

SALT, LIGHT & COCAINE: RELIGIOUS CIVIL SOCIETY AND
NARCO-VIOLENCE IN MEXICO'S BORDER REGION

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: The Political Theory & Praxis of Religion in Latin America.....	19
Chapter Three: Religion, Illiberality & Civil Society.....	67
Chapter Four: The Rise & Entrenchment of Mexico’s Drug Regime.....	92
Chapter Five: The Messenger Angels of Psalm 100 Church.....	148
Chapter Six: Stand Up for Juarez / Thrive Without Bribes.....	176
Chapter Seven: The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity.....	201
Chapter Eight: Discussion of Cases, Conclusions & Contributions.....	220
Works Cited.....	249

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Photo of Messenger Angels in Front of Mural	151
2. Photo of Psalm 100 Church	152
3. Photo of Messenger Angels in Dress Rehearsal	159
4. Photo of Protest Signs carried by Messenger Angels	162
5. Photo of Messenger Angels on Bridge of the Americas	166
6. Photo of Messenger Angels in front of Juarez City Hospital	175
7. Photo of sign painted on mountain: “The Bible is God’s word.”	176
8. Photo of project founders Daniel Valles and Gustavo Arango	178
9. Photo of Stand Up for Juarez teams out in the city	185
10. Photo of Thrive Without Bribes training in Jojutla, Mexico	190
11. Photo of Javier Sicilia, founder of the Movement for Peace	202
12. Photo of Movement for Peace protest event	213
13. Photo of Javier Sicilia at Fort Benning (USA) protest	216

ABSTRACT

SALT, LIGHT & COCAINE: RELIGIOUS CIVIL SOCIETY AND NARCO-VIOLENCE IN MEXICO'S BORDER REGION

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Latin America's rising indices of criminality make it now one of the world's most troubled regions. In 2015, 34 of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world were in Latin America, and one-third of the world's murders now occur there. Mexico is a case of particular interest where narco-violence has claimed nearly 200,000 lives. Mexico is also one of the world's most religious nations, creating a jarring panorama of religious fervor and lawlessness. This dissertation investigates cases of this overlap to identify contributions and prospects of religious actors within civil society and to account for religion's uniquely powerful ability to shape identity and action. This dissertation does so by presenting original first-person ethnographic observation and analysis of three religion-based civil society organizations that have mobilized to resist the violence in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There are few more grave challenges to governance in the Western hemisphere than the epidemic of violent criminality that prevails in Latin America, particularly in the northern triangle of Central America and Mexico. Rising indices of violence have placed portions of Latin America among the world's most troubled locations. In 2016, 43 of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world were in Latin America. One-third of the world's murders now occur in Latin America, making it more common there than in any other part of the world (Engle and Macias, 2015).

Within this jarring panorama, the violence in Mexico stands out as a case of particular interest. Only the Syrian civil war has claimed more lives from 2006-present than the violence stemming from the drug wars in Mexico. Nine of the most dangerous cities in the world are in Mexico (Gagne, 2016). Independent analysts estimate the number of dead and missing from the drug wars as high as 200,000 since 2006, though exact figures will likely never be known. The most violent zones in Mexico are concentrated along the northern border and scattered regions in the interior of the country. Since 2006, there has been an explosion of drug war-related violence in Ciudad Juarez, a city of 1.3 million people in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Texas. The city was considered the world's most dangerous from 2008-2012, and at

the peak of violence 10 people were murdered every day (Quinones, 2016). Suburban municipalities were pushed to even greater depths of violence. In Valle de Juarez, on the eastern edge of Juarez, 55,000 of the city's 60,000 residents fled the violence (Romero, 2016). City streets became ghost towns after dark as citizens took refuge from lawlessness in their homes only to awaken to bodies in the streets and disfigured corpses dangling from overpasses almost every morning for years on end.

The narco-trafficking architects of this regime of violence are rational actors who employ a “pornography of violence”¹ that is broadcast across domestic and international media. Within Mexico, these calculated displays of violence function as “tranquilizers,” numbing rival gangs, citizens, municipal leaders, and even the state. The cartels are not alone in willful applications of violence. The Mexican state has significant blood on its hands, as well. Chapter Four will demonstrate the collusion and corruption among the state and illicit actors that has rotted Mexico's security and legal apparatus, from policemen to presidents. While incidents of narco-violence are grotesque and public, state-based acts of violence in response are equally grotesque but less visible. Both types of violence are purposeful, with the shared aim of anesthetizing and making more pliable their besieged populations.

Latin America and Mexico are also noteworthy because these stresses occur in a region and country with some of the highest concentrations of Christians in the world. Ninety-five per cent of Mexico's population identifies as Christian (88% Catholic; 7%

¹ Virginia Garrard-Burnett (2010) warns researchers against the morbid consumption of the “pornography of violence,” which is a hallmark of analyses of mass murder. This dissertation will avoid “pornographic” depictions, and will state the nature of gruesome acts only when essential to the point under discussion.

evangelical), and 45% of those attend a religious service at least once a week (Pew Forum, 2013). Investigations of Latin America's intriguing juxtaposition of high levels of criminal violence and a predominance of Christian religiosity has become the cutting edge of political-science scholarship of religion in the region (Wilde, et al, 2015). Though recent scholarship has emphasized the continental aspects of this dilemma, the question of religious responses to violence at municipal and inter-city levels has not been adequately addressed. Some attention is coming to the question of civil society's responses to violence as a whole at the municipal level (Ley, 2014), but this approach does not isolate religious actors, and so does not account for this uniquely powerful shaper of identity and group affiliation, which has been mobilized to resist and challenge violence in the Mexico borderlands.

