently weak and had no power. 67 During the rebellion, Serafin Armora y Gonzalez was bishop in Tamaulipas, and he

65 Ocasio, Capitalism and Development: Tampico, Mexico, 1876-1924, 195-199.


apparently complied with laws that restricted the church, and he tried to improve relations with the government at that time. He was in power from 1924 to 1955. 68

As governor of Tamaulipas in the 1920s, Portes Gil mostly acted like a politician, rather than a social reformer, despite his outward support for socialism. Under his direction, agrarian reform in Tamaulipas was “limited, selective, and carefully calculated to obtain” maximum political benefits. The landowning class and the large estate system in the state were also protected by Portes Gil, and he generally used land distribution as a “propaganda tool” to look like a revolutionary governor. Consequently, the hacienda system continued to dominate Tamaulipas, and only about 5 percent of rural villages were considered “free villages” in 1921. Roughly 75 percent of the rural population lived and worked on haciendas, as well. Moreover, foreigners mostly rejected agrarian reform in Tamaulipas, and Americans continued to own one-eighth of all landholdings in the state in 1923, which included oil properties. 69

In the twentieth century, there were, however, no protests in Tamaulipas over land issues. This was largely due to the “divisiveness” that existed between the middle and working classes, which hindered “broad based popular” movements there. The state’s population also was not “cohesive” or “homogenous,” and commercial and landowning elites typically controlled the state. On top of this, Tamaulipas’s main business and commercial cities of Tampico, Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo all had separate, independent industries, and there was little collaboration between them. Tampico, for example, had oil enclaves, while a cotton and ranching industry

developed in the northern cities of Matamoros and Reynosa. Economic fragmentation in the state ultimately created disunity and regional biases. The US Chamber of Commerce was also very influential there. Tamaulipas was essentially a “patchwork of powerful interests,” which dominated different parts of the state, and this made it hard to centrally manage it, claims Michael A. Ervin.  

Grassroots mobilization was also not encouraged in Tamaulipas, despite the official backing of socialism there. Yet, in other states in the post-revolution era, socialist leaders organized the working population, and created civically-engaged “peasant leagues,” but Portes Gil didn’t seem to have any interest in doing this. He did, however, establish the League of Agrarian Communities and Peasant Syndicates of the State of Tamaulipas, which he molded into a “personal political machine.” He controlled its leadership and policies until the 1930s. The league also played a “key role” in the formation of the Mexican Peasant Confederation (CCM), which was connected to the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), the precursor to the PRI.  

Portes Gil continued to “de facto” govern Tamaulipas until 1947. His party, the Socialist Border Party (PSF), was actually a “model” for what eventually became the PRI, claims David Sabet. The PSF was “highly effective in cutting across regional loyalties” and it used “functional representation” to manage and control different societal groups in the state, which was also a very effective tool at the national level. The PSF inspired the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), as well, which later changed its name to the PRI. The PNR borrowed the

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71 Fowler-Salamini, “Tamaulipas: Land Reform and the State,” 209-211.

structure and laws of the PSF, which was a “political machine” that Portes Gil used to “control his state,” observes Peter Calvert. The PNR excelled at “suppressed agrarianism,” which was similar to the agrarian reform agenda that was adopted at that time in Tamaulipas.73

The PNR in Mexico was primarily established to create “political stability” in the country after years of insecurity following the Mexican Revolution. 74 Portes Gil was the head of the PNR when it was formed and he was also president of the country at that time. He used his previous experience with the PSF to help build the new party, and the PSF was “subsumed” by the PNR in 1929. 75

When Lazaro Cardenas became president of Mexico in 1934, he embarked on a broad project to implement the social and political reforms of the 1917 Mexican constitution. He tried to “co-opt popular movements, to subordinate them to the state.” He supported labor and agrarian rights and he used state-led corporatist organizations to manage these movements. 76 Cardenas also nationalized Mexico’s oil industry following clashes between workers and foreign oil companies in Tamaulipas and the Gulf region. The government unionized the oil industry, as well. 77 In Tamaulipas, the Confederation of the Mexican Workers (CTM) union became the most


75 J. Justin Castro, Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938 (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 2016), 33.


powerful labor union in the state. Today, the state is considered the “birthplace of the modern organized labor movement” in Mexico. 78

In 1947, Mexico’s President Miguel Aleman Valdes shut down the state government in Tamaulipas and then re-organized it, although Portes Gil and his supporters had controlled the state until then. Aleman “used an economic and security crisis” to dissolve the government and he imposed a new political order there, which allowed him and the central government to seize control. This move created political instability in Tamaulipas and led to the further growth of corporatist organizations there, which were then managed by the federal government. As Tamaulipas urbanized in the 1960s, the Confederation of the Mexican Workers (CTM) union consolidated its “control over city and state politics” at that time, and powerful labor leaders were created in cities throughout the state. 79

Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA

In the 1960s, the maquiladora program started in Mexico, and many factories relocated to Tamaulipas. Maquiladoras are foreign-owned factories, which typically operate along the US-Mexican border. These companies were established in Mexico to reduce the high unemployment rate at that time. The industry later spread to other parts of Mexico. Maquiladora factories are considered “foreign enclaves” in the Mexican economic system. Raw materials are typically transported into Mexico from abroad, without paying duties. Products are then produced and exported out of the country at reduced costs. These types of factories exist in Mexico largely


79 Sabet, Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border, 70-71; Salinas, “Tamaulipas: Mafias, Caciques, and Civic-Political Culture,” 162-169.
because of their cheap operating costs, and the availability of low-cost Mexican labor. There are currently hundreds of maquiladora factories in major cities in Tamaulipas.  

The maquiladora industry generally thrives during periods of economic instability in Mexico since maquiladoras profit when the peso weakens and export and labor costs decrease. Local Mexican firms, however, tend to suffer when the economy is weak because they sell to domestic populations, and product demand usually goes down during economic depressions in Mexico.  

The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) provided an economic boost to the maquiladora industry in Tamaulipas, and increased the flow of products between Mexico and the US. As a result of NAFTA, countless shipments now pass between Tamaulipas and the US on a daily basis. It has become nearly impossible, as well, for US customs to check every shipment that enters from Mexico. Tamaulipas also has the highest number of international bridges between the US and Mexico. Since the enactment of NAFTA, massive “quantities of narcotics, migrants, guns, and other contraband” now move across the Rio Grande every day. The border between Tamaulipas and Texas is frequently called a “smugglers paradise.”  

Prior to the 2000 presidential elections in Mexico, the maquiladora industry in Tamaulipas had the highest rate of unionization in the country. In large cities in Tamaulipas  


unionization was nearly 100 percent, while the government-backed Confederation of the Mexican Workers (CTM) union had the most members. 83 In other parts of Mexico, however, the maquiladora industry is typically anti-union. In Tamaulipas, unions have successfully “pushed” to unionize every maquiladora in the state, according to Edward J. Williams. 84

Labor unions in Tamaulipas “flex their muscles” more than any other state in Mexico, and they are largely controlled by the government. Their activities are also directed by the governing elites in the state’s “highly centralized, semi-authoritarian system,” observes Williams. Local union leadership in Tamaulipas frequently collaborates with company management, as well, to reduce worker benefits. Non-union members in Mexico reportedly have greater job satisfaction than union members. Managers in the maquiladora industry, however, are not in a position to challenge local labor unions because they are usually foreign-owned and they have little local bargaining power. 85

In Mexico, “entrenched” labor union leaders were largely “hostile” to democratization before the 2000 presidential elections, notes Wayne Cornelius. Democracy was also obstructed in the state by the “authoritarian control of organized labor,” like some other parts of Mexico. There was also “heavy-handed, authoritarian control” of union workers in Tamaulipas, especially in the CTM, which was “under the thumb” of the government. 86 Tamaulipas was infiltrated, as

83 Otero, “Unions and Job Queuing in Mexico’s Maquiladoras,” 393-395.
86 Cornelius, “Mexico’s Delayed Democratization,” 64.
well, by “union corporativism” prior to the 2000 elections, which dominated most aspects of life, like local politics, social activities and civil society, maintains Salinas. 87

The maquiladora industry also controls the economy in many cities in Tamaulipas, although there is some economic diversification there, such as in Tampico with the petroleum industry. 88 The oil industry, however, is also unionized. In Tamaulipas, the strong “centralization of union representation in the CTM,” and the government support for labor unions, has allowed Tamaulipas’s unions to have “unequaled” power, compared to other states, observes Otero. 89

Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico

The historic 2000 presidential elections in Mexico did little to change the political situation in Tamaulipas. The PRI continued to dominate Tamaulipas and it won municipal and state elections by large margins until 2016. Tamaulipas symbolized the “corporatism and clientelism” that the PRI’s political system was able to create in Mexico during the twentieth century, according to Daniel Sabet. In most parts of Tamaulipas, the “norms of clientelism, co-option, and cynicism” ultimately blocked democracy. 90 Union bosses also controlled cities and manipulated the “union rank-and-file” for personal and political gain. 91 The governor of Tamaulipas, moreover, had difficulty controlling politics outside of Ciudad Victoria because unions had “enormous power and influence,” and they usually backed their own “entrenched interests.” 92

87 Salinas, “Tamaulipas: Mafias, Caciques, and Civic-Political Culture,” 164.
88 Williams, The Unionization of the Maquiladora Industry: The Tamaulipan Case in National Context, 14-17.
89 Otero, “Unions and Job Queuing in Mexico’s Maquiladoras,” 395.
92 Williams, The Unionization of the Maquiladora Industry: The Tamaulipan Case in National Context, 14-17.
During the twentieth century, political elections in Tamaulipas were not held in the “strict sense of fulfilling the requirements of democracy,” maintains Salinas. Instead the “internal selection” instruments of the PRI usually chose candidates before elections. Consequently, the local PRI was able to monopolize political power in Tamaulipas for decades, and the state became very important overall for the PRI. Labor bosses in Tamaulipas also maintained a “ham-fisted domination of the official party.” Some political reformers tried to affiliate with other political parties, like the Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Mexicana (PARM), but powerful CTM labor bosses usually dominated local politics and mobilized votes for the official party.

A lack of “countervailing,” political and socioeconomic powers in Tamaulipas ultimately allowed authoritarianism to dominate the state during the twentieth century. There are also no industrial elites or “agroindustrial” capitalists in the state, who could potentially challenge the hegemony of the union bosses. Even in the maquiladora industry in Tamaulipas, union bosses were deferred to. In Tamaulipas, wealth usually comes from “public sector activities,” along with “illicit” activities. The political influence of union bosses also “impedes free democratic processes,” like nowhere else, at least prior to the 2000 political elections, observes Salinas.

Many civil society organizations in Tamaulipas are considered “clientelistic,” as well, and they have an affiliation with the PRI or another minor political party. Some cities in

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94 Williams, The Unionization of the Maquiladora Industry: The Tamaulipan Case in National Context, 13,15; Sabet, Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border, 71-72.

95 Williams, The Unionization of the Maquiladora Industry: The Tamaulipan Case in National Context, 13.


97 Sabet, Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border, 72-75.
Tamaulipas have also developed “criminal enclaves” after years of government policies, which have only benefited a small sector of local society. This situation has eroded the safety of Tamaulipas’s local communities, and strengthened the state’s informal economy, which has also diminished the government’s ability to govern and collect taxes there. 98 Some believe that Tamaulipas is “ungovernable,” and essentially a “failed state,” comments Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera. Organized crime in Tamaulipas, is also sometimes seen as a “parallel government.” 99

The Institutional Capacity of the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas

Historically, the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas has been institutionally weak and doesn’t challenge authoritarianism. The strength and effectiveness of the church will be examined below.

Table 7-2. Tamaulipas I: Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Dependent Variable:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
<td>Whether the diocese or archdiocese is institutionally strong and effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-Optation by the Government or Elite Groups

The Catholic Church in Tamaulipas has had little autonomy or independence from the government mainly because the church developed in a historically different way there.

98 Grayson, The Executioner’s Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State they Created, xxv.

Tamaulipas was colonized during the enlightenment era in the mid-1700s, and the church’s role in the colonization process was very limited. Anticlericalism, along with other international influences, further reduced the church’s social and political role in the state. As a result, the church remains institutionally weak.

Tamaulipas had the lowest number of Catholic Churches in Mexico in 1900, while the amount of Protestant churches increased there. In the twentieth century, the church in Tamaulipas was mainly quiet and it did not oppose the government. The clergy also had little influence in local politics. Following the Mexican Revolution, socialist ideas spread throughout the state, which further weakened Catholicism there. Currently, the church and its clergy are at times targets of violence from criminal groups in Tamaulipas. The apparent lawlessness in Tamaulipas has further reduced the church’s autonomy and its capacity to challenge authoritarianism.

Networks: Strong and Enduring Church Networks, Which Were Typically Developed Prior to State Formation

Since the colonial era, the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas has had a very minor role in local society. This reduced the church’s influence and minimized its ability to create strong church networks. It hindered civil society development in the state, as well. Catholic Church networks continue to be extremely weak in Tamaulipas.

In the early twentieth century, there were also many international influences in Tamaulipas. Tampico was the most important city in the state after oil was discovered there, and foreign clubs and international organizations developed, as well, which were not tied to the


101 Sabet, Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border, 38-39.
Catholic Church. There were also other organizations in Tamaulipas, like Masonic Lodges and Protestant churches, which further weakened local church networks. Between 1910 and 1921, the population of Tampico increased from 23,000 to 150,000, due to the oil boom. The Catholic Church, however, continued to play a “minor role” in society, observes Norman Caulfield. Catholic unions also never established a “foothold” in the area, due to the church’s weakness in the state.102

**Policy Implementation: A High-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow Church Guidelines**

Vatican reforms and church initiatives appear to have been largely overlooked in Tamaulipas, due to the church’s powerlessness and dependence on the government for its survival. There was never a very strong social Catholic movement in Tamaulipas, and Rerum Novarum does not seem to have significantly affected the church there. The institutional weaknesses of the diocese were also perhaps too significant to support these types of major social and structural changes.

Vatican II does not seem to have greatly influenced the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas either. Civil society remains weak in Tamaulipas and it was mainly used as a vehicle for patron-client relationships and government-affiliated organizations or labor unions prior to the 2000 elections. The Catholic Church’s weak institutional capacity has likely limited its ability to support and embrace Vatican reforms and church initiatives.

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Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution

The Catholic Church in Tamaulipas appears constricted and controlled within civil society. The church and its clergy are also susceptible to violence and attacks from criminal organizations. Prior to the 2000 elections, civil society in Tamaulipas mainly consisted of hierarchal PRI-connected organizations with patron-client relationships. This undercuts the church’s ability to establish horizontal and egalitarian civil society organizations. This situation has likely eroded the public’s trust in the Catholic Church in Tamaulipas and hindered its ability to pursue its local objectives.

Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Church-Autonomous Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships

The number of Catholic Churches in Tamaulipas has always been very low, although the structure of the diocese was re-organized several times during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{103} There was only one church parish, however, in Tampico in the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{104} In 1958, the Tampico diocese was separated into two dioceses, one in Tampico and the other in Matamoros. In 1964 another diocese was created in Ciudad Victoria, and in 1989 a new diocese was established in Nuevo Laredo. These dioceses are connected to the Archdiocese of Monterrey in Nuevo Leon. Yet, despite four new separate church dioceses in the state, the church still seems oppressed by the government and local patron-client networks.


\textsuperscript{104} Caulfield, \textit{Mexican Workers and the State: From the Porfiriato to NAFTA}, 25.
Currently, there is very little civic engagement in Tamaulipas and the state is considered “stagnant” in that regard. ¹⁰⁵ The PRI and labor unions were also the main networking outlets prior to the 2000 elections. The government-backed union, Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), controlled all major cities in the state, while the church remained powerless. ¹⁰⁶ Tamaulipas had an ideal “mixture of corporatism and clientelism,” under the PRI controlled system, claims Daniel Sabet. ¹⁰⁷ Resident union “mafias” created localized power structures in Tamaulipas, which were usually affiliated with the PRI. ¹⁰⁸

Efforts to build up civil society in Tamaulipas have been mostly unsuccessful, and civil society networks are limited. Society ultimately fears “persecution” by criminal groups if they participate in independent civil society organizations.¹⁰⁹ Nuevo Laredo, which is a city in northern Tamaulipas, has been described as “highly clientelistic,” with a “closed political environment,” and a nonprofit sector that is “dependent” on the political arena. There are also less nonprofit organizations in Nuevo Laredo than other states, and these organizations are low “intensity,” with less institutionalization. Associational life in Nuevo Laredo is generally not autonomous either, and it is “highly dependent” on the PRI and local politics. In Nuevo Laredo, there are also a few professional and business-oriented organizations, but Tamaulipas’s long-


term one-party system generally created an inactive civil society prior to 2000, where the Catholic Church was consistently overshadowed and weak.\footnote{Sabet, \textit{Nonprofits and Their Networks: Cleaning the Waters along Mexico’s Northern Border}, 66-73; Sabet, “Thickening Civil Society: Explaining the Development of Associational Life in Mexico,” 415-419.}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The state case study of Tamaulipas provides an instructive model of a Catholic Church that has repeatedly chosen not to challenge the government, largely because of its institutional incapacity to do so. Tamaulipas was mainly a one-party state until 2016 when the PAN won the governorship for the first time in state history after several local PRI corruption scandals. Tamaulipas has a high crime rate and it grapples with major societal issues like drug trafficking, kidnapping, corruption and extreme crises in governance. \footnote{Salinas, “Tamaulipas: Mafias, Caciques, and Civic-Political Culture,” 161; Grayson, \textit{The Executioner’s Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State they Created}, 1-23.} In the colonial era, Tamaulipas was one of the last provinces to be colonized by the Spanish. As a result, the church’s missionary system was largely excluded from the colonization process. The church in Tamaulipas remains institutionally weak and it does not present a challenge to government authoritarianism.
CHAPTER 8
STATE OF HIDALGO:
A POOR STATE AND ITS PERSECUTED CATHOLIC CHURCH

Facts about Hidalgo

Catholic Church Challenge to Authoritarianism: Low level

Location: It is sixty miles northeast of Mexico City.

Population: 3,920,892 (2000 INEGI)

Capital: Pachuca

Indigenous Population: High indigenous population at 15.2% (2000 INEGI)

Colonization and Statehood: It was colonized in 1521. It became a state in 1869.

Religion: Pachuca is 80 % Catholic, and Hidalgo is 90% Catholic (2000 INEGI)

Economy: Hidalgo is considered one of the poorest states in Mexico.

Climate and Terrain: Hidalgo is a very mountainous state. Agriculture production is limited by poor soil quality and a lack of water.

Politics: The current governor of Hidalgo is from the PRI party. Every governor of this state has been a member of the PRI since the party’s foundation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8-1. Governor Election Results in the State of Hidalgo 1999 to 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elections in Hidalgo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
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<td>PRD/</td>
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<tr>
<td>PT</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAN/</td>
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<tr>
<td>VERDE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The mountainous and remote state of Hidalgo is located in central Mexico, sixty miles northeast of Mexico City. Hidalgo is one of the poorest and least developed states in the country and it has a high indigenous population. The state offers another example of a local Catholic Church that has mainly chosen not to challenge government authoritarianism. Hidalgo is largely dominated by powerful families, and it has one of the highest out-migration rates in Mexico. Politicians, business leaders and other religions have also undercut the Catholic Church in Hidalgo, which has significantly weakened it.  

Hidalgo was first declared a state by President Benito Juarez in 1869 to reward fellow Liberals for fighting the Conservatives in the War of the Reform, and during the French intervention in the mid-1800s. The state also embraced Liberalism and anticlericalism at that time. It was previously part of the expansive Aztec Empire and the State of Mexico. It was named after the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, who started Mexico’s movement for independence from Spain in 1810.  

Early in the nineteenth century, a large Protestant community of mine workers migrated to Hidalgo from England to work in the mines near the capital city of Pachuca. Their arrival brought a new religion to the area, which had a profound impact on the state. A Jewish settlement also existed near Pachuca in the colonial era. The region around Hidalgo was controlled by the rich and powerful Archdiocese of Mexico in Mexico City during the colonial period. At that time, some priests in this archdiocese were accused of mistreating parishioners,

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which is likely why Liberalism and anticlericalism were widely embraced in Hidalgo. The state did not have its first Catholic Church diocese until 1863, which occurred during a period of intense church-state conflict in Hidalgo.³

Historically, any attempt by the Catholic Church to challenge the government in Hidalgo has resulted in extreme reprimands by local government officials. Catholic clergy and bishops have also been exiled from the state if they strongly complained about the government, which has ultimately silenced them. Hidalgo is considered “a stronghold of caciquismo, where a small number of powerful families have managed to maintain political control,” claims Analiese Richard. In Hidalgo the PRI has “long dominated the political landscape both by patronage” and force.⁴ The Catholic Church in Hidalgo has, at times, also been co-opted by local elites.

This case study will focus primarily on the Catholic Church Diocese of Tulancingo, which is the oldest diocese in the state. It became an archdiocese in 2005. The Diocese of Huejutla, which is in the northern part of the state, will also be evaluated. Both dioceses are institutionally weak and they have never successfully challenged authoritarianism.

This chapter will examine six common historic events in Mexico to understand the specific development and historical trajectory of the Catholic Church in Hidalgo. These events include the 1). The Spanish Colonial Period 2). Independence from Spain and its Aftermath 3). The Mexican Revolution 4). The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI 5). Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA 6). Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico. Five


variables will then be analyzed to determine the institutional strength and effectiveness of the Catholic Church in Hidalgo and its capacity to challenge authoritarianism.

**Common Historic Events**

**The Spanish Colonial Period**

The state of Hidalgo was originally part of the vast Aztec Empire, which was also known as the Triple Alliance. This was a military confederation that conquered various communities throughout central Mexico beginning in the 1400s. The Aztec Empire was controlled by three city-states in the Valley of Mexico, which included Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco and Tlacopan. Through a complex system of tribute collection and trade, the Aztec Empire dominated a population of 5 million people and 77,000 square miles. The future state of Hidalgo was in the northern part of the Aztec Empire. It was later conquered in 1521 by the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes.  

Prior to the Aztec’s domination of the Hidalgo area, it was inhabited by the Toltecs, who established the largest civilization in central Mexico in 900 CE, with its headquarters in Tula in Hidalgo. The Aztecs claimed to be descendents of the Toltecs, who the Aztecs revered. The Aztecs saw the Toltecs as “superhuman,” wise and “morally superior” lords. They also adopted many of the same cultural practices as the Toltecs. The Toltecs, like the Aztecs, spoke Nahuatl. They created an advanced civilization, which lasted until the 1200s. The empire was eventually abandoned after repeated invasions from wild indigenous populations.  

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When the Spanish first arrived in Hidalgo in the 1500s they found a rural area that had silver mines, but mostly poor agriculture potential. The climate was mainly arid, as well, and it had poor soil quality in most areas. Hidalgo is one of the most mountainous states in Mexico and parts of it were isolated and inaccessible during the colonial era due to its rough terrain. Cattle ranches and maguey operations were also established in Hidalgo, while silver mines provided the Spanish with capital.  

An assortment of indigenous populations existed in Hidalgo in the colonial period. In the north, there was a large quantity of Nahuatl speakers, while the south has more Otomi speakers. Hidalgo’s “geographic heterogeneity” made it an “ethnic and linguistic patchwork,” with a lot of diversity.  

It has five main regions, which include the present capital of Pachuca in the south, where many of the silver mines are; the southern plains of Apan; the isolated and fertile Huasteca mountain region in the north; the dry and arid Mezquital Valley in the west; and the agriculture and textile region of the Valley of Tulancingo in the east.  

The different regions in Hidalgo had little interaction with each other in the colonial era due to poor transportation and tremendous distance. Therefore, they “related separately” as individual economic enclaves to the capital in Mexico City. Hidalgo supplied raw materials to the capital, such as meat, pulque, silver and wool.  

Mexico City was the largest city in Latin

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9 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 64.
11 Richard, The Unsettled Sector: NGOs and the Cultivation of Democratic Citizenship in Rural Mexico, 17.
America during the colonial period. It had a population of nearly 170,000 in 1800, which was higher than Rio de Janeiro or Lima, Peru.  

Franciscans and Augustinian friars were sent to Hidalgo in the colonial era to evangelize it, but the area was very “inhospitable” due to its mountainous terrain and arid climate, which made evangelization extremely challenging. Jesuits owned haciendas in the western Mezquital Valley, as well, but the haciendas in this area were usually not profitable because of poor soil quality and the lack of water there. These issues ultimately prevented the development of large-scale agriculture enterprises in the Mezquital Valley. The haciendas which the Jesuits owned, were sold after they were expelled from Mexico in 1767.

In the Mezquital Valley, the Catholic Church had “only marginal success in penetrating the region,” claims Leah Sarat. This was mainly due to the “rugged nature of the landscape” and the area’s isolation. There were also frequent uprisings by indigenous populations, who fought to “defend territory against external encroachment.” The Otomi “retreated to the most marginal lands” in order to maintain their autonomy, which kept them insulated from society. Indigenous groups rebelled against the Spanish, as well, in other parts of Hidalgo, and they sometimes protested the payment of taxes, which the Catholic Church also collected.

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By the mid-1700s, most of the Franciscan and Augustinian monasteries around Hidalgo were taken over by the expansive and distant Archdiocese of Mexico. 17 Hidalgo did not have its own Catholic Church diocese until 1863, which was several years before it became a state in 1869. Prior to that, the Archdiocese of Mexico in Mexico City dominated the region. The Archdiocese of Mexico was the “richest and most populous” church district in Latin America at that time, and it had the highest quantity of tithe revenues. 18 It included most of central Mexico, and covered the future states of Mexico, Morelos, Guerrero and Hidalgo. The Archdiocese of Mexico also supervised church activity in Hidalgo. In total, the Archdiocese of Mexico had 237 parishes around central Mexico, and a population of over one million people. 19

The popularity of the Catholic Church in many rural areas in the territory of the Archdiocese of Mexico was surprisingly low during the colonial era, observes T.G. Powell. This was largely due to alleged priest misconduct in this archdiocese. Priests were routinely accused by parishioners of prioritizing financial gain and neglecting and mistreating them. The archdiocese was also criticized for being inefficient and “lax” in its supervisory duties. As a result, some priests did not “even pretend” to live “in accordance with prescribed moral standards,” while many impoverished parishes in central Mexico weren’t able to afford a resident priest. 20 Parishioners were also typically required to pay high fees to receive religious services. Some priests refused to “bury the dead,” as well, if a grieving family did not have sufficient


funds. This “ruthless squeezing of pesos from poverty-stricken peasants” was routinely condemned by Liberals in central Mexico.  

Parishioners in the Archdiocese of Mexico also experienced frustrations when they appealed to the Archdiocese in Mexico City for assistance and they were apparently disregarded. In the Hidalgo area, parishioners also complained of excessive fees and priest issues, which damaged the reputation of the Catholic Church there. The Archdiocese in Mexico City was accused of failing to “police its clergy,” as well. Some rural priests in the Archdiocese of Mexico also reported poor treatment by their own parishioners, who claimed they treated them with hostility. Meanwhile, a number of priests in rural central Mexico were involved in major scandals due to their “depraved, violent” temperaments and misconduct, maintains Powell.

During the War of the Reform in the mid-1800s, the unpopularity of the Catholic Church in the region of the Archdiocese of Mexico became apparent when many in the Hidalgo area chose not to defend the church during the conflict. In the countryside in central Mexico, Mexican clergymen had few supporters due to the “delinquency and irresponsibility” of some of its priests. Many also sided with Liberals, instead of the Catholic Church-backed Conservatives, during the various church-state conflicts in the mid-1800s. The overwhelming public support in central Mexico for the Liberals demonstrates the church’s standing in this part of Mexico at that time, as opposed to other regions. In Guanajuato, for example, many in society vigorously fought on the side of the local Catholic Church, which was part of a different diocese.

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In the colonial era in Hidalgo, the economy was largely dominated by the mining industry and a hacienda system, which focused mainly on metal production. By the 16\textsuperscript{th} century mining had become an integral part of the local economy. Two of the earliest and most productive mining centers in Mexico were located in Pachuca and Real del Monte, which is about sixty miles from Mexico City. By the eighteenth century, mining ventures in Pachuca were well-organized and profitable.\textsuperscript{25} However, workers frequently complained of poor treatment by mine owners, and therefore many joined the popular insurgency for Mexico’s independence in 1810.\textsuperscript{26}

**Independence from Spain and its Aftermath**

The independence period was politically and economically unstable in Hidalgo. Before the war, the mines in Hidalgo also flooded. The war for independence brought new destruction to local mines, and improved technology was needed to pump the water out. During the war for independence, some mines in Hidalgo closed, as well, and hacienda production slowed, which created economic stagnation there.\textsuperscript{27} Guanajuato, however, suffered considerably more than Hidalgo at that time because the war started there. Consequently, many miners moved from Guanajuato to look for work in the mines of Pachuca and Real del Monte, “where prospects seemed brighter.”\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{26} Coerver, *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History*, 213-214.