While religion has dominated the headlines in the new millennium as a source of global conflict, in many parts of the world, religious groups have also asserted their (far less publicized) roles as benevolent shapers of their communities and politics (Hertzke, 2004, p. 16). For much of the 20th century, arguments about the ideological clash between capitalism and communism obscured this larger "tectonic shift" (Ibid) in the global religious landscape. With the retreat of Cold War ideological frameworks, new accountings of religious behavior in the public square are needed. Stepan's work on democratization in the religious societies of the Global South has shown that religious expression should be welcome in well ordered democratic societies. Adhering to policies of "hard secularism" as a means or sign of "progress" can in fact hinder the development of democracy and civil society (Stepan, 2012, 90-91). With the Global South taking for

granted the role of religion in public life, the question for political science researchers becomes not *whether* religion will shape political life, but *how*, *when* and *where* it will do so.

Citizens in Mexico face despair and resignation over the twin threats of corruption and criminality, and each must answer the question of whether to act at all, in what way, and to what end. Citizens embedded in religious communities, predicated on ethical behavior in private and public life, face real quandaries about whether and in what way to respond to such oppressive circumstances. The preponderance of scholarship on religion in Latin America predicts that religious actors are likely to respond to political crisis in two ways: by turning to radical politics - we might say “uncivil society” - or by doing nothing at all (Willems, 1967; D’Epinay, 1968; Stoll, 1990; Stoll, 1994). The Mexican case presently is one of crisis, and as Chapter Two will explain, the cases I document are at odds with both the regime of violence and with what scholars of religious politics in Latin America predict about them. They are therefore academically interesting and instructive examples of the real-world politics of religious actors.

Dissertation Core Arguments

This dissertation addresses those lacunae and contributes to the growing body of research on instances of civil society whose religious identity has become a source of activism. It presents original first-person ethnographic observation of and engagement with several examples of religious-based civil society organizations that organized to resist and challenge this violence in Ciudad Juárez: Stand Up For Juarez/Thrive Without

Bribes; The Messenger Angels of Psalm 100; and The Movement For Peace with Justice and Dignity. These comprise cases of religiously motivated “dissenting” behavior within the entrenched regime of violence around Ciudad Juarez. I speak of “dissenting behavior” here as purposeful acts that aim to resist, challenge, and transform politically oppressive environments.

This dissertation argues from these cases that: 1) these religious civil society actors offer a model of alternative politics in their context rather than abstention and so defy the scholarly consensus on their prospects by contributing to the growth of Mexico’s Third Sector; 2) religious actors in Mexico are more likely to engage their dangerous public-square when they also face material costs for abstention – such as threats to person and property - and when the target issue (non-violence and ending corruption) enjoys popular support; and 3) the anti-violence engagement effort makes religious civil society an irreplaceable site of political learning and a means of politically activating religious identity in a manner that enhances the prospects of liberal democracy in Mexico. This multi-faceted argument is developed in this document by describing the confluence of factors - historical, political, theological and factors – that cause religious actors to eschew radical politics or no politics at all, and to opt for legitimate, religiously based civil society activism in the face of a seemingly insurmountable wave of violence.

METHODS AND DATA

Case Study Approach

It is important for researchers to explain and justify their approach to their work. For this dissertation, I have chosen a case-study method to document the lived experience of three religiously motivated activist groups in Ciudad Juarez. I argue that the case-study method is the most appropriate approach given my complex, discrete, subject matter and the objective of this research to offer “thick” descriptions of real-world, religious civil society over time. The case-study method does not necessarily imply an ethnographic or even qualitative process, though this dissertation has both characteristics. Case-study work, however, is well suited to investigations of phenomena when the boundaries between events and context are not clear (Yin, 2003). Yin asserts that case studies are appropriate when 1) the research may be framed as inquiring “why” or “how;” 2) when the subject matter is a contemporary event; and 3) when the researcher has limited control over the events. This study clearly meets that criteria.

Political - Ethnographic and Area-Studies Approaches

Though case studies are not *necessarily* ethnographic, comparative politics is populated with case studies utilizing a narrative, ethnographic presentation. This dissertation is likewise best understood and assessed as a work of *political ethnography*. Ethnographic approaches in our field are particularly useful for capturing and assessing the “view from below,” and for understanding hard-to-reach populations and phenomena not typically gathered up in formal politics or connected to a given society’s powerful

classes. Gaining insight into that “view from below” in the city of Juarez is a primary aim of this dissertation.