In the 1820s, following Mexico’s independence, Protestant miners from England began to migrate to Hidalgo after a new mining venture was established in London called the British Real del Monte Company. In 1824, this company started to extract silver from the Real del Monte mines, close to Pachuca. Real del Monte became one of Mexico’s most “renowned silver camps.” The British company introduced new technologies, as well, like steam-driven pumps, which removed excess water. The mines, along with various haciendas in the area, were primarily owned by Pedro Jose Romero de Terreros, the third count of Regla. The British company leased the mines from him, and in return he provided the company with local political patronage in the post-independence era, which was a volatile period in the country. The British Real del Monte Company existed in Hidalgo for the next twenty-five years and excavated millions of dollars of silver. It also lost money, which ultimately led to the company’s demise. 29

The influx of English professional miners in Real del Monte left a lasting mark on the state, which had been largely insulated from outside influences during the colonial era. Their incursion was like another foreign colonization in the area, only a few years after the Spanish had left. The miners were mainly from Cornwall, England. By the 1840s the British Real del Monte Company typically had about 80 British staff members at a time working in the town of Real del Monte, and these workers also brought their families there. This created a massive English colony in Hidalgo, which had an enormous impact on the area. The mining company also helped re-build the town of Real del Monte. 30


In Real del Monte, the population grew significantly due to the influx of English miners. The British mining company improved working conditions, as well, and introduced new institutions like schools, medical clinics and banks, which were based on a British system. The company also paid for an English school master to work at a school outside of Real del Monte. The mining company built and maintained roads in Hidalgo, as well, which improved transportation in the region. Some of the Cornish miners became very wealthy and influential in the state, and they remained in Hidalgo permanently. Cornish miners continued to congregate in Hidalgo during the twentieth century due to the abundance of mines there.

The Cornish miners in Hidalgo were Protestants, although the Catholic Church was the only officially recognized religion in Mexico at the time of their arrival. Miners were therefore instructed to remain “politically neutral” and to respect the religion of their host country. However, the area’s isolation and the large presence of Protestant miners and their families, significantly altered Hidalgo’s religious and social dynamic. Hidalgo became the most Protestant state in Mexico in the late nineteenth century, which was mainly attributed to the influence of the Cornish miners, who were Methodists. The miners apparently helped break the religious “prejudice” of the Catholic Church in the state.

Some of the Cornish miners were also Protestant preachers and they evangelized the local population. Other miners donated money to build Protestant churches in the state. Francis Rule, one of the wealthiest Cornish miners in Hidalgo, helped finance a large Methodist Church in the

center of Pachuca, which was completed in 1876. This church still stands in Pachuca and it is located one block from the downtown area. Pachuca became the “headquarters” for Methodism in Hidalgo, and the religion rapidly spread throughout the state. 35

Work shortages in the British-operated mines also impacted local society in Hidalgo as Cornish miners started to work alongside Mexican miners, who were typically hired by the company. There were occasional clashes, however, between British and Mexican workers. 36 British supervisors generally distrusted Mexican workers, and they were reluctant to allow them to use their imported machinery or give them “positions of trust,” according to Robert Randall. 37 They fought, as well, over a form of payment called the “partido,” which required mining companies in Mexico to pay a portion of worker wages in metal, which the British company objected to. 38

Mines in Pachuca and Real del Monte were originally acquired in the eighteenth century by Pedro Romero de Terreros, the first count of Regla, who was born in Spain. They continued to stay in the Romero de Terreros family for generations. The first count of Regla was the grandfather of the third count of Regla, who leased the mines to the British company in 1824. The first count of Regla was Catholic and a self-proclaimed philanthropist. However, unlike most Mexican mining magnates of that era, Romero did not build Catholic Churches in Hidalgo, even though mine owners usually donated a portion of their wealth to build impressive churches, like in Guanajuato. It is unclear why Romero de Terreros did not want to leave an “architectural

mark” in Hidalgo, but it might have been because he lived in Mexico City and Queretaro, and when he was in Hidalgo he did not stay in Real del Monte or Pachuca. 39

A Catholic parish priest was also blamed for a huge scandal that erupted in Real del Monte in 1766, which apparently damaged the church’s local standing there. The priest was accused of igniting massive riots that took place in the mining camps at that time. Consequently, the priest was evicted from the area, which perhaps explains why Romero de Terreros was reluctant to build Catholic Churches in Hidalgo, as this might have given the clergy unnecessary influence over his workers. He was apparently very troubled by the strikes, and he pushed for the expulsion of the Catholic priest, who was also defamed as a womanizer. Romero de Terreros had enormous power in Real Del Monte, which “cannot be exaggerated,” insists Doris M. Ladd. He had more money than anyone in the area and he was the largest employer there. 40

The first Catholic Church diocese in Hidalgo was not built until 1863, and it was placed in the remote town of Tulancingo. It was managed by the Archdiocese of Mexico, which had generally controlled the area since the colonial era. The location of the new church diocese was a long distance from the important mining centers of Pachuca and Real del Monte. A high bishop turnover rate in the Tulancingo diocese also “undermined” its growth after its establishment. Between 1885 and 1921, there were six different bishops there. Tulancingo was considered very politically and economically “irrelevant,” as well, notes Ben Fallaw. This further weakened the

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church’s influence in Hidalgo, particularly as Protestantism spread in the state’s capital of Pachuca.  

Hidalgo was created as a state by Benito Juárez in 1869 to reward local Liberals for fighting in the War of the Reform, and during the French intervention. Liberalism and anticlericalism were popular ideologies in Hidalgo, which further weakened the Catholic Church’s importance in the state. The first Catholic bishop in Tulancingo was Juan Bautista Ormaechea y Ernaiz, who was in power from 1863 to 1884. He was a staunch opponent of the Reform Laws and spoke out against Protestantism and Freemasonry, which were growing in Hidalgo. He also issued a “treatise” in 1877 to warn Mexicans against the “invasion” of Freemasonry and Protestantism in the state.

Bishop Ormaechea supported the Conservative Party and the French intervention in Mexico because he believed the French would defend the interests of the Catholic Church. When Archduke Maximilian visited Tulancingo in 1865, he also met with the bishop there. Ormaechea was a member of a governing council that sought to establish a French monarchy in Mexico. When the French were finally expelled from Mexico in 1867, Ormaechea was also forcefully removed from Hidalgo due to his staunch support for the French and the Conservatives.

After the expulsion of Ormaechea, there were a number of different, short-term bishops in the Tulancingo diocese over the next several decades. The second bishop of Tulancingo was

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41 Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, 64.


Agustin de Jesus Torres y Hernandez, who served for only four years from 1885 to 1889, until his death. Next there was Jose Maria Armas y Rosales, who was bishop until 1898. Then for several years Maximiano Reynoso y del Corral was bishop. 45

Throughout the nineteenth century Hidalgo was mainly a Liberal stronghold, and the population supported the secular philosophies of Benito Juarez. The state was actually a pioneer in Mexico’s Liberal movement likely due to the area’s early issues with the Archdiocese of Mexico, and the local impact of Protestantism there. Pachuca was the “cradle of Hidalgan liberalism,” and the northern mountainous parts of the state also embraced Protestantism and Liberalism. The only area where the Catholic Church had any influence was in the remote city of Tulancingo. 46 Liberals in Mexico believed the Catholic Church created “superstition and backwardness” and “saddled Indians” with religious expenses and debt. Liberals also saw local indigenous populations as “caught in a state of static dependency” with the church. 47

During the various Liberal-Conservative clashes in Mexico in the mid-1800s, Hidalgo was a key “battleground” state. The state’s immense mining wealth, liberal leanings and proximity to Mexico City made it an obvious target for hostilities. 48 However, before the War of the Reform, many in Hidalgo already supported church-state separation in Mexico. In the northern Hidalgo town of Jacala, its mayor and citizens gathered in 1856 to ratify “el acta de Jacala,” which endorsed anticlericalism, church-state separation and freedom of worship, prior to

45 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 64.
48 Coerver, Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History, 214.
Hidalgo becoming a state. This act offered early support for the Reform Laws and the 1857 constitution. 49

After Hidalgo became a state, Protestantism continued to spread throughout the state, particularly within the ranchero communities in the northern mountainous part of Hidalgo. In the 1870s, the city of Pisafloros in the north had a Protestant congregation with more than one hundred members. This anti-hierarchal religion “appealed to the mostly small to medium sized ranch owners” in the isolated mountain regions of Hidalgo. Protestantism was also popular because it “eroded the vertical class structure,” which was associated with “colonial-era hierarchy and traditional peasant-landlord social relations,” claims Mark Saad Saka. 50 This impoverished area of Hidalgo had very few Catholic Churches, as well, due to its remoteness. 51

The Reform Laws, which were passed in the mid-1800s in Mexico, ultimately had a major impact on Hidalgo. Some large haciendas and many indigenous communities lost land at that time because these laws were widely embraced by local Liberals in Hidalgo. An estimated two-thirds of indigenous communities lost access to their agriculture land in the state due to the Reform Laws, which forced them to move to the city or to work on haciendas or in the silver mines. Hidalgo’s new wealthy miners and merchants typically purchased the available real estate, and created smaller haciendas and cattle ranches with it. Indigenous populations who lost land then were required to pay for access to their old land if they wanted to remain there. This made Hidalgo’s indigenous populations extremely dependent on landowners, and the state


50 Saka, For God and Revolution: Priest, Peasant, and Agrarian Socialism in the Mexican Huasteca, 119-120.

developed a reputation for “feudal backwardness.” The Catholic Church diocese in Tulancingo also lost property due to the Reform Laws, and as a result it forged alliances with local hacienda owners to quiet the landless poor in exchange for church chapels.52

In the isolated mountainous regions of northern Hidalgo there were generally two classes of people after the Reform Laws. There was an upper class, which consisted mainly of landowning farmers, and there was a lower class that included landless, wage laborers. The impoverished group rented plots of land from the farmers, who they were typically dependent on due to their extreme economic insecurity. Factionalism also existed within the upper classes over land issues and political power, and there was a “lack of solidarity” among the landless poor, as well. After the Mexican Revolution, another class emerged called “middle peasants,” who were minor agriculture producers in Hidalgo, who generally grew coffee. 53

Landowners, who owned small to medium size plots of land in Hidalgo’s northern mountainous region, were usually called rancheros. These landholders typically acquired property as a result of the Reform Laws. They were generally anticlerical Liberals and members of the upper class. 54 Ranchero communities also existed in the states of Guanajuato, Michoacán and Jalisco, but in those areas they tended to be “strongly Catholic,” while rancheros in Hidalgo and Guerrero were “traditionally liberal” and anticlerical, notes Alan Knight. 55 The rise of the ranchero class in Mexico was triggered by the Reform Laws, which resulted in the government’s


seizure of vast amounts of land previously linked to indigenous communities, church properties and large haciendas. 56

In the mid to late 1800s, migrants from other parts of Mexico started to flock to the isolated northern region of Hidalgo to escape “political persecution.” 57 The area’s anticlerical and liberal reputation appealed to “Liberal sympathizers” from more conservative regions of Mexico. Newcomers to the area were also typically “followers of Benito Juarez’s” philosophies, like the current residents. 58 Farms and cattle ranches were developed for commercial use at that time, and the area also attracted day laborers from different parts of Hidalgo. 59

During the Porfirio Diaz era, attempts were made to increase agriculture and mining production in Hidalgo, and to improve education there. 60 Poor working conditions, however, produced unrest in the mining camps, and there was continuous fighting over lost land in the indigenous communities. In an effort to force stability and economic growth, Diaz urged local leaders in Hidalgo to “quell dissent.” With Diaz’s blessing, a family of brothers controlled the state from 1877 to 1897. The Cravioto brothers alternated as governor, and “provided the firm hand” needed for “crushing those who fought for the return of lands.” Dozens were killed during

56 Ian Jacobs, Ranchero Revolt: The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1982), 42.


60 Victoria Brocca Andrade, Historia Regional de Hidalgo: Perfil Socioeconomic (Mexico, DF: Editorial Limusa S.A. De C.V., 2000), 32.
this time period. Porfirio Diaz later installed Pedro L. Rodriguez as governor, who was more conservative than the Cravioto brothers, which offended local Liberals.

A large quantity of social clubs were created in Hidalgo prior to the Mexican Revolution to protest the lack of civil liberties in the state and to oust Porfirio Diaz, who was very unpopular in Hidalgo. Anti-reelection clubs, like the Benito Juarez Club, were formed at that time. These types of clubs played a key role in the nomination of Francisco Madero for president. Liberal associations and clubs had been popular in Hidalgo since the early 1800s and they were at the forefront of the anti-Diaz resistance movement there. Pachuca was regarded as a hub for Mexican Liberalism, and Hidalgo and San Luis Potosi had the highest number of Liberal clubs in Mexico at that time.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, Catholic Church activity still was mainly concentrated in the Tulancingo area and the church didn’t have a major impact on the state. The church diocese, however, held two congresses prior to the Mexican Revolution to discuss local agriculture and labor issues. At that time, the bishop, Jose Mora y del Rio, who was in power from 1901 to 1907, addressed the high rate of alcoholism among local workers and their lack of moral judgement and technical skills. The congresses also discussed how to improve old-fashioned farming methods in Tulancingo, which were hindering production.

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64 Richard, *The Unsettled Sector: NGOs and the Cultivation of Democratic Citizenship in Rural Mexico*, 30, 40-42.
The agriculture conferences were a rare attempt by the diocese in Tulancingo to become involved in local community issues. The meetings were attended by landowners, ranchers, church officials and civil authorities. Indigenous populations, however, were largely blamed by the church for the agriculture issues in Hidalgo. The church also urged hacienda owners to reconnect with the Catholic Church and to be better moral examples for workers. However, it doesn’t appear that hacienda owners followed the church’s paternalistic advice, and worker discontent continued to grow in Hidalgo, which was “brutally put down” by the government. 65

**The Mexican Revolution**

During the Mexican Revolution, Hidalgo was not the site of major fighting, but it played a key preliminary role in mobilizing people and disseminating revolutionary ideology before it started. Mobilization in Hidalgo occurred largely through Liberal clubs, Masonic lodges and other local civic associations, which were popular in the state. Criticism of Diaz also spread through local newspapers and via labor and student groups. 66 During the revolution, Jose Juan de Jesus Herrera y Pina was the bishop in Tulancingo, but he spent most of his time exiled in Castroville, Texas, where he created a seminary. 67

The influx of Protestant Cornish miners in Hidalgo in the nineteenth century contributed significantly to the growth of Liberal and non-Catholic institutions in the state prior to the revolution. Non-Catholic moral principles were deeply entrenched in Hidalgo, as well, which helped build local support for the revolution. Diaz was disliked by local Liberals in Hidalgo because of his weak application of the country’s Reform Laws, and his conciliatory attitude

66 Vergara, “Los Masones y La Revolución Mexicana en el Estado de Hidalgo,” 1-10.
toward the Catholic Church. The future president, Francisco Madero, however, had wide support in Hidalgo. 68

Masonic lodges and other similar civic associations were very popular with Cornish miners in Hidalgo. Masonic lodges and other similar social organizations were seen as local “surrogates” for Cornish trade unions and social clubs outside of Cornwall. They provided this group with “solidarity and security” in new surroundings, notes Philip Payton. In the nineteenth century Masonic lodges were also an important part of life in Cornwall, England. They produced an international network, as well, and upon arrival to a new mining site, Cornish miners always established a Masonic Lodge and a private burial ground, which was separate from the Catholic Church. The Cornish also practiced a form of “extended nepotism,” where local mining captains “reserved” the best job for the next Cornish miner. 69 Cornish miners in Hidalgo built their own Protestant temples and schools, as well, and they spread the religion throughout the state. 70

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, landowning farmers and merchants in the mountainous northern region of Hidalgo, were also “united in their opposition” to Diaz. This area was “consistently liberal” and anticlerical, and many also participated in military campaigns during the revolution. There were no indigenous uprisings during the revolution, however, in this part of Hidalgo, due to the close paternalistic relationship between landowners and rural workers there. Landowners and merchants also controlled most of the municipal posts and political positions in the area, and therefore they controlled local politics. 71

68 Vergara, “Los Masones y La Revolución Mexicana en el Estado de Hidalgo,” 1-5, 13.
70 Vergara, “Los Masones y La Revolución Mexicana en el Estado de Hidalgo,” 1-5.
The Post-Revolution Period and the Rise of the PRI

After the Mexican Revolution ended, landowning farmers and merchants in the northern mountainous areas of Hidalgo began to profit from the PRI’s new political patronage networks in that area. This sector of the population dominated local-level politics there, and they used political participation to gain access to external resources. The region ultimately became an important base of support for the PRI. Local indigenous populations, however, usually did not own land or participate in politics in this area. Land reform was limited there, as well, and done mainly to benefit landowners.\textsuperscript{72} New agrarian committees were also formed, but they tended to be dominated by landowning farmers and politicians, who then were able to control land reform in the area. The poor in Hidalgo mostly remained landless after the revolution.\textsuperscript{73}

In 1922, a new Catholic Church diocese was established in the northern town of Huejutla, which became the state’s second church diocese. The diocese had the highest population of Nahuatl speakers in Mexico. Prior to its foundation, the Catholic Church was weak in this area. This part of Hidalgo “did not have much use for the institutional church or its dogmas” claims Ben Fallaw.\textsuperscript{74} In the colonial era, parts of the Huejutla municipality were also controlled by large haciendas, which did not build Catholic Church chapels or hold religious festivals. Neighboring villages did not use a civil-religious systems either. In the southern part of the Huejutla municipality, however, there were some designated Nahuatl indigenous villages.\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{73} Schryer, \textit{The Rancheros of Pisafloros: The History of a Peasant Bourgeoisie in Twentieth-Century Mexico}, 111-112.

\textsuperscript{74} Fallaw, \textit{Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico}, 63-66.

The first bishop in the Huejutla diocese was Jose de Jesus Manriquez y Zarate, who arrived there in 1923. He also learned to speak Nahuatl in order to communicate with local populations. The bishop, however, made little attempt to change the established socioeconomic order in the area, and he mostly viewed the Nahuatl culture with “condescension and concern.” He created a “subordinate” set of lay institutions, as well, for indigenous populations to participate in. Moreover, the diocese was largely dependent on local elites for its continued existence. Prior to the establishment of the new diocese, there had been little contact with the Catholic Church in the Huejutla area or the Huasteca region. During the Cristero Rebellion there was also no fighting in this area due to the weakness of the church there. 

In 1926, after only a few short years in the new Huejutla diocese, Bishop Manriquez was exiled from Hidalgo, and sent to the US after criticizing the federal government for its anticlerical views and support for socialist education. The bishop’s opinions made him unwelcome in Hidalgo and he remained a refugee in the US until 1944, although he resigned from his post in 1939. Manriquez’s exile was the longest expulsion of any bishop in Mexican history. Successive priests in this diocese were perhaps reluctant to speak out against government authoritarianism due to their fears of forced removal. The diocese became very conservative and conciliatory towards the government, like the diocese in Tulancingo.

A few decades after Huejutla’s bishop was exiled from Hidalgo, another member of the local Catholic Church clergy was expelled from Pisaflorres in the 1960s, which is a municipality.

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76 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 63-71.
in the northern part of the state. Padre Jesus was a new parish priest there, who quickly threatened the PRI’s local control. The priest spoke out about the “communist tendencies” of the PRI and introduced “new sources of financial aid” for peasants and landowning farmers. He also started an independent peasant union in the area, which angered the local PRI because they usually controlled peasant and agrarian associations there. Adversaries of the controversial Catholic priest tried to have him removed from the area. Eventually he was ordered by church officials to leave after it was determined that he had accepted donations from the American Embassy to build a local hospital, which would provide birth control. At that time, his independent peasant union was promptly shut down, and the area once again returned to the status quo. 79

In the Mezquital Valley, in the western part of Hidalgo, the economy started to improve there after the Mexican Revolution due to a new irrigation system, which was constructed by the government. Consequently, commercial agriculture operations increased in this area. A new oil refinery was also built in Tula in the late 1970s. 80 Large landholders in the Mezquital Valley also began to monopolize land and employment opportunities in this area. They controlled local politics, as well, and the rural indigenous population, and they made important decisions on political posts like municipal president and ejido commissioner. This influence allowed them to gain substantial power and wealth in the area, and strong local patron-client relationships were established.81


80 Sarat, Fire in the Canyon: Religion, Migration, and the Mexican Dream, 11, 31-32;

81 Luis Roniger, Hierarchy and Trust in Modern Mexico and Brazil (New York, NY: Praeger, 1990), 64-65.
In the poor agriculture and textile region of Tulancingo, the Catholic Church continued to be institutionally weak in the post-revolutionary period. 82 The church exercised more “political weight” there than other parts of the state, but the PRI started to dominate the area, as well. 83 After the revolution, the recovery of the diocese in Tulancingo was, however, slow. From 1921 to 1932, Vicente Castellanos y Nunez was bishop. He brought in new priests from Spain and France to fill empty clerical positions, but this created friction with the Mexican priesthood. During the Cristero Rebellion, Tulancingo was largely quiet. 84

The Catholic Church diocese in Tulancingo typically operated “without much direction” in the twentieth century, according to Fallaw. It lacked strong leadership and resources, and it was institutionally weak. Priests also had “little enthusiasm” for church reforms or Vatican initiatives. There were three attempts, for instance, to start a Catholic Action chapter in the diocese between 1930 and 1936, but they all failed. Finally in 1936 a chapter was established, but it never grew into a hub for civic action largely because of Hidalgo’s anticlerical atmosphere. Local priests also anticipated a “dim future” for the Catholic Action chapter due to the unfavorable conditions in Hidalgo. 85

When a new bishop, Luis Maria Altamirano y Bulnes, arrived in Tulancingo in 1933 he was quickly incarcerated by the federal government after conducting official pastoral visits in Hidalgo, which were not permitted by the Mexican constitution at that time. This incident,

82 Ashley Dyan Ross, A Virtuous Cycle: Tracing Democratic Quality through Equality, PhD Dissertation (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University, 2010), 99-100.
83 Richard, The Unsettled Sector: NGOs and the Cultivation of Democratic Citizenship in Rural Mexico, 18-19.
84 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 64-66.
85 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 90-98.
however, invoked little reaction from the local Catholic Church. After Miguel Dario Miranda y Gomez was named bishop of the Tulancingo diocese in 1937, he arrived “incognito” because he heard Masonic Lodges controlled the area. There was also an insufficient number of priests in the diocese, and the quality of religious instruction was considered poor. Miranda studied the Mason’s influence on the diocese, and debated whether to change the seminary’s location to another state. Instead he sent students to a different seminary in Hidalgo, and he recruited priests from outside the area. He attempted to increase community participation for the diocese, as well. He served in Tulancingo until 1955 and was later archbishop of Mexico.

After Miranda’s departure from the Tulancingo diocese, the next bishop, Adalberto Almeida y Merino, arrived in 1956 and he served only six years. He attended Vatican II, but doesn’t appear to have used these principles in Hidalgo. In his future assignment in Chihuahua, however, he was considered an extremely transformative archbishop. The institutional weakness of the Tulancingo diocese likely prevented him from fully embracing Vatican II in Hidalgo. Future bishops in the diocese included Jose Esaul Robles Jimenez, who served from 1962 to 1974, and Pedro Aranda Diaz-Munoz, who was bishop until 2008.

In Huejutla, the local Catholic Church diocese had a very difficult time recovering after its first bishop, Jose de Jesus Manriquez y Zarate, was forcefully exiled to the US in 1926. The diocese was without a bishop for many years due to his absence. The next bishop, Manuel Jeronimo Yerena y Camarena, didn’t start until 1940, but remained until 1963. The diocese at

86 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 90-98.
87 Francisco Belgodere and Guillermo Ma Havers, Obispos Mexicanos del Siglo XX (Guadalajara, Jalisco: Libros Catolicos, 1994), 177-185.
that time had an insufficient number of priests and continued to be institutionally weak. In 1945 there was only one priest per every 23,000 people, out of its 450,000 population, which was the third worst ratio in Mexico. 89

In 1963, Bartolome Carrasco Briseno was named bishop of the Huejutla diocese, but he only stayed a couple years. He was considered “conservative” in Hidalgo, but later as Archbishop of Oaxaca he was a strong supporter of human rights. 90 Serafin Vasquez Elizalde was bishop in Huejutla from 1968 to 1977. At that time, a few Catholic priests started to speak out about the exploitation of the landless poor and other local agrarian issues in the area. Some peasants were also killed following protests over land issues. Local priests were critical of land owners after the violence. 91 Juan de Dios Caballero Reyes was bishop of Huejutla from 1978 to 1993, and next Salvador Martinez Perez served until 2009. A third Catholic Church diocese was established in Hidalgo in the city of Tula in 1961. 92

**Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA**

As one of the poorest states in Mexico, the passage of NAFTA in 1994 significantly impacted the state of Hidalgo. New land privatization laws resulted in more land being taken over in rural agriculture communities. At that time, residents from Hidalgo began to migrate to the US to find work because of the state’s lack of economic opportunities. By 2000, Hidalgo had Mexico’s second highest out-migration rate to the US. Mexico’s economic liberalization policies in the mid-1990s also resulted in the reduction of government subsidies for Hidalgo’s rural

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farmers, which created further insecurity in the countryside. Indigenous farmers also had trouble competing with reduced prices for corn, coffee and other agriculture commodities, as foreign companies began to offer their products within Mexico.  

After the passage of NAFTA, small-scale agriculture production was also “neglected” by the government. This left members of the rural population in Hidalgo with “little choice but to seek their livelihoods in agribusiness, urban wage labor, and US migration,” explains Sarat. By 2000, some towns in Hidalgo, such as those in the Mezquital Valley, had equal parts of its citizens living in the US. As millions of dollars a month in remittances began to flow into Hidalgo from family members and friends in the US, local residents started to rely on these funds for survival. Now small farms in Hidalgo are often subsidized by US remittances rather than government programs. Changes in the countryside in Hidalgo have also resulted in a growing number of young people “who see no future for themselves” in the state’s rural areas. They are skeptical, as well, that political change can occur at the voting booth. Therefore, they frequently “vote with their feet,” and head to the US instead to find work, claims Richard.

The high out-rate, and then in-migration from Hidalgo to the US and back, has also resulted in new forms of religious engagement in the state. Pentecostalism, for example, has become an important new religion in the Mezquital Valley. The religion was spread mainly via

93 Sarat, Fire in the Canyon: Religion, Migration, and the Mexican Dream, 15, 77.
94 Sarat, Fire in the Canyon: Religion, Migration, and the Mexican Dream, 77-83.
family members and friends, who became acquainted with it in the US. As Protestantism grew in the area, changes have also been made to civil-religious systems in the Mezquital Valley.

Catholics and Protestants now serve together in committee-based local government systems, and each religion has its own festivals. 98

**Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico**

Hidalgo continues to be one of the most “impoverished, and overlooked states” in Mexico, according to Richard. It is also mainly a one-party state and the PRI has dominated it since the party’s foundation. The party has created a strong niche for itself in Hidalgo largely through its control of various corporatist organizations, which are managed by the government. 99

The Hidalgo government also nationalized the mining industry in the mid-1900s, after a long period of foreign management. This allowed the government, under PRI leadership, to gain significant control of Hidalgo’s most important economic industry, which became depleted of minerals in some areas. 100

In many parts of Hidalgo, agrarian reform has also been mostly disregarded. In the northern part of Hidalgo, the lack of land reform has created poverty and inequity. Landowners there were mostly unaffected by agrarian reform until at least the 1970s. Strong patron-client relationships were also established in this area between the landless poor and landowners, who


controlled politics, employment opportunities and land. The poor rural farmers therefore were required to be subservient to the wealthy landowners, who usually backed the PRI. 101

The landless poor in Huejutla and other parts of northern Hidalgo, eventually became radicalized in the 1970s due to the lack of agrarian reform there. The emergence of new Protestant sects and other religious influences, also helped to intensify land issues in this area. There were many different Protestant religions in this region including Seventh Day Adventist, Baptists and Pentecostal sects, which educated peasants on the inequalities in society. Peasants were typically either jailed or severely reprimanded by officials if they complained about land. When local peasants started to protest, this triggered a violent reaction from landowners. Many of the landless poor were jailed or killed at that time. By the end of the 1970s, some were able to acquire land at that time, although the area remained predominately under the control of wealthy landowners. 102

In the municipality of Tulancingo, citizen organizations and grassroots movements were largely missing there during the twentieth century, and the area lacked a “participatory culture,” according to Ross. Most communities in Tulancingo were also rural and poor, or lower or middle class. Residents had limited budgets, as well, and they were typically too busy working to challenge local power structures. Tulancingo appears, however, to have a more competitive party system than other parts of Hidalgo. In 1999 the PAN won a municipal election in Tulancingo for

101 Schryer, Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico, 94-96; Richard, “Mediating Dilemmas: Local NGO’s and Rural Development in Neoliberal Mexico,” 169; Schryer, The Rancheros of Pisaflóres: The History of a Peasant Bourgeoisie in Twentieth-Century Mexico, 10-19.