This study was carried out as “grounded research” in the border region, culled from first-person observations and interviews with the actors themselves, as well as news reports, other scholars’ data, documentaries, photographs, archival information, census data, and historical work. This study observed the networking and activist behaviors of individual elites and rank-and-file participants located primarily in Ciudad Juárez/El Paso, with auxiliary interviews in Matamoros/Brownsville, and Nuevo Laredo/Laredo, Austin, Texas, and San Salvador. Ciudad Juarez is a rich source of insight because it is a nexus of violence and human migration, but the city also hosts Mexico’s highest concentration of media outlets. Thus, it offers ample third-party documentation of the regime of violence. Juarez / El Paso is a large borderland metropolitan area and so provides opportunities for medium-range network effects to play out both along and across the border. This northern border zone and Juarez itself have some of the highest concentrations of religiosity, and especially non-Catholic Christian religious expressions.

In addition, this study adheres to the tradition of area studies, which prioritizes use of “thickly descriptive” data harvested through fieldwork. Bates (1997) asserts that, while the so called “softer sciences” of area studies and research built on an embedded, ethnographic methodology has its detractors, there is no conflict between area studies and political science, and indeed, the one is indispensable to the other. Embedded, real-world observation also features prominently in the social science on religious communities in Latin America. The landmark works in the field, as well as other significant contributions

to be addressed in Chapter Two, have preferred this “close quarters” model of data collection. Furthermore, the skills and good will that is generated from respectful, cross-cultural, bilingual research is a clear human resource as well as an academic boon.

Discussion of Objections to Case Study Method

The first charge that might be made is that this study focuses primarily on a single city and country. While this is a valid point of contention, this criticism is not fatal for this research project for several reasons. First, the concern about absolute case numbers is best understood as a general caution in the field of comparative politics and a reminder to state our conclusions tentatively in light of unavoidable limitations. However, our understanding can indeed advance by focusing on fewer, better articulated cases rather than more, thinly described cases. It cheapens the value of our enterprise to *a priori* prohibit developing deep expertise on a particular case of life-and-death politics solely because we do not have the time or resources to add another. A second objection often raised about this class of study method is the risk of selection on the dependent variable - that is, studying only those subjects that exhibit the “desired” behavior and so distorting our findings. This objection stems from a misunderstanding of the case-study method’s objective, which is abstraction to and improvement of theory, not generalization to populations. Third, with small-N research, it is a well-accepted technique to increase the number of observations within a case study in order to grow the sample size, which is accomplished in this dissertation by multiple site visits over period of years. Fourth, the politics of religion in Mexico is under-represented in the literature currently, a problem

this study incrementally helps to resolve. Chile, Brazil, and Guatemala are more celebrated cases where non-Catholic Christian numbers are booming and so have drawn most of the resources. Mexico is in a period of tremendous stress and transition, including being on the cusp of its own “evangelical moment.” Much more attention needs to be paid to the politics of religion in Mexico, given the demographic shifts underway there. Finally, this study is inherently a socially/culturally embedded project. Large portions of this work required being with and building rapport among key actors. Replicating this study in multiple countries, or even multiple cities, would take significant time and resources that this researcher does not possess.

Data Collection & Empirics

This dissertation collected observations related to what I have termed *structured regional actions* carried out by these religious civil society actors. These structured regional actions target external, politically important audiences, but not for the acquisition of formal political power for the actors. The phenomena under discussion first features *structure*, a characteristic that researchers on the Third Sector have established as a boundary between miscellaneous personal behaviors and more formal civil society. This is a more exclusive framing than, for example, the broadly voluntary and associational behaviors that Putnam studies in his seminal works on democracy and social capital. In this dissertation, *structure* implies a formal linkage of individuals or groups that is observable, has identifiable objectives for the public square, and that persists beyond a single event.

These events are also *regional* in that their scope of intended impact is beyond the physical footprint or the neighborhood of a local church congregation but is not primarily aimed at altering the national political trajectory through elections or lobbying efforts, for example. Its aim is municipal or inter-city. Geography and “control” of physical territory is very much a part of the story of violence in Mexico. There is an explicit territorial claim contained in the acts carried out by subjects of this study. The regional aspirations of these religious civil society actors cross the boundaries of local polities and so prick their municipalities and the state even as they also cross the bloody physical boundaries of the *plazas* (lucrative border crossings) contested by organized crime.

The phenomena of interest to this dissertation also necessarily include *actions*, in that they involve the purposeful orientation of human bodies and/or speech in the public square. This is distinguished from, for example, prayer vigils in the privacy of one’s home, or sermons that highlight social ills only for the ears of congregants in that church. These more private, personal actions would become interesting to this discussion if they defend, support or prepare actors for purposeful speech or bodily presentation in the public square. The *actions* interesting to this dissertation include marches, protests and statements, street preaching, forging of new actor alliances, media objects, social-media campaigns, training programs, curriculum development, and rehabilitative projects (human and property), etc.

The data for this interdisciplinary study has been compiled from diverse sources, including personal observations of the actions of the metropolitan and regionally oriented actors. I was present for organizational meetings, protests, vigils, and church services,

where I documented what I saw and heard. In keeping with the qualitative tradition of ethnographic observers, I conducted structured interviews with selected participants and leaders but also compiled private observations and notes. I currently hold over 40 hours of recorded interviews, and I logged 14 on-site days of personal observation of Defendamos Juarez / Avanza sin Tranza and 14 days with the Messenger Angels over the course of calendar years, 2015-2016. The protest activities of Movimiento Para La Paz did not coincide with my availability to travel, and so I conducted interviews by phone in 2016 with program leaders and compiled data from the numerous media reports and documentary material on the organization, its activities and its celebrated founder Javier Sicilia.

I also sought subjects in the U.S. and Central America. These contacts did not progress to formal case studies, but could offer expansions of this research in the future. Their testimony was relevant, however, and so was compiled in my qualitative data bank for this study. I interviewed individuals living along the Texas-Mexico border, some of whom have elected not to engage in riskier or visible forms of activism, or whose Christian communities abstained from activism. These non-actors I interviewed are not entirely disconnected from activist networks, however. The variation among actors is not simply “on-off” in these circumstances. Rather, actors demonstrate a continuum of activism “intensity,” from a low of nothing at all (or abstention) to small forms of resistance in the tradition of Scott’s “weapons of the weak” to more extensive and explicit kinds of activism that are featured in this document.

Statement on Researcher Bias

It is important for researchers to make their biases explicit to the degree the researcher is aware of them. My loyalties in this case are unambiguously with the religious-based civil society actors. They inhabit a dangerous world, and yet they pursue an objectively improved civic life and all at considerable personal risk. Their work is honorable, and the benefits of their work accrue to all citizens equally. My academic formation has convinced me of the essential value civil society holds for the global democratic project. While there have been efforts to problematize the role of civil society, the scholarly consensus among comparativists on the worth of civil society is quite strong. Therefore, this preference is unlikely to be controversial.

I also have a profound interest in questions of religious politics by virtue of growing up in an evangelical Christian community in the United States, and having worked with an evangelical humanitarian group in Central America. I continue to participate in a Protestant Christian community currently. The academe is typically suspicious of religion's influence and potential to prejudice science, and so readers might find my close association to the Christian religion problematic. While lacking self-awareness of potential conflicts of interest would be a weakness, I am sensitive to those pitfalls. In the cases of the groups I am studying, in fact, my evangelical background becomes a research asset. This is because a common characteristic of evangelicals is that they feel misunderstood and marginalized. This is especially so in Mexico, as will be demonstrated later in this dissertation. My personal connections to the international, evangelical Christian community and years of professional experience with Latin

American evangelicals was a source of comfort to my evangelical subjects. It gave them the sense that the investigator was “one of them.” This is not exploitative but rather enriching, as it increased my access to and authenticity of their actions and statements. While maintaining a critical distance is essential for the researcher, close observation of the movements and activists required of political ethnographers inevitably produces human connections, as well. The connections I retain from this work are primarily of a professional nature, however, to leave open possible expansions of this research.

Risks and Limitations of the Research

It is furthermore essential for researchers not to overstate their case and to recognize the limitations of their work. In an absolute sense, more political ethnographic data collection can always be done and could be done here, too. However, as a self-funded researcher, I faced material limits of time and resources. Selection of three cases in the same city was made in view of what could be done with those resource limits and which location was most interesting to carry it out. I selected cases offering comparatively easy access or where I could leverage pre-existing connections in Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. Additionally, these cases are accessible to me because I possess the Spanish-language skills needed to carry out this field research without an intermediary. El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras also offer potential subjects for this dissertation, but they were beyond my reach due to time and financial limitations.

Also to be considered is the risk of incurring physical danger researching in a zone where the state is unable to adequately protect its own citizens. It is important to

acknowledge the risks that publication of this research could pose to research subjects. While I worked most closely with leaders of the organisms of civil society, who are typically public figures and already “on the record” as activists, I preserved the anonymity of all other interview subjects. Any recorded interviews with participants will be held securely and privately for five years and then destroyed.

Unprotected foreigners are also sometimes viewed as easy sources of funds for so called “express” kidnappings. I mitigated some of these risks to my person by utilizing local, trusted connections, and moving around the city in their vehicles. This also facilitated additional access to the subjects. Whenever possible, I also utilized research subjects on the U.S. side of the border or contacted subjects by email, phone or Skype. Exposure to potential harm is one of the calculated risks that “grounded” researchers assume when making observations in a zone of conflict.

DISSERTATION PLAN

This remainder of this document is constructed to offer a comprehensive view of the political and theological world in which these religious civil society actors are embedded, to offer an engaging and accessible picture of the actors, and to characterize the actors’ relationship to their political world.

Chapter Two addresses the intersection of religion and politics in the legacy of prominent Christian theologies that have shaped political expressions of Latin America and Mexico’s religious communities, ranging from radical behaviors to abstention and separatism. Diverging behaviors of religiously motivated citizens in Latin America

correspond to Thomistic theopolitical arguments and those of Liberation Theology, which are status-quo and revisionist theologies, respectively. Both Catholics and non-Catholics have been shaped by the Thomist and Liberationist dispositions, though the source of both ideas is the Catholic tradition.

This chapter explores how each tradition shapes these civil-society actors for their purposeful orientation of bodies and speech in the public square in Juarez. This chapter also addresses the implications of mass Protestantization in the region, which is an ongoing, real-world process and the most important demographic shift since the region gained independence from Spain. I accomplish this task through a critical presentation of relevant scholarly work, an exercise that also points to the state of the academic art and serves to frame this dissertation's contribution to the comparative-politics research agenda on communities of faith in Latin America.