102 Schryer, Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico, 94-107, 184-192, 201-202.
the first time in state history, yet this did not seem to lessen the PRI’s continued control over the state. 103

In Tulancingo, some non-governmental organizations, such Desarrollo Rural de Hidalgo, also exist, which began in the late 1960s. Desarrollo Rural de Hidalgo is an independent, rural development organization, which creates local agriculture cooperatives. By 2002 there were ten more similar organizations in Tulancingo. However, land privatization and government cuts in Hidalgo have reduced small-scale farming, and this has further weakened agriculture organizations, which initially made some temporary gains in civil society. 104 Memories of the “intense agrarian conflicts” of the 1970s also limits civic participation in Hidalgo, according to Jonathan Fox. Class issues are present in Hidalgo, as well. Mestizo “caciques” dominate local and federal branches of government agencies in the state, and there appears to be some discrimination against indigenous groups. 105

Allegations of government corruption were also common in the state, and there is little municipal democracy there. There were reports of the mismanagement of funds in local municipalities, as well, prior to the 2000 elections. For the most part, the PRI controls the government in Hidalgo, and oversight agencies are usually not autonomous. 106 Other political parties in Hidalgo are also weak, and politics is largely controlled by landowning families and influential people. 107 Electoral competition is minimal, as well, in Hidalgo, and in the 1990s the

105 Fox, Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico, 199-200.
106 Fox, Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico, 199-200.
legislature was seen by the public as mainly “irrelevant.” Congressional oversight was also low due to the PRI’s political hegemony. The PRI held a legislative supermajority in Hidalgo until the late 1990s, with more than two-thirds of the seats in the state legislature belonging to the PRI. This meant that it could approve constitutional reforms without consulting other parties. Minority parties ultimately had little influence in the legislature prior to the 2000 presidential elections in Mexico. 108

**Institutional Capacity of the Catholic Church in Hidalgo**

The Catholic Church has been historically weak in Hidalgo. In this section, the characteristics of an institutionally strong and effective church will be assessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8-2. Hidalgo I: Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Church</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-Optation by the Government or Elite Groups**

The Catholic Church in Hidalgo has very little autonomy or independence from the government, and it has, at times, been co-opted by local elites. In the past, church officials who

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tried to challenge the government have been exiled from the state. The church’s weak status was likely caused by several factors. First during the colonial era Hidalgo was part of the Archdiocese of Mexico, which was the largest and richest administrative church unit in Latin America. This archdiocese was criticized, however, for poorly supervising its parishes, which helped Liberalism and anticlericalism grow in popularity in Hidalgo. 109 The state is also very mountainous and parts of it were inaccessible during the colonial era. Therefore, Catholic missionaries were mostly unsuccessful at evangelizing the region due to its remoteness. The first church diocese was located in Tulancingo, as well, which was isolated and far from the capital of Pachuca. These factors weakened the church in Hidalgo, and diminished its independence and autonomy there.

During the colonial era, there was also a large influx of mine workers from Cornwall, England, who came to Hidalgo for work. They were Protestants instead of Catholic, which minimized the Catholic Church’s social role in local mining communities.110 Currently, there are three Catholic Church dioceses in the state, but the church only appears to have influence in Tulancingo, which is isolated and far from the state capital. Above all, the Catholic Church in Hidalgo is dependent on the government and elites for its existence, and it lacks the autonomy and independence needed to successfully challenge authoritarianism. 111

Networks: Strong and Enduring Church Networks, Which Were Typically Developed Prior to State Formation

Catholic Church networks are largely weak in Hidalgo, due to the inability of the church to fully integrate into the area during the colonial era. After Mexico’s independence there were


110 Vergara, “Los Masones y La Revolución Mexicana en el Estado de Hidalgo,” 1-5.

111 Richard, The Unsettled Sector: NGOs and the Cultivation of Democratic Citizenship in Rural Mexico, 18-19, 30.
also many different social influences in Hidalgo, such as Masonic Lodges and Liberal clubs, which were unaffiliated with the church. These clubs were anti-Porfirio Diaz and helped to remove him from power before the revolution. The influx of Protestant miners from England also weakened Catholic Church networks in Hidalgo. Hidalgo is an isolated and mountainous region, which made the creation of church networks difficult. A religious-cargo system appears to exist in some parts of Hidalgo, but not all.

Elite families currently control Hidalgo, and patron-client relationships in society appear to be standard. Church networks have likely been further corrupted in Hidalgo by authoritarian forces and government corporatist groups. This has inevitably created an unfavorable climate for the Catholic Church in the state, and reduced its ability to produce independent civil society organizations, which create horizontal networks of engagement.

**Policy Implementation: A High-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow Church Guidelines**

Vatican reforms and church initiatives have faced major hurdles in Hidalgo, despite fruitless attempts by the Catholic Church to incorporate them. In the era of Rerum Novarum, Tulancingo was economically and politically marginalized, and a social Catholic movement did not develop there. The bishop of Tulancingo, Jose Mora y del Rio, did attempt to find solutions to local agrarian issues in the Rerum Novarum era, but his time in Tulancingo was short and he didn’t make a big impact on the state. Roberto Ocadiz remarks that the “admirable themes” of the assorted agriculture congresses, which were held by the church, were not “taken into account by the hacendados, authorities, and liberal intellectuals of the time.”

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Vatican II also seems to have had little impact on Hidalgo or the local Catholic Church, due to the church’s incapacity to fully implement these types of transformative changes. Independent civil society organizations in Hidalgo also appear to be unpopular with the government, and therefore the church doesn’t have the ability to fully develop civil society there. The diocese of Tulancingo, and the other dioceses in the state, also seem too institutionally weak to support major Vatican reforms.

**Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution**

During the colonial era, Hidalgo was part of the Archdiocese of Mexico and the trust levels in this archdiocese were surprisingly low due to the behavior of some of its priests. This likely had a long-term impact on the Catholic Church in Hidalgo and its ability to cultivate trust in society. This perhaps also caused Liberalism and non-Catholic religions to find wide support in the state.

The failure of the church dioceses in Hidalgo to successfully implement Vatican reforms and to support the growth of an independent and thriving civil society, likely eroded the church’s public trust levels before the 2000 political elections. The prevalence of patron-client relationships in Hidalgo has also created a hierarchal and restrictive atmosphere, which has limited the church’s growth and its ability to promote democratic initiatives in the state.

**Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Autonomous Church-Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships**

The hegemony of the government in Hidalgo appears to be restricting the Catholic Church’s ability to develop a strong civil society, which is separate from the government. The PRI, for example, sees the growth of autonomous organizations in Hidalgo as a “threat to the social and political order.” However, after agrarian violence hit northern Hidalgo in the 1970s,
some “independent” organizations were permitted in the “conservative” Tulancingo Valley in order to lower the potential risk of rural violence there, but these organizations were largely backed by the government. They were also undercut before they were able to have substantial influence in the area. Wealthy elites appear to have potentially co-opted these groups, as well, due to their financial needs. The NGOs were initially inspired by influential Christian leaders outside the state, but they seem to have little connection to religion now.

Numerically, there are a lot of Catholic Churches in the state of Hidalgo because it was once part of the wealthy and expansive Archdiocese of Mexico. The high number of churches there, however, does not change the historic reality in Hidalgo. The Catholic Church has consistently lacked autonomy and independence from the government and elites. Other religions and influences have weakened the church in Hidalgo, as well. The church dioceses in the state are also located in very remote areas, which are outside of the capital city of Pachuca. This has likely further reduced the church’s ability to influence the government and local politics.

**Conclusion**

Historically, the Catholic Church in the state of Hidalgo has been institutionally weak and has chosen not to challenge government authoritarianism. Political and business leaders have also tried to diminish and undercut the church in Hidalgo. The state became a strong-hold for anticlericalism and Liberalism in the nineteenth century. There was an influx of Protestant mine workers from England, as well, which increased the influence of Protestantism in the state. These

113 Richard, *The Unsettled Sector: NGOs and the Cultivation of Democratic Citizenship in Rural Mexico*, 69.


factors weakened the church in Hidalgo and made it institutionally incapable of successfully challenging authoritarianism in Mexico prior to the 2000 elections.
CHAPTER 9
STATE OF YUCATAN:
A CO-OPTED CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ITS FAILURES TO CHALLENGE
AUTHORITARIANISM

Facts about Yucatan

Catholic Church Challenge to Authoritarianism: Low Level

Location: It is located on the Gulf of Mexico, in the southeast of Mexico.

Population: 1,655,707 (2000 INEGI)

Indigenous Population: It has a high indigenous population at 33 percent (2000 INEGI)

Colonization and Statehood: Colonized in the mid-1500s and it became a state in 1823.

Religion: 84.3 % were Catholic (2000 INEGI)

Economy: The economy in Yucatan was largely weak prior to 2000.

Climate and Terrain: Yucatan has poor soil quality and there is an inadequate supply of water there. The terrain is largely flat and the weather is hot and humid.

Politics: From 2001 to 2007 Yucatan had a PAN governor for the first time in its history. Since then all governors have been from the PRI.

Table 9-1. Election Results for Governor in Yucatan for 1987 to 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>PMS</th>
<th>PAN</th>
<th>PST</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>PMS</th>
<th>PAN</th>
<th>PST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>280,130</td>
<td>4,538</td>
<td>34,247</td>
<td>4,390</td>
<td>250,403</td>
<td>15,360</td>
<td>228,163</td>
<td>20,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>250,403</td>
<td>15,360</td>
<td>228,163</td>
<td>20,480</td>
<td>301,497</td>
<td>24,648</td>
<td>322,575</td>
<td>3,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>301,497</td>
<td>24,648</td>
<td>322,575</td>
<td>3,709</td>
<td>414,452</td>
<td>22,496</td>
<td>354,805</td>
<td>22,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>414,452</td>
<td>22,496</td>
<td>354,805</td>
<td>22,496</td>
<td>481,229</td>
<td>40,950</td>
<td>429,046</td>
<td>14,537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Catholic Church in Yucatan has long been a “conservative force to be reckoned with” in the state. Historically, it has been tied to the upper and elite classes, and acted as a “counterpoint” to the PRI. This is largely due to the church-state relationship in Yucatan, which was carved out centuries ago. The church in Yucatan has mainly been passive and inactive in regards to local politics. It has backed elite causes and mostly accommodated the government instead of mobilizing indigenous people to fight for their rights, despite having one of the highest indigenous populations in Mexico. In Yucatan, “there has been no Indian or Maya political movement to speak of,” observes Shannan Mattiace.  

This case study looks again at why and under what conditions a Catholic Church diocese or archdiocese successfully challenged government authoritarianism in Mexico prior to the 2000 presidential elections. The focus of this chapter will be on the Archdiocese of Yucatan, which is located in Merida. The Yucatan church offers a variation in the church’s response to authoritarianism since it does not look to have challenged the government at any point in its long history, nor during the PRI’s heyday, which lasted until 2000.

In Yucatan, “state penetration” is very high even “in the most remote Maya villages.” The Catholic Church in Yucatan appears for the most part to accept authoritarianism in the state, and it doesn’t try to challenge it.  

This contrasts with the situation in Tamaulipas, where the church has consistently failed to challenge authoritarianism, but this is mostly unintentional and a result of the church’s extreme weakness there. While in Hidalgo the church is very suppressed by the government and local elites, and therefore it is incapable of successfully challenging

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authoritarianism. These examples demonstrate the variations that exist in Mexico’s church-state relationships.

The Yucatan Catholic Church is widely considered to be “one of the most conservative in the country,” insists Mattiace. It hasn’t supported indigenous “ethnic conscious raising” or any progressive training programs, like in Chiapas. For 26 years it was run by Archbishop Manuel Castro Ruiz, who was later succeeded in 1995 by Emilio Berlie Belaunzaran, who was an equally conservative man. Both archbishops “actively sought to shut down” any priest who was motivated by Vatican II or the 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops, held in Medellin, Columbia, which called for improved treatment of the poor. The archbishops also did not back Christian base communities, and they tried to deter any priest who attempted to initiate these kinds of community programs. The church leadership in Yucatan “actively discouraged” priests, as well, from engaging in social issues. ³

Consequently, there is no cohesive advocacy network to pressure state legislators and to defend indigenous rights and cultures in Yucatan. However, in many other states around Mexico, like in Chiapas, Catholic Church networks have been widely utilized by indigenous populations to challenge authoritarianism. In local communities, indigenous people have also used church networks to “forge ethnic-based organizations,” although this does not appear possible in Yucatan. There has been no indigenous mobilization to oppose unjust laws in Yucatan or local PRI corporatist structures. The legislature in Yucatan is also slow to pass laws that defend indigenous rights. ⁴

The acquiescent attitude of the Yucatan Archdiocese and its reluctance to challenge the government appears to have its roots in Yucatan’s local history and politics. The church has traditionally lacked autonomy from the government and it has also been co-opted by elites. It was primarily viewed in Yucatan as the “pillar of the oligarchy” before the Mexican Revolution. Severe anticlerical restrictions were also imposed on it during the revolution. The Socialist Party in Yucatan started to grow in influence at that time. Eventually by the 1940s, the Socialist Party controlled the state, until it was incorporated into the PRI, which ruled Yucatan throughout the twentieth century.  

In an effort to understand the Catholic Church’s development and historical trajectory in Yucatan, six common historic events in Mexico will be examined, which can potentially shed light on the institutional dynamics of the Yucatan church. The common events that will be looked at in this chapter include the 1). The Spanish Colonial Period 2). Independence from Spain 3). The Mexican Revolution 4). The Post-Revolution period and the Rise of the PRI 5). Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA 6). Before and After the 2000 presidential elections in Mexico. Five variables will then be evaluated to understand the institutional strength and effectiveness of the archdiocese in Yucatan and its ability to challenge government authoritarianism.

**Common Historic Events**

**The Spanish Colonial Period**

The state of Yucatan in Mexico’s southeast corner is almost completely flat and lacks any lakes or rivers. The climate is also hot and humid and the terrain is covered with limestone rock,
which greatly hinders agriculture production there. Its water supply is limited, as well, and natural water sources are only located in certain areas. When the Spanish conquistadores first colonized this part of Mexico in the mid-16th century they found no silver or gold, which was their primary objective. In the age of Spanish imperialism, notes Nancy Farriss, wealth mainly “consisted of gold and silver,” and what could be bought and sold on the European market. Yucatan was also “extremely poor” in natural resources. Thus, from the beginning Yucatan was a disappointment because it offered little financial gain for the Spanish colonists.

During the colonial era, the area’s remoteness, lack of natural resources and poverty, gave it freedom from New Spain’s capital in Mexico City. Yucatan’s primary colonial relationship remained with Spain, instead of New Spain, because its ports on the Gulf of Mexico were used for trading and shipping with Spain and Cuba. Only a small part of the province’s commercial activity took place within Mexico. Yucatan was essentially “cut off” from most of Mexico by “great distance” and “harsh terrain,” maintains Edward Moseley. Therefore, the Yucatan Peninsula was practically an island during much of its early history, and as a result it developed a distinct regional identity.

Yucatan’s unique geography and climate also help explain its early developmental issues. Spain viewed the area as “inhospitable” for the production of crops, like wheat, barley and grapes, which were common in Spain. Unfavorable weather conditions and Yucatan’s specific

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topography made these crops impossible to grow there. Subsequently, few Spaniards wanted to live there. 9

The absence of precious metals and natural resources also meant that Spanish elites needed to rely on Mayan society to generate an income for them. Colonists engaged in commerce and usually did not participate in agriculture production in Yucatan. They depended instead on the rents and tributes which Indians paid them through the encomienda system, which lasted much longer in Yucatan than in New Spain. The Mayan population produced goods, like cotton clothes, textiles, corn, wax, honey and salt, and these were then exported from Yucatan to different areas, which produced profits for Spanish elites. Spaniards also attempted to find other local sources of income, but this was difficult. Service in the Catholic Church’s “ecclesiastical bureaucracy” was one of the only other employment options in Yucatan, but vacancies there were rare. 10

In Yucatan, the Order of St. Francis was tasked with bringing Christianity to the province, and in 1559 the Franciscan Province of Yucatan was established. The religious order was granted a “virtual monopoly” of the area by the Crown. Yet, despite a concerted effort by the Franciscans to spread Christianity in Yucatan, clergy numbers and methods were never sufficient to tackle the Maya population. In the sixteenth century there were only about 38 friars for the entire Peninsula and half of them lived in the cities of Merida or Campeche. One of Yucatan’s first bishops, Diego de Landa, was also extremely cruel to the indigenous population and ordered the destruction of more than 20,000 religious idols and paraphernalia, which obliterated a large portion of Mayan culture and history. Landa “tossed” their sacred histories


10 Patch, Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 31-38.
into a fire and destroyed centuries of culture and religion with a “single bonfire,” while the Maya watched, maintains John F. Chuchiak IV. Landa also caused the death and torture of thousands of Mayas. 11

A sophisticated Mayan civilization had lived in Yucatan until around the 800s, but by the time the Spanish arrived this population was weak and scattered around the Yucatan Peninsula. For the most part, Yucatan’s indigenous population was linguistically and culturally homogenous, and mainly spoke Yucatec Mayan. 12 Franciscans tried to force the Mayans, who typically lived in small villages and towns, to stay in larger settlements, “bajo de campana,” (beneath the church bell) and under the priest’s “prying eyes.” This policy, however, usually failed because friars didn’t take into consideration Mayan social, economic and agriculture traditions. Some indigenous populations also liked to move around “from one settlement to another regardless of what the colonial authorities wanted them to do.” Others escaped in search of new opportunities or simply retreated to evade the colonial authority’s control. 13

Colonial Mayan society in Yucatan was largely itinerant, and geographic mobility was an “important feature” of their lives, in spite of efforts to put them in closed communities. As a result this population was viewed as incontrollable and slipping “through the fingers” of the colonists. The Spanish colonialists, nevertheless, continued to try unsuccessfully to force the

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13 Patch, Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 48-66.
indigenous population to live in a way that was “culturally foreign and economically impractical.”

The city of Merida, which was established in 1542, became a popular base for Spanish colonists in Yucatan, who preferred living there to the rural areas outside the city. The Spanish presence was largely weak in the indigenous villages around Yucatan, observes Robert Patch. Merida was the “primary center” of Spanish power in the Peninsula. Spanish elites usually resided in the heart or capital city of a province, which was a Roman and Iberian tradition. Most Catholic Church parishes outside of Merida were also under the supervision of the Franciscans, at least until the middle of the eighteenth century. Few pueblos, however, had a resident priest because priests typically stayed in larger villages and only visited remote areas occasionally. The Franciscans generally did not own rural estates or land in Yucatan because this was discouraged by the Franciscan order.

In rural areas, indigenous officials usually managed the day to day operations themselves of parish churches. The Maya accepted the rituals of Christianity, but maintained their own pre-Hispanic religious practices. There was also some resentment towards local Catholic Church clerics, who they sometimes saw as failing in their duties. Douglas Richmond notes that Christianity never penetrated very “deep” among the Mayas in Yucatan. The church also

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17 Patch, *Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan*, 45-46, 111.
19 Richmond, *Conflict and Carnage in Yucatan: Liberals, the Second Empire, and Maya Revolutionaries*, 18.
remained largely an “extension of the dominant social group.” 20 A majority of the clergy were from elite and upper or middle class backgrounds, as well, maintains Raymond Harrington. 21

Indigenous Mayan populations were the most sizable majority in Yucatan. In 1800 there was a total population of 500,000 people there, and 70,000 were Caucasian, 55,000 mestizos and blacks, and the rest Maya. 22 One of the biggest challenges of living in the Yucatan Peninsula was the lack of water. Water was only located in specific areas and therefore people clustered around wells and water sources, which meant that the labor population could be controlled by those who owned the land with water. Yucatan’s isolation and lack of economic and commercial development, also resulted in the encomienda system lasting much longer in Yucatan than the rest of Mexico. It did not end there until 1785. Yucatan was typically several steps behind Central Mexico in development and growth, maintains Timothy Parrish. 23

**Independence from Spain and its Aftermath**

Mexico’s independence from Spain occurred in September of 1821, yet prior to this there were no independence battles in Yucatan. The governor in Yucatan simply resigned, “without a fight,” explains James Carey. 24 Yucatan was actually “reluctant” to cut ties with Spain because Cuba and Spain were its main colonial trading partners. 25 After independence, Yucatan was politically unstable and local elites fought over Liberalism, Conservatism and anticlerical

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22 Richmond, *Conflict and Carnage in Yucatan: Liberals, the Second Empire, and Maya Revolutionaries*, 25.

23 Parrish, “Class Structure and Social Reproduction in New Spain/Mexico,” 142-143.


political ideologies. In Yucatan there was a massive “resistance to the liberal agenda” and Liberal elites also had differing political viewpoints. Yucatan suffered financially, as well, due to economic losses from ending trade with Cuba and Spain. Yucatan tried several times to become independent from Mexico after 1821, but these attempts were unsuccessful. 26

The Catholic Church lost most of its standing in Yucatan after independence. It was ultimately seen as a “feeble antagonist” once its ties were broken with Spain. Yucatan lacked the forceful anticlericalism that occurred in other parts of Mexico following independence, but the church lost an “element of stability” and “prestige” at that time, and it was significantly weakened, claims Nelson Reed. In the 19th century there was only one church built in the state. 27

In 1847, a “Caste War” broke out in Yucatan following a large revolt by the Mayan population, who fought against people of Spanish origin. Spanish descendents continued to control Yucatan even after independence from Spain. The Caste War “erupted due to tax grievances, land grabs, and ethnic conflict,” observes Richmond. The Mayans were also angry about the high taxes the Catholic Church required them to pay. Hundreds of thousands of people reportedly died in this war, which lasted until the start of the twentieth century. The conflict created deep ethnic divisions and resulted in the continued discrimination of Mayan people in Yucatan.28

In the mid-19th century, henequen, a type of agave plant that grows in hot climates, started to generate immense wealth in Yucatan after centuries of poverty there. Henequen fibers produce rope, twine and bags, which at that time were needed for agriculture production.

26 Richmond, Conflict and Carnage in Yucatan: Liberals, the Second Empire, and Maya Revolutionaries, 17-30.
28 Richmond, Conflict and Carnage in Yucatan: Liberals, the Second Empire, and Maya Revolutionaries, 24-27.
Yucatan held a “monopoly” in the international henequen market, and ownership of the industry was largely “in the hands of local entreprenuers.” Due to henequen sales and exports, the end of the nineteenth century in Yucatan was an “opulent era” of “regional pride.”  

From approximately 1880 to 1917 Yucatan was the wealthiest state in Mexico. Yucatan’s “wealth and splendor were based upon fields of henequen plants that stretched as far as the eye could see,” maintains Moseley.  

In the Porfirio Diaz era, nearly one hundred percent of henequen was shipped to the US, where there was an overwhelming demand for it. The local henequen industry was controlled by about 30 “interconnected” local families, who were considered part of the “Casta Divina” (Divine Caste). Leading this group were the Montes and Molina families. At that time, “economic and political power were tightly interwoven” in Yucatan, notes Mattiace. Yucatan’s wealthiest man, Olegario Molina Solis, owned the largest henequen plantation in the state, and he was also elected as governor in 1902. He was a cabinet minister under Diaz, as well.  

In the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution, the divide between Yucatan’s rich and poor was immense. In 1910 Yucatan had a population of 339,613. Out of this population only about 3.6 percent owned land in the state while the rest had no land or property. Land in Yucatan was consumed by large henequen estates and the labor system was considered slave-like there.  

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Vast quantities of agriculture communal land were also taken over or sold off mainly to producers of henequen after the passage of the Reform Laws.  

Prior to the revolution there was “severe oppression” of the rural population in Yucatan, largely because the indigenous population had no land, and they were forced to work for large land holders, sometimes under deplorable working conditions. Yet, despite these repressive conditions, the “rural masses” did not mobilize or fight for their rights, which proves that oppression does not “inevitably lead to spontaneous popular movements,” insists Gilbert Joseph.  

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in Yucatan regained much of the power it had lost after Mexico’s independence from Spain by partnering with the state’s wealthy and powerful elites. Olegario Molina forged a “strategic partnership” with the church, as well, and he subsequently became a “dominant political and economic figure” in Yucatan, observes Hernan Menendez Rodriguez. Politically, Molina was considered a moderate Liberal as opposed to a radical Liberal. Radical Liberals at that time supported strict anticlerical and secular political policies in Mexico. Molina and the “moderate or opportunistic wing of liberalism” in Yucatan, generally backed the church’s continued involvement in politics and economics, while radical Liberals strongly opposed this.  

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The Catholic Church’s economic and social position started to greatly improve in Yucatan due to the “alliance” that was forged between the church diocese in Merida and the moderate faction of Yucatan’s Liberal party. This pact actually began during the administration of Governor Manuel Romero Ancona, who governed until 1882, and it continued at least through Governor Molina’s term, which lasted until 1910. The church attempted to “rebuild its economic base” by participating in the “economic modernization” of Yucatan. It also hoped to circumvent any local attempts to secularize the state. The church’s leadership sought to restore mandatory tithing or taxation, as well, which had ended with the Reform Laws and the 1857 Mexican Constitution. The Reform laws, as well as the Caste War, had created major loses for the church in Yucatan, and many in society refused to pay the tithe. Due to the Catholic Church’s weak economic position in Yucatan, it elected to seek out political protection and financial resources from the rich and powerful in the state.  

In 1887, Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona was consecrated bishop of the Yucatan diocese. He was “theologically conservative,” and considered “Molina’s man” and his top pick for the job. Carrillo next appointed Molina’s brother as diocese treasurer, who quickly restored mandatory tithing in Yucatan. Only Molina’s “powerful influence,” argues Menendez, could have made tithing obligatory again in the state. The Catholic Church also asked for a percentage of henequen sales, and in return the church invested in Molina’s business ventures. Molina reportedly borrowed funds from the church, as well, to build railroads in Yucatan, which allowed him to control transportation in the state.  


37 Menendez, “The Resurgence of the Church in Yucatan: The Olegario Molina- Crescencio Carrillo Alliance,” 218-224.
Radical Liberals and even Conservatives in Yucatan started to raise major objections to the tightknit church-state relationship, which was created at that time. They also complained of the “dangers of a reconstituted church,” which was being transformed under the leadership of Bishop Carrillo, with Molina’s financial and political backing. Following a public outcry, the bishop finally removed Molina’s brother as the diocese’s treasurer, yet he promptly designated him as the official representative to the pope and dispatched him to Rome. His first assignment was to try to convince the pope to upgrade the Catholic Church diocese in Yucatan to an archdiocese, which it became in 1906.38

In the decades leading up to the Mexican Revolution, the Catholic Church in Yucatan continued to pressure the public to pay the church tithe and called it a “grave sin” not to. Fearful of the church’s censure, many paid it. The state’s wealthiest families also felt obligated to pay after repeated goading from the rich and powerful Molina family. The financial assistance from the tithe created the “financial rebirth” of the Catholic Church in Yucatan. The church’s “economic revitalization” emerged, however, only due to its unswerving support for the “business and political strategies” of Molina. Mandatory church tithing in Mexico was also a violation of official religious freedom laws at that time. Yet, money collected from the tithe significantly improved the finances of the church diocese in Yucatan, and provided the “fruit” for the Molina-church alliance.39

The church-state pact in Yucatan was further institutionalized in 1889 when the first modern banking institution in the state was established in Merida, which was called Yucatan

38 Menendez, “The Resurgence of the Church in Yucatan: The Olegario Molina- Crescencio Carrillo Alliance,” 218-224.

Bank. Its board consisted of Molina and other affluent society members, who also had ties to the Catholic Church. The bank soon began to loan money to foreign and local investors, and it continued to receive financial backing from the church. The bank’s creation reflected the “political and economic ambitions” of both Molina and the local Catholic Church, and their evolving “alliance” at that time. The bank’s financial support was eventually used by Molina to spread his business interests abroad. The Catholic Church consequently “regained its economic footing” in Yucatan, and became a “silent partner” in the state’s prosperity. 40

In 1900, Martin Tritschler y Cordova was named the new bishop of the Yucatan diocese. He served as bishop, and then archbishop, for 42 years. Tritschler consistently “sought allies at the very top of Yucatecan society,” observes Ben Fallaw. He created a close alliance with Olegario Molina, as well, and secured further “financial support” for the church through wealthy landowners and bankers. In his first decade as bishop, Tritschler also increased the church’s influence in society through his connections, and new church chapels were constructed on plantations and in towns across the state. Tritschler sought to Hispanicize the diocese, as well, and he hired a large number of clergy from Spain. He failed, however, to speak out about the dismal living and working conditions of the Mayans at that time, who were “trapped in near slavery” in Yucatan. His lack of honesty was largely due to fears that he might jeopardize the henequen industry, which financially supported the church. Tritschler was conservative and used a “top down” strategy to manage the diocese. Ultimately, he relied on powerful people in society to protect him and the church. 41

40 Menendez, “The Resurgence of the Church in Yucatan: The Olegario Molina- Crescencio Carrillo Alliance,” 222-223.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, the Catholic Church in Yucatan also established Catholic labor unions, which were largely “despised by progressive labor leaders.” The main goal of these unions was to increase the church’s influence in society, not to defend labor. The church viewed working class social movements in Yucatan as a “menace,” according to Ramon Chacon. Catholic labor unions were also used to “counter radical labor movements,” which existed in other parts of Mexico. 42

The Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910, yet Yucatan remained largely unaffected by it due to its isolation and lack of revolutionary goals and leadership. There was also strong resistance to social change from the existing power structures in the state. The revolution in Yucatan, largely came “from without,” claims Fallaw, and it was not a “popular revolt from below.” 43 The state maintained its existing political and economic structure until at least 1915, when revolutionary leader Salvador Alvarado descended on it with a seven thousand man army at the orders of President Venustiano Carranza. Prior to 1915 the agro-commercial “bourgeoisie” in Yucatan had an “unshakable hold on the levers of economic and political power.” This was largely due to sustained Mayan oppression and prolonged oligarchical rule, which was supported by Porfirio Diaz, observes Joseph. 44

Terry, Ben W. Fallaw, Gilbert M. Joseph and Edward H. Moseley, 229-230 (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama, 2010).

42 Chacon, “Salvador Alvarado and the Roman Catholic Church: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary Yucatan,” 258.


After Alvarado arrived in Yucatan in 1915, he transformed the semi-feudal region into a “great laboratory” for social change. He proposed radical reforms and immediately put severe restrictions on the Catholic Church, which were harsher than other revolutionary leaders at that time. Anticlericalism was key to his social and political program in Yucatan, and the Catholic Church was a constant target. Alvarado restructured local society via a “populist revolutionary” agenda. In regards to the Catholic Church, Chacon maintains:

The Church was vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse not only because of its perception as a pillar of the oligarchy, but also because revolutionaries believed that it had played an important role in exploiting and controlling the masses. Moreover, the Church experienced ill treatment because a large percentage of its priesthood consisted of Spaniards, a group regarded by revolutionaries as deceitful, avaricious, and oppressive to the mestizo and Indian masses.