Chapter Three develops the premise that religion, until very recently, has been a uniquely powerful and unsafe force in Mexico's public square. A robust and critical analysis of religiously motivated actors mobilizing against narco-violence requires treatment of religion's causal role in Mexico's illiberality and democratic foot dragging. The complexity and tragedy of Mexican history with regard to religion is impossible to capture in one chapter, but it is possible to demonstrate patterns and cleavages that bear on the cases under investigation in this dissertation. While Mexico has domesticated religion, the present-day civility was born of tremendous national pain and repeated struggle. Transfers of power in Mexico were frequently internecine affairs, bloody and unstable, while religion was the wedge that cracked open the state. Through the post-

independence era, the state was interpreted and reinterpreted by agents of religion and politics and the product was a permanent antagonism between the two (Pomerleau, 1981). This reality has contributed to the alienation of religious communities from Mexico's public life as well as the underdevelopment of the country's civil society.

Chapter Four discusses the rise of drug trafficking and its turn to violence, while describing the present-day reach and organization of some of the most powerful cartels. This discussion will demonstrate depths of corruption and complicity of the Mexican state in its development. Evidence of corruption and malfeasance is made public only once the culpable are beyond the reach of the law. Thus, Mexico becomes the country "where nothing ever happens," (*Aqui no pasa nada.*) as the sarcastic saying goes. The state is incapable of altering the country's violent course or it is in cahoots with violent actors. Meanwhile, a tyranny of low expectations ensures that no causes will ever be discovered; citizens will simply live with effects. No individual is brought to account; democracy simply lurches forward. Drug violence and political stagnation become mutually reinforcing vices.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the narrative case reports of the purposeful acts of speech and presence in the public square and the religious communities from which these acts of religious civil society spring. Each chapter focuses on one religious-civil society group, beginning with Stand Up for Juarez/Thrive Without Bribes, followed by the Messenger Angels of Psalm 100, and last is the Movement for Peace and Justice. The chapters are written in accessible prose in order to paint an engaging picture of these civil society actors and the faith communities to which they are

connected. This narrative-presentation device is also a reflection of how the groups' spokespeople present themselves to the world, though of course that world is Spanish speaking. Each group is led by a skilled, popular communicator who understands and utilizes the power of words and image. These groups are not one-dimensional data points but are composed of complex, fully realized citizens, and I wish to present them as such. Likewise, the actions they engage in are outgrowths of the interaction of religious formation and community within their strata of Mexican society.

Chapter Eight presents concluding arguments based on the case studies analyzed in this dissertation. The research reveals that, consistent with the work of other scholars, religion can be a powerful motivating factor for citizens under situations of extreme violence. In these cases, I argue that religious actors will move into an unfavorable and even dangerous public square when it becomes dangerous to them *not* to do so and when their activism can target popular issues, like ending corruption, a status I call "issue safety." I also found that these actors offer a model of alternative politics instead of abstention, which defies the scholarly consensus. The actors in my cases are cynical about and disillusioned with the state but equally earnest about the content and truth claims of their religious systems. They are working from an understanding of citizenship that begins in religious identity and has obligations that reach beyond the state. Despite the crisis of violence that has harmed these actors and their communities and despite Mexico's illiberal democracy that marginalizes - even punishes - faith-based acts in the public square, the religious-civil-society actors investigated advance a normative claim about the public square in Mexico, about state and citizen obligations, and about

religion's place among them. In each of these cases in Ciudad Juarez, my work confirms that religious communities can be effective allies of a functional state *to the degree* the state truly desires to encourage legitimate, democratic expression.

This work also urges caution in assessing the efficacy of civil society in Mexico. It is easy to overburden the sector with pro-reformist expectations. The Third Sector's underdevelopment in the country, the context of impunity, an occasionally adversarial one-party state, and widespread criminality are fierce headwinds that have rendered an anemic Third Sector at a time when the Mexican state can least afford weak allies. While encouraging things are happening in Mexico's civil society, the changes are incremental when compared to the Third Sector globally and even regionally. Nevertheless, these cases offer reasons for hope. These religious actors are contributing materially to the growth of the Third Sector in Mexico. This research also concludes that these civil society groups are irreplaceable sites of political learning for the activists involved. For these religious actors, their activism is one of the few political spaces in Mexico where they can engage politics from a place of trust and hope that also activates their religious identities.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICAL THEORY & PRAXIS OF RELIGION IN LATIN AMERICA

Chapter Overview and Statement of Purpose

Mexican citizens must answer the question of whether and how to act in the public square in view of seemingly intractable challenges of corruption and violence. Citizens for whom religion is an important political motivation answer that question by drawing on wells from the Christian tradition with flavors unique to the Latin and Mexican experience. This chapter addresses the intersection of religion and politics first in the legacy of prominent Christian theologies that have shaped political expressions of Latin America and Mexico's religious communities, ranging from radical behaviors to abstention and separatism. Diverging behaviors of religiously motivated citizens in Latin America correspond to Thomistic theopolitical arguments and those of Liberation Theology, which are status-quo and revisionist theologies, respectively. Both Catholics and non-Catholics have been shaped by the Thomist and Liberationist dispositions, though the source of both ideas is the Catholic tradition.

Scholarship on religion in Latin America came of age during the Cold War, and Liberation Theology was especially attuned to that conflict. Thus, much of the literature on Latin American religion in public life utilized Liberation Theology as the preferred heuristic for the contest between communism and capitalism. Now that the global

ideological contest has receded, it is necessary to offer fresh accounts of religion in the public square and to assess whether the predictions made during the era of economic-global-systems conflict still obtain. The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity is a progressive, Catholic expression and an example of how Mexican religious civil society has metabolized Liberation Theology in the post-communist era. The Messenger Angels and Defendamos Juarez, on the other hand, are Protestant-evangelical expressions whose formation is in the pietistic and charismatic theologies inherited from North American missionaries. For theological reasons as well as material, political motives, they tend to retreat from Catholicism and Liberation Theology.

This chapter explores how each tradition shapes these civil-society actors for their purposeful orientation of bodies and speech in the public square in Juarez. This chapter also addresses the implications of mass Protestantization in the region, which is an ongoing, real-world process and the most important demographic shift since the region gained independence from Spain. This process has profound implications for the distribution and political reach of the dispositions described here. I accomplish this task through a critical presentation of relevant scholarly work, an exercise that also points to the state of the academic art and serves to frame this dissertation's contribution to the comparative-politics research agenda on communities of faith in Latin America.

Roots of Liberation, the “Most Important Theological Movement of the 20th Century”

Liberation Theology defied not only its own religious authorities but also the secular paradigms of its day. Its perceived connections to the left-leaning, even Marxist,

political agenda alienated religious conservatives, both Catholic and Protestant, but especially evangelicals on the continent. While debating Liberation Theology has become a boutique enterprise with the retreat of the Cold War, its influence on progressive Catholics and Protestants in Latin America persists. The current generation of Latin American religious and intellectual elites was formed by, or in reaction to, Liberation Theology. The ethics of Liberation Theology shapes the leadership of the Movement for Peace, for example, which retains the anti-capitalist and anti-globalization rhetoric of Liberation Theology, though the Movement for Peace rejects revolutionary tactics. The Liberationist system is peculiar because it is the most progressive and *explicitly political* theology in Catholicism in the West. It is significant also in that it is native-born in Latin America and became a thorn in the flesh of the institutional Catholic church in the 1960s and 1970s.

Liberation Theology critiqued the pre-modern conservatism of the Catholic Church and the hyper-modern, neoliberal (often Protestant endorsed) economic theories of the rich, industrialized Global North. Due to its emphasis on the world as seen “from below” and its commitment to act accordingly, a revolutionary notion at the time, Petrella (2005) called Liberation Theology “the most important theological movement of the twentieth century” (Petrella 2005: xi). Its importance was also bound up in the material hazard Liberationist ideas posed to institutions in Latin American public life. Catholic elites were concerned this theology could fundamentally alter the Church’s relationship to political power. Political authorities were apprehensive about a theology advocating radical politics, including armed revolt. International capitalist leaders and U.S. Cold

warriors were concerned about its rejection of the free-market system and alleged idolization of Marxism-Leninism.

The reticence about theology and politics “from below” was not a Cold War invention. Its first appearance dates at least to Vatican I, a global conference of bishops which took place in 1870, which was a severe, conservative reaction to the secular, liberal ideas primarily coming out of Europe. Vatican I marked the last formal gasp of the old-style Christendom (Tombs 2002: 44) and featured reactionary moves, such as a development of the doctrine of papal infallibility (Berryman 1984: 16). Vatican I was in part a desperate attempt to defuse the burgeoning global socialist-Marxist movement of that time by asserting the faults of liberalizing political movements afoot in Europe. Pope Leo XIII was installed in 1878, and despite the church’s reactionary posture at the time, Leo initiated the foundational changes that paved the way for Liberation Theology.

Leo’s philosophical changes created a more experimental theological environment. His liberalized perspective is evident in the *Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labor)*. Early on in the document it is clear that Leo XIII is cognizant of the growing strength of Marxism, noting that it is not surprising that the “spirit of revolutionary change [has] passed beyond the sphere of politics and made its influence felt in the cognate sphere of practical economics...” (1891, 1). What is critical is that, despite some reservations, Leo concedes the *morality* of the socialist critique:

“In any case we clearly see, and on this there is general agreement, that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class: for the ancient workingmen's guilds were abolished in the last century, and no other protective organization took their place. Public institutions and the laws set aside the ancient religion. Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been

surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hard-heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition (1891: 3).”

In the next breath, however, he states the church’s opposition to organized socialism at the state level. While Leo agreed to the socialist statement of the problem, he stopped well short of the “unjust” Marxist remedy:

“They [socialists and Marxists] hold that by thus transferring property from private individuals to the community, the present mischievous state of things will be set to rights, inasmuch as each citizen will then get his fair share of whatever there is to enjoy...They are, moreover, emphatically unjust, for they would rob the lawful possessor, distort the functions of the State, and create utter confusion in the community (1891: 4).”