As part of his reform agenda, Alvarado re-distributed land to the landless in Yucatan, he changed the education system, and he reformed labor laws. He knew this would “invite the wrath” of the large and influential hacienda owners and merchants, but he did it anyway. Alvarado reportedly sent officials to villages and haciendas in Yucatan to inform laborers that they were finally free from slavery. Alvarado knew, however, that there was “no chance of building” a revolution” from the bottom up. Therefore, he tried to force it from the top down.

The reforms that Alvarado and subsequent socialist leaders in Yucatan adopted had a major impact on the state. Alvarado became active in the Socialist Party of Yucatan, which he

used as a platform to mobilize his ideas. The Socialist Party of Yucatan gained a near monopoly on political power until it was incorporated into the PRI in 1946.  

Alvarado’s extreme hostility towards the Catholic Church significantly weakened the church in the state. Alvarado saw it as the “enemy of the Revolution,” and as the government’s main adversary. A majority of foreign Catholic priests were also asked to leave Yucatan at that time, and the rest were rounded up and sent to Merida so they could be watched. Alvarado considered the church to be an “extension of the oligarchy,” which controlled the lower classes and allied with the rich. He hoped to foster loyalty instead to the post-revolution government. He created rural schools, which taught in the Mayan language, and he supported public instead of Catholic education. He unionized labor and seized land, as well, which had previously been owned by large haciendas.

Prior to the revolution, the Catholic Church in Yucatan was usually supported financially by rich hacienda owners, who constructed churches on their plantations and donated money to the clergy. Alvarado confiscated church properties in Yucatan, including the Archbishop’s palace. The Catholic Church’s reaction to Alvarado’s agenda was of “general acquiesce.” It knew as a political opponent it stood “little chance” against the Mexican government or the new revolutionary regime. The Catholic Church ultimately had little independence or autonomy from the government or elites in Yucatan, which made it institutionally powerless.

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After Alvarado’s reforms went into effect, the henequen industry in Yucatan started to be managed by a state-run cooperative, which Alvarado ran. Local henequen producers were then forced to join the state cooperative, even though powerful families had controlled the industry up until that time, along with education, government and banking in the state. Alvarado decided to completely restructure the henequen industry because it was central to Yucatan’s economy. By 1916 the industry had become a “government monopoly.” Yucatan’s upper class apparently “tried to buy” Alvarado off with cars, houses and gifts. They also attempted “winning and dining” him, but he refused their offers and he was unrelenting in his reform agenda. 52

Once the Mexican government gained control of the henequen industry in Yucatan, American buyers became very nervous. They feared restrictions on their once “secure flow of twine for harvesting.” Some American henequen dealers urged the US government to intervene in Yucatan. Alvarado reacted by imposing stricter regulations on the industry. Eventually all henequen producers were required to sell their products exclusively via the government cooperative. Alvarado threatened to confiscate henequen property if regulations were not obeyed and in the end Alvarado prevailed in Yucatan. 53

After Alvarado’s reforms were implemented in Yucatan, the state was viewed by the rest of Mexico as a “pace-setter” and on the “cutting edge” of the revolution. Reforms in women’s rights, land, labor, politics and education were all adopted at that time. Alvarado ultimately attempted to create a new political and economic structure in Yucatan. His policies, along with those of subsequent socialist leaders, significantly impacted politics in the state. In 1918 Felipe Carrillo Puerto, another socialist leader, became governor of Yucatan after President Venustiano


Carranza removed Alvarado from Yucatan. Carrillo Puerto also introduced major changes to the region.  

**Post-Revolution and the Rise of the PRI**

The social reforms of Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto were even more radical than Alvarado’s, and he “pushed the Revolution to the left,” observes Joseph. Both Alvarado and Carrillo Puerto helped to abolish the “slave-peonage system,” and they tried to raise the consciousness of workers. Carrillo Puerto was a “lifelong socialist committed to bringing structural change” to the state.  

He also viewed the Catholic Church as the “great nemesis” of socialism, and accused plantation owners of using the church and priests to keep rural workers “docile.” He described Catholicism as four hundred years of “backwardness,” and he insisted there was no God. Carrillo Puerto utilized Mayan heroes and symbols to attract local support for his socialist ideas. He linked these concepts to socialism and even some elements of Christianity. Carrillo Puerto launched an “energetic cultural campaign” that included reprinting important Mayan texts and displaying Mayan art, which helped mobilize local support for socialism. Carrillo Puerto, however, was assassinated in 1924.  

Bartolome Garcia Correa, who once worked as Carrillo Puerto’s private secretary, became governor of Yucatan in 1930. He revived Carrillo Puerto’s “Mayanism” campaign and “skillfully” manipulated the memory of the Caste War for “full political advantage.” He also promised to “elevate” indigenous people so they could have a “better” life. Garcia Correa led the

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56 Fallaw, “From Acrimony to Accommodation: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary-Era Yucatan,” 231.
Socialist Party of the Southeast, which Alvarado founded under a different name. The party dominated politics in Yucatan until the 1940s. Garcia Correa also supported anticlerical reforms and was fervently against the Catholic Church.  

Prior to becoming governor of Yucatan, Garcia Correa helped to create the precursor party to the PRI, which was called the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). He was also the first person of Maya descent to govern Yucatan since the conquest. As a political leader in Yucatan, Garcia Correa used caciques or political bosses in the countryside to organize elections and to create support for the Socialist Party of the Southeast. The party under Garcia Correa’s leadership became highly “centralized” and “vertically structured,” and it promoted a type of populism. Garcia Correa also acted as an “ethnic broker” between the state, federal government and local indigenous communities. He tried to represent himself as a “man of the people.” Yet, while he was governor, the public in Yucatan started to blame him and the state-run cooperatives for the major decline in the henequen industry. There were also protests over rising prices and unemployment in the state.

During the post-revolution period, the Catholic Church in Yucatan adopted a “much lower profile” in local affairs, observes Fallaw. Archbishop Martin Tritschler y Cordoba, who was archbishop in Yucatan from 1900 to 1942, maintained a strict policy of “political neutrality” at that time, and priests were instructed to be very discrete in their duties. This allowed the church to quietly exist in Yucatan despite continued assaults from various socialist leaders and

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58 Fallaw, “From Acrimony to Accommodation: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary-Era Yucatan,” 237; Fallaw, “Cardenas and the Caste War That Wasn’t: State Power and Indigenismo in Post-Revolutionary Yucatan,” 554-558.


anticlerical activists. During the Cristero Rebellion, Tritschler did not show any support for the rebellion or other church-state battles, which arose in Mexico at that time.  

In the 1930s, President Lazaro Cardenas came to Yucatan and “imposed” sweeping agrarian changes there. He also made significant modifications to the local land tenure system. Cardenas was president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940. He was committed to agrarian reform and Article 27 of the Mexican constitution. He supervised the breakup of haciendas in Yucatan and gave part of the land to landless populations through a new federal ejido program, which created communal properties. He also focused on building a strong and stable political system in Mexico, which incorporated the ideals of the revolution. He established the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) in Yucatan, as well, which was a government-supported union. By 1940 a socialist-style power structure was institutionalized in Yucatan, which had “orthodoxy” with other states.  

Cardenas’s reforms permitted the federal government to have much greater control in Yucatan, particularly in the rural areas, observes Jeffery Brannon. Cardenas used Yucatan as a “crucial testing ground” for his policies. Yucatan’s Socialist Party of the Southeast gained a near monopoly on political power at that time until it converged with the PRI in 1946. After the Socialist Party was integrated into the PRI, Yucatan became “another PRI strong hold.”

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61 Fallaw, “From Acrimony to Accommodation: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary-Era Yucatan,” 227-245.


Local government-backed trade unions also helped the federal government to control the state. The PRI continued to win all major elections in Yucatan for the next fifty-five years.  

**Mexico’s Debt Crisis and NAFTA**

By the 1970s Yucatan became one of Mexico’s “poorest” states. At that time, the federal government, under PRI leadership, controlled the henequen industry, which was Yucatan’s only profitable industry, and the main source of its income and employment. Cordage mills were seized and nationalized, as well, by the government in 1964. They were placed under the authority of a single publically-owned government corporation called Cordemex. Cordemex, which was run by the government, held a monopoly on raw fibers in Yucatan. The federal government also managed Banrural, which supervised and financed the federal ejido program in the state. Jeffery Brannon insists that these government-controlled organizations actually prioritized “political-social goals” over efficiency.

As the “leading symbols” of the federal government in Yucatan, both Cordemex and Banrural championed “policies designed to minimize social discontent and defection” from the PRI. This produced a “dismal” and inefficient state of affairs for these agencies. There were also major financial losses in the henequen industry at that time. By the end of the 1970s, the deficits from the henequen industry were “so overwhelming and production so disorganized that Cordemex and the Banrural had almost ceased performing a legitimate economic function in the

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state,” notes Brannon. The agencies eventually became the “official distributing agents for a massive, corrupt, and largely ad hoc social-welfare program” in Yucatan. 69

Yucatan rapidly transformed into a major “problem” area in Mexico. The “once proud and wealthy” state began a period of “severe economic depression,” and it became dependent on federal government subsidies. 70 Henequen production also suffered from competition from synthetic materials and lowering prices. 71 Yucatan was soon one of the most impoverished states in Mexico, and federal subsidies largely supported public services. 72 The state was caught in a vicious cycle of “monoculture and state interventionism.” 73

Mexico’s debt crisis in the 1980s hit Yucatan’s economy especially hard with income levels dropping significantly, yet greater wealth being accrued by the wealthy. There were also cutbacks in federal assistance programs due to the debt crisis. At that time, Yucatan suffered from government inefficiencies, corruption, social problems, low levels of productivity in farming, a lack of infrastructure and incompetence in the management of ejido lands. These factors produced a depressed economy there. By the 1990s rural workers started leaving the countryside to look for work in the cities. 74


When NAFTA was implemented in 1994, prices for crops, such as corn and rice, fell significantly in the state as international markets opened up in Mexico. Local Mayan farmers had trouble competing with the prices of imported crops. Subsequently, many Mayan landowners had to sell or rent their land to large agriculture businesses from Mexico and abroad, who frequently hired back the old owners at minimal pay. NAFTA also produced new jobs in Yucatan as some maquiladora firms moved from the US border to Yucatan, yet worker wages in the state were the lowest in the country. Despite these major local issues, the Mayan population in Yucatan did not mobilize or publically express their grievances. They instead tried to adapt to the changes or they migrated to new areas, like their ancestors had done who faced similar problems.  

In Yucatan, indigenous mobilization through religious activism was largely missing during the twentieth century. The Catholic Church, however, had frequently helped to create grassroots movements in other states, like in Chiapas, but these types of church networks do not seem to exist in Yucatan. The church Archdiocese in Yucatan and its leadership also do not appear to directly target the indigenous population or mobilize them for any kind of political or social activism, which seems to contribute to their inaction. Yucatan is actually “remarkable” for its lack of indigenous grassroots activism. There also are no civil-religious systems in rural areas of Yucatan, which has likely weakened church networks further in local communities. 

**Before and After the 2000 Presidential Elections in Mexico**

Prior to the 2000 presidential elections, Yucatan’s economy was weak and development and productivity were extremely low there. The state was more financially dependent on the

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federal government than other Mexican states because the central government was paying around 90 percent of the state’s public sector expenditures at that point. Yucatan’s “heavy financial dependence” on the federal government allowed the PRI to use its economic support to gain local political backing for the party, maintains Carlos R. Menendez Losa. 77

The PRI ultimately became the “quasi-official party” in Yucatan during the twentieth century. It was the “party of the government,” and competition from other political parties was considered a challenge to not only the PRI, but to the state government itself. The PRI’s ties to the state government were “open and direct” and it frequently mobilized government and rural workers to support it. Prior to the 2000 elections, the PRI’s corporatist and clientelistic networks in the state were also strong, and the party largely controlled urban and rural areas. Local business owners also backed the PRI because of the state’s dependence on federal subsidies. Business entrepenuars in Yucatan were fearful, as well, of censure if they criticized the federal government, and therefore they typically supported PRI candidates in Yucatan elections. 78

The National Action Party (PAN) gained some influence in Yucatan before the 2000 presidential elections, and the party won a few municipal elections in Merida and other towns over the years. However, the PRI usually won all major local elections in Yucatan and it was the main political party in the state during the twentieth century. The PAN regularly complained of election fraud in Yucatan, as well, but it was able to win the 2001 Yucatan governor race for one term. This, however, was only after the PAN had secured the presidency in 2000. Yucatan ultimately had a long history of supporting the federal government due to its deep financial dependence on it. Prior to 2000, a PAN win for governor in Yucatan could have cost the state its

77 Menendez, “The PAN in Yucatan: An Ascendant Political Option,” 259-262.
“federal government support.” The organizational structure of the PAN in Yucatan was also very weak, which made it difficult to challenge the PRI. A PRI governor was elected again in 2007 after only one term with the PAN. 79

In Yucatan, the PAN never had any “direct” or “public links” to the local Catholic Church hierarchy, and there were no connections between the two entities. The church Archdiocese was typically very “timid” in regards to politics, and reluctant to criticize either the state government or the PRI. It also consistently failed to denounce PRI voting irregularities and civil rights violations in Yucatan, claims Menendez. Above all, the Archdiocese in Yucatan played a “predominately conservative role” in local society prior to the 2000 presidential elections. The hierarchy, however, encouraged election participation during the 1990s, and allowed some Catholic-related groups to exist, but this did not create any type of challenge to the PRI’s entrenched system in the state. 80

Prior to the 2000 presidential elections, Yucatan was seen as an entrenched authoritarian enclave in Mexico and as a PRI “stronghold.” 81 For decades, democratization was largely impeded there due to PRI hegemony, and the financial dependence of the state on the federal government. 82

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The Institutional Capacity of the Catholic Church in Yucatan

The Catholic Church Archdiocese in Yucatan was institutionally weak and mainly co-opted during the twentieth century. The characteristics of an institutionally strong and effective archdiocese will now be evaluated for the Yucatan church.