Defining a Politics of Liberation

Leo XIII’s declarations, though obviously sympathetic to the plight of the poor, still denounce the alternatives to the capitalist system. The critical change, however, is Leo’s openness to criticism that originated in secular intellectual society. However, it took half a century for those ideas to bear fruit. It was Vatican II, hosted in Latin America from 1962-1965, that turned the Catholic Church “inside out” (Berryman, 1987, p16). Pope John XXIII initiated a previously unimaginable process of reform, by “modestly accepting [the Church’s] ‘pilgrim’ status, journeying alongside the rest of humankind. In a further radical shift, the church began to see in ‘human progress’ evidence of God’s working in human history” (Berryman 1987: 16). Shortly before the opening sessions of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII updated Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (Tombs 2002, p 74) with papal encyclicals that placed the Catholic church as the guardian of “human dignity” (*Mater et Magister*, 1961) and human rights in a democratic context (*Pacem in*

Terris, 1963). The mandate became making the church the church of all, especially the poor (Gutierrez 1999: 25). It was the reflections on precisely what a “church of the poor” would look like that launched Liberation Theology.

Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez first described the concept of Liberation Theology in 1964 (Berryman 1987; Nickoloff 1996) though his ideas were not popularized until 1971. Gutierrez argued that “the theology of liberation, like any theology, is about God. God and God’s love are, ultimately, its only themes” (Gutierrez 1999: 19). Gutierrez states his case for an activist posture for Christians:

The participation of Christian in the process of liberation in Latin America that some time ago we used to call the ‘most important fact’ in the life of the Church is nothing other than an expression of the immense historical process that we know as the ‘irruption’ of the poor. This has helped us see with unusual force and clarity the longstanding, cruel poverty in which the great majority of Latin American live. These people have burst upon the social scene with ‘their poverty on their shoulders’ – as [Bartolome de] Las Casas commented referring to the Indian nations of his time” (Gutierrez 1999: 20).

Gutierrez argues that this is an overdue and consequential change in the relationship of the poor to the church and to society at large. Gutierrez argues that Liberation Theology becomes part of the project whereby “the poor begin to see themselves as subjects of their own history, as being able to take their destiny in their own hands” (Gutierrez 1999: 21). The critical pieces of the Liberation intellectual framework were its formulation of poverty as the antagonist to liberation. In the words of Gutierrez, “poverty” was threefold: (1) material poverty, or the lack of goods required to satisfy basic needs; (2) spiritual poverty, which is the renunciation of desire for worldly goods by those who have them; (3) poverty as a commitment to live in solidarity with the poor as a protest

against material poverty.

“Liberation” is also threefold: (1) the elimination of immediate causes of poverty and injustice; (2) the elimination of obstacles to human development and dignity – a “new humanism”; (3) the elimination of sin and selfishness (Gutierrez, 1999, pp25-26). For Gutierrez, poverty in Latin America implies “death, unjust and premature death” (Gutierrez, 1999, 24). Liberation Theology is not so much a new theology as a “new method” of doing theology (Rowland, 1999; Bedford, 1999; Jung, 2005). This is usually expressed in the phrase “a preferential option for the poor.” The work became moving away from theology *about* the poor and toward a theology *for* the poor.

Thus, at the *top* of Gutierrez’s hierarchy of poverties was material poverty, and at the *bottom* was spiritual poverty (or “sin”). Spiritual poverty had been the Catholic Church’s priority for millennia, and Liberation Theology subverts this ancient hierarchy. Christian notions of sin and salvation require a metaphor, whether sickness vs. healing or brokenness vs. wholeness, or as the Liberationists described it, as poverty vs. liberation (Hebblethwaite, 1999, p 179). Thus, Liberation Theology comes very close to redefining salvation as coming through action, or *praxis*, that seeks the betterment of the poor. The signature vocabulary of Liberationists, then, is this dialectic of justice and injustice (Bell 2002: 334). Gutierrez (1999) says that the Liberation method consists of two acts: first is the commitment to live in the same conditions as the poor, and the second is to reflect on the Bible from within this condition. “Right” action becomes constantly pointing to previously invisible, oppressed “others” in our society, and seeking their protection. Scholars have described this two-part method as “orthopraxis,” a marrying of orthodoxy

to real-world action.

Liberation, Thomism and Religiously Motivated Politics

Tombs (2002) emphasized the impossibility of understanding Liberation Theology outside of its historical context. Latin America has been religiously homogenous for centuries, and it remains an exceptionally strategic region for the Catholic Church. Today, Latin America constitutes the single largest block of Roman Catholic Christians. It is also the only portion of the developing world with a Christian heritage (Medhurst 1991: 189). This remarkable stability meant that the Roman Catholic Church did not change dramatically in its core ideological orientation from the colonial period until shortly before the rise of Liberation Theology. The Catholic Church was complicit in the colonial project for political reasons but also for reasons of theology. Medhurst (1991) and Tombs (2002) argue that the expansion of the Church in Latin America was broadly viewed through the lens of “Christendom,” or “colonial Christendom” (Berryman 1987: 10), an ideological rendering of the Christian faith that sought an international Christian empire.

Tombs phrases this as the Church’s “option for power” (Tombs 2002: 41), which is his rhetorical subversion of Liberation Theology’s ethical principle of the “option for the poor.” This “Christendom” ideology was underwritten by the predominant Roman Catholic theology of the colonial era, which Medhurst (1991) identifies as the “Thomist” tradition. It is named for its roots in the thinking of the brilliant, medieval, monk-cum-saint Thomas Aquinas, who adapted into the Christian worldview the hard dualism

advocated by Greco-Platonic thought, which posited hermetic spheres of the heavenly, divine and good on one hand, and the terrestrial, human and fallen on the other.