Table 9-2. Yucatan I: Characteristics of an Institutionally Strong and Effective Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Dependent Variable:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Church-State Relationship: A high degree of church autonomy and independence from the government as opposed to co-optation by the government or elite groups</td>
<td>Whether the diocese or archdiocese is institutionally strong and effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy Implementation: A high-level capacity to implement Vatican reforms and follow church guidelines</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Trust: A large degree of public trust and confidence in the church institution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Infrastructure: Expansive church infrastructure and a large number of autonomous church-connected civil society organizations, which do not rely on patron-client relationships</td>
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</tbody>
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Church-State Relationship: A High Degree of Church Autonomy and Independence from the Government as Opposed to Co-optation by the Government or Elite Groups

Historically, the Catholic Church Archdiocese in Yucatan has been tied to the upper and elite classes, who have mainly co-opted it. As a result it has consistently lacked autonomy and failed to challenge the government. The church diocese in Merida also typically sought political and financial sponsorship from elites during the colonial era, and even after independence due to the area’s poverty. Therefore, the church was never seen as a “threat” to authoritarianism, which
explains why it maintained a harmonious relationship with the government, and was unwilling to oppose it. 83

Poor economic conditions in Yucatan still play a major role in how the church operates in the state. There is a priest shortage and the archdiocese doesn’t have sufficient financial resources. The clergy in Yucatan are also typically recruited from elite families and from “comfortable backgrounds,” and thus they are largely seen as extensions of the power structure in Yucatan. Few have Mayan surnames or speak native languages and many reside in Merida or other cities in the state. This creates “psychological distance” between the clergy and the local population. Priests in Yucatan also have been reluctant to “push for significant social change” in the state. 84

Franciscans were responsible for evangelizing Yucatan in the colonial era, but their numbers and methods were never adequate to control the local Mayan population. Many friars also lived in the cities and not in the rural areas where the indigenous populations lived. 85 As a result, Christianity was never strongly embraced by the Mayans in the countryside, and the church was largely viewed as part of the upper class. 86 When the henequen boom began in Yucatan, the church partnered with the wealthy in order to obtain political protection and


financial support. The church also failed to speak out about the dismal working conditions of the poor at that time. 87

During the Mexican Revolution, socialism arrived in Yucatan and the church was a frequent target of revolutionaries. Socialist politicians attacked and weakened the church and put harsh restrictions on it. The church was forced to remain politically neutral in order to exist. 88 The church still tries to avoid any situation that might be seen as confrontational. The clergy and its membership also “approach potentially explosive political issues with extreme caution,” maintains Giles Wayland-Smith. As a result, the church does not try to mobilize the population in support of social issues.89

The Catholic Church in Yucatan has never had any autonomy or independence from the government or elites because of its historical weak position there, and early decision to align with the wealthy and powerful in society. Due to the church’s powerlessness it has consistently failed to challenge authoritarianism or promote democratization in the state.

Networks: Strong and enduring church networks, which were typically developed prior to state formation

During the colonial era, the Franciscans and the Catholic Church neglected to fully integrate indigenous populations into the church’s organizational structure. As a result, church networks, which pre-existed the state, were largely weak there. Mayan society was also mainly itinerant and mobile, and attempts to put them into closed communities were unsuccessful during Spanish colonization. It was therefore difficult to establish strong and enduring church networks

87 Fallaw, “From Acrimony to Accommodation: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary-Era Yucatan, 228-242.

88 Fallaw, “From Acrimony to Accommodation: Church-State Relations in Revolutionary-Era Yucatan, 228-242.

between the church and the Mayan population. 90 Yucatecan communities also lacked a civil-religious system or traditional “elder councils,” which further weakened local church networks. 91

Yucatan’s isolation and lack of economic and commercial development caused colonial institutions like the encomienda system to persist longer in Yucatan than other parts of Mexico. This system didn’t end until 1785 in Yucatan. 92 Through this system colonists were able to extract tribute and find labor from the Mayan population for centuries. An encomendero’s responsibility in Yucatan was to care for a group of Indians, teach them Catholicism and give them instructions on how to be “civilized.” Colonists controlled the commercial economy of indigenous communities in Yucatan, largely through the encomienda system. 93 Priests in Catholic parishes in Yucatan also helped maintain the encomienda system in rural areas, which likely created distrust between the indigenous population and the local Catholic Church. 94

Due to the relative failures of the Franciscans to organize indigenous populations into closed communities, and their continued exploitation by the encomienda system, strong church networks in indigenous communities were never fully developed in Yucatan. The connection between the Catholic Church and indigenous populations in Yucatan also appears to have been mostly a patron-client relationship during the colonial era.

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92 Parrish, “Class Structure and Social Reproduction in New Spain/Mexico,” 142-143.


Policy Implementation: A high-Level Capacity to Implement Vatican Reforms and Follow Church Guidelines

Rerum Novarum and the social Catholic movement was not embraced by Catholic Church leaders in Yucatan, at least not in the way they were likely intended. At the time of Rerum Novarum, church leaders did become more involved in the politics of the state, but mostly by forming closer ties with society’s rich and powerful. This ultimately resulted in the further dominance of the Catholic Church by elites and the government.

Vatican II was also not embraced by the leadership in Yucatan. At that time the archdiocese was run by Archbishop Manuel Castro Ruiz, who was later succeeded in 1995 by an equally conservative man, Emilio Carlos Berlie Belaunzaran. Both archbishops “actively sought to shut down” any priest that was inspired by the 1968 conference held in Medellin, which called for a focus on the poor. 95 Berlie Belaunzaran was also “hostile” to evangelization methods that concentrated on indigenous populations. He “actively discouraged the promotion of Christian base communities,” as well, and largely failed to implement the objectives of Vatican II. 96 This further weakened the institutional capacity of the church in Yucatan.

Institutional Trust: A Large Degree of Public Trust and Confidence in the Church Institution

The early leadership of the Catholic Church diocese in Yucatan created a major set-back for public trust levels in the church. Diego de Landa, who was one of the first bishops there,

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treated the indigenous population with extreme cruelty. He destroyed important pieces of Mayan history and culture, as well, and this reduced the church’s ability to create trust in society.  

The church’s practice of catering to the dominant, elite classes, also potentially eroded the public’s trust in the Yucatan church. The conservative, top-down leadership style by successive bishops in Yucatan, and the failure to implement Vatican reforms, has perhaps reduced the public’s confidence further in the archdiocese. The limited number of civil society organizations, which were supported by the church prior to 2000, has also likely decreased the church’s trust levels in local society, particularly as the PRI’s vertical social networks remained strong and enduring throughout the twentieth century.

Infrastructure: Expansive Church Infrastructure and a Large Number of Autonomous Church-Connected Civil Society Organizations, Which do not rely on Patron-Client Relationships

The Catholic Church in Yucatan has failed to create the type of autonomous, horizontal social networks and organizations that have been prevalent in more civically engaged states like Chiapas. The political atmosphere in Yucatan is also not “conducive to bold, social action-oriented programs,” maintains Wayland-Smith. The priests have “scant resources,” and they are also “terribly over-burdened” by their schedules.

The church also does not seem to target the indigenous population in Yucatan or specifically mobilize them for social activism. Ultimately, the church struggles financially and has always had difficulty funding social programs due to the “relative poverty” of local society, which is “reflected in the poverty of the Church itself,” claims Wayland-Smith. This has limited


the role of the church in Yucatan.\textsuperscript{99} National church organizations exist in Yucatan like Catholic Action, and other church groups, and they sometimes criticized the political system in Yucatan prior to 2000. But they were typically censured by the church’s hierarchy for doing this. \textsuperscript{100} In Yucatan, there also appears to be less ethnic conflicts possibly because there is only one ethnicity there, which is Yucatec Maya.

The PRI’s “organizational presence” and corporatist structure in Yucatan were deeply entrenched prior to the 2000 elections, which likely weakened the church’s ability to develop civil society there. The PRI’s system of “district, municipal, and sectional committees” provided it with “unique political capacities” in the state, which perhaps weakened all other local social networks. \textsuperscript{101} During the twentieth century, independent labor unions in Yucatan were also normally shunned by the PRI and therefore they were “unable to survive,” notes Marie France Labrecque. The Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) was the only union legitimately recognized in Yucatan prior to the 2000 elections.\textsuperscript{102}

Yucatan has grappled with major financial problems, as well, and this has likely affected the Catholic Church’s infrastructure. There appears, however, to be a sufficient numbers of churches in Yucatan, but an inadequate number of priests. \textsuperscript{103}


\textsuperscript{100} Menendez, “The PAN in Yucatan: An Ascendant Political Option,” 268.

\textsuperscript{101} Menendez, “The PAN in Yucatan: An Ascendant Political Option,” 266.


Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Yucatan is considered to be conservative. Historically, it has been tied to the elite and upper classes, and in politics it has remained quiet and inactive. It has never mobilized indigenous people to fight for their rights, despite having a very high indigenous population. The Archdiocese in Merida also does not appear to have challenged the Yucatan government at any point in history. The church in Yucatan is institutionally weak and co-opted by elites and the government, and therefore it is largely incapable of challenging authoritarianism.
The Catholic Church is a deeply-rooted, ancient institution in Mexico. It arrived with the Spanish colonists in the 1500s. It also had an unprecedented amount of power in the colonization of Mexico and in developing local communities and institutions. In the decades leading up to the 2000 presidential elections, some church dioceses and archdioceses played vital roles in local democratization efforts. Institutionally strong and effective church units essentially fought back against authoritarianism and helped ignite democratization in local areas. Yet, the case studies also reveal the institutional limitations and restrictive church-state relationships that exist in Mexico, which makes some church units exceedingly unlikely to challenge authoritarianism or to promote democratization. This is an important factor to consider because it suggests that the persistence of authoritarianism in some parts of Mexico has been aided, in some cases, by the inability of local churches to perform at their full potential.

The role of political institutions is a key concept in democratization studies, yet in Mexico religious institutions are also crucial for understanding local democratization efforts. In the 1990s, approximately two-thirds of the non-governmental organizations, which dealt with important political issues in Mexico, were affiliated with Christian denominations. This underscores the significant link between religious institutions and politics in the country. ¹

Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico are also enclaves of social behavior, which can generate local democratic outcomes or help authoritarianism to persist. This phenomenon is best understood through an in-depth and comparative historical analysis of local church units. In an effort to examine the inner dynamics of church units and their different

church-state relationships, this dissertation utilized a bottom-up, localized approach. It focused on a diverse collection of dioceses and archdioceses in Mexico, and analyzed their histories and societal roles. It also looked at their efforts to challenge authoritarianism prior to the 2000 elections. The study uncovered the extreme difficulties that many church units face in challenging authoritarianism in Mexico. Some are institutionally weak and co-opted by local and state governments.

Yet, Catholic Church dioceses and archdioceses, which are institutionally strong and effective, have played significant roles in local democratization efforts in Mexico, which the case studies also revealed. They produced “norms and networks” of civic engagement, social capital and civic traditions, which are vital for the development of good governance. They also built trust and cooperation within their memberships, which ignited collective action in some parts of Mexico prior to 2000. They provided space for opposition movements, as well, and they created independent civil society organizations. Alternative political parties were also frequently developed from local church networks. Institutionally weak dioceses or archdioceses, on the other hand, usually lacked autonomy and were co-opted and undermined by local authoritarian forces. They were generally incapable of implementing Vatican reforms or creating strong church networks. They also tended to have weak civil societies, and therefore they offered little challenge to authoritarianism prior to 2000.

Church dioceses and archdioceses that have previously challenged authoritarianism are not located in any particular region in Mexico. They have high and low-levels of indigenous populations, strong and weak economies, and assorted topographies and climates. Above all, what differentiates the church units that challenged authoritarianism from the ones that did not

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was their institutional capacity to do so. Institutional qualities of church units are deeply-entrenched and long enduring, and they differ considerably throughout Mexico. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the institutional dynamics of church units and their church-state relationships.

The case studies of Chiapas, Guanajuato and Chihuahua provided an excellent opportunity to understand the inner dynamics of strong and effective church units, and the tools that they utilized to challenge authoritarianism in the twentieth century. These church units supported local civil society growth, social justice initiatives and democracy-producing programs. The church diocese in San Cristobal can be viewed as a model for understanding the church’s capacity to challenge authoritarianism in Mexico. The diocese utilized local church networks to produce a strong oppositional movement to the PRI, which significantly impacted local and national politics. In Guanajuato, the Diocese of Leon, also became a hub for Catholic resistance movements, and PRI opposition was largely defined by Catholic “beliefs and mobilized by Catholic organizations.” 3 In Chihuahua, the archdiocese ignited a democratic movement in the 1980s, and became the leading advocate for democratization in the state. Church leadership also publicized election fraud and backed social justice initiatives.

The case studies of Tamaulipas, Hidalgo and Yucatan, in contrast, offered examples of institutionally weak church units with very restrictive church-state relationships. These churches typically had little effect on local-level democratization efforts. In some instances they might inadvertently have helped to legitimize authoritarian regimes. In Tamaulipas, the Catholic Church’s role in the colonization process was minimal, which weakened its institutional capacity there. Tamaulipas currently grapples with many extreme social issues, and an autonomous civil

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3 Fallaw, Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 158-159.
society is largely missing there. In Hidalgo, the church also lacks independence from the
government and typically does not challenge authoritarianism. It has been consistently
undermined and co-opted, as well, by elites and weakened by outside influences. In Yucatan, the
church is considered conservative and it is tied to the upper and elite classes. It is politically
inactive and it does not challenge authoritarianism or mobilize indigenous people to fight for
their rights.

Above all, this study on church dioceses and archdioceses demonstrated the importance
of examining local-level institutions in Mexico, like the Catholic Church, as well as state and
local governments. John Hiskey calls subnational politics the “essential next step” for
democratization studies in Mexico, which he says is a neglected area of analysis. Subnational
politics ultimately provides an opportunity to understand the challenges and failures of federal
reforms in local communities in Mexico. In some municipalities the PRI continues to control
local areas, and there is a resistance to “competitive elections.” 4 In 2009, for example, eight
states had never “witnessed any political party other than the PRI.” 5 This has created
authoritarian enclaves within Mexico, which will likely persist until democratization takes hold
at the local level. 6

At the federal level, however, the election of Vicente Fox in 2000 ended seventy years of
continuous PRI hegemony in Mexico. Prior to the elections, the PAN gained wide popularity and


6 Lawson, “Mexico’s Unfinished Transition: Democratization and Authoritarian Enclaves in Mexico,” 267-268;
Wayne Cornelius, “Subnational Politics and Democratization: Tensions Between Center and Periphery in the
Mexican Political System,” in Subnational Politics and Democratization in Mexico, eds. Wayne A. Cornelius, Todd
A. Eisenstadt and Jane Hindley, 11 (La Jolla, CA: University of California, San Diego, 1999).
became the “democratic alternative” to the PRI. The PAN’s appeal in 2000 was mainly due to its pro-democratic credentials. It was also seen as an “agent” for good governance, which allowed it to be less clear about its political policies, observes Steven Wuhs. 7 In some states, however, the PAN also has deep local and historical roots. After the PAN won in 2000, it continued to control the presidency until 2012 when a PRI candidate won again. This demonstrates the potential for successful political transitions in the country.

In Mexico, future research on the Catholic Church could include more detailed historical analyses of local church dioceses and archdioceses, and their distinctive church-state relationships. This might help further uncover the institutional challenges that some churches face in Mexico. Yet, it is also clear that a collection of defiant Catholic Churches can have a significant impact on Mexican politics. Prior to the 2000 presidential elections, strong and effective dioceses and archdioceses played major roles in Mexico’s democratization efforts, and they proved that they have the capacity to challenge authoritarianism and ignite democratization, when required.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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