Thomistic theology then assigned features of culture to one or the other side of this hard boundary, with no migration across that boundary permitted. All of human culture and social institutions fall in the latter - intractably fallen and evil - category. As such, *human culture* could not be fixed; only human souls could be fixed. Thus, preoccupations with unobtainable social change become frivolous and troublesome.

It might be tempting to dismiss assessments of medieval thought patterns as so many “angels dancing on the head of a pin,” but it is an effective interpretive and predictive device. This bifurcated understanding of power became a structural feature of Christian thought and by extension a structural feature of politics in this very Christian region. Indeed, this dualistic, Thomist approach can be traced through almost every modern form of Christian practice in the Western hemisphere, though important critiques have come against it in most traditions.² It is especially consequential for politics because of its assignment of institutionalized power to the “upper” realm of the divine. It is especially consequential for Latin America because of the Catholic church’s cultural dominance and its centuries-long “Christendom” orientation.

Thomist thought then perceived political hierarchies as expressions of divine will (Medhurst 1991: 189-191) and therefore unassailable, whereas Liberation Theology views hierarchies as loci of injustice and systemic evil and obvious targets for reform. If,

² [For an extended discussion of the implications of Thomism, Christian separatism, fundamentalism and related theological ideas, see H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. Harper & Row: 1951.] His discussion is primarily about the European and North American churches, but the patterns are generalizable.

as Thomism argues, hierarchies of power are akin to revelation from God, it is exceedingly difficult to progress from this theological stance to a change-oriented social critique. Thomist theology at once sustained the hierarchical structure of the Church while rationalizing other injustices that descend from those persistent, hierarchical social forms. They are simply God-ordained. Participation in a religious community becomes a temporary escape from the grinding realities of an impoverished or even enslaved life, not a means to alter that reality.

This is not to say that the Catholic church was a monolith of indifference to suffering for 500 years until Liberation Theology appeared. There were important voices from within the Church that tried to alert it to the suffering of the indigenous poor (Tombs, 2002; Rowland, 1999; Gutierrez 1968, 1991). The Dominicans did so in colonial times as did other radical priests, such as Bartolome de las Casas (Rowland 1999: 2). What separates these voices from Liberation Theology is that they remained isolated and they did not advocate a reinterpretation of political power. No coherent, critical, internal movement emerged in the Catholic Church prior to Liberation Theology. Rather, the Church's position for centuries was to opt for power when forced to choose (Toombs, 2002).

Some of the most important counterpoints to Liberation Theology's formulation of evil and redemption as political-systemic problems have come from the Catholic Church itself. Beginning in the late 1970s, Pope John Paul II, Cardinal John Ratzinger (before he became Pope Benedict XVI), and Cardinal Lopez Trujillo worked to reassert the traditional understanding of the hierarchy of evil, with spiritual poverty preceding

material poverty. The concern was traditional thinking about sin and salvation, but it was also a concern about “secular” sourcing for theology. In search of the solution for sin/evil/poverty, Liberation Theology was open to social analysis from many sides, including dependency theory and Marxism.

The literature is divided about precisely “how Marxist” Liberation Theology was. In the years after communism collapsed, supporters tended to downplay the connections between Liberation and leftist economics. Critics, however, could not see past the Marxism. Gutierrez (1999) claims that with dependency theory at its peak in the 1960s and 70s, dependency theory even more than Marxism provided the social-analysis content of the Liberation. Gutierrez later acknowledged the limitations of dependency theory and that Liberationists over-commitment to it. He argued that Liberation Theology should not be tied into a single social or economic analysis. Nickoloff (1996) holds that Gutierrez’s primary interest was in the dialogue between theology and the social sciences *generally* instead of the narrower conversation with Marxism. Gutierrez rejected the anti-religious biases of Marxism as well as its totalitarian offshoots (Nickoloff 1996: 19). The fraternity with Marxism is one of the key factors in John Paul II’s silencing of strident voices like Brazilian Liberationist Leonardo Boff.³

Others argue that Liberation Theology did not go far enough in its Marxist critique. Bell (2001 and 2002) maintains that the heart of the Liberation critique is its entrenched opposition to “savage capitalism” and its endless cycle of violence, misery

³ See Boff’s book *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutionalized Church* (Crossroad, 1985), which prompted the censorship.

and premature death (2002: 333). Alistair Khee (1990) critiques Liberation Theology for picking and choosing from Marx, taking his social categories and economic mechanisms but rejecting the religious critique (Martin 1998, 117). These critiques did have an effect. Even in John Paul II's conservative responses⁴, widely regarded as a rejection of Liberation Theology, Liberation vocabulary (such as "option for the poor") had already entered the Catholic lexicon permanently (Hebblethwaite: 182-186).

Liberation Theology also won converts among the Protestant community, though whatever inroads it made in that community were severely constrained by Protestant fears of Marxism (Pixley 2000). This speaks powerfully to the historical and political ties that many Protestants - and especially evangelicals - had with the United States in depths of the Cold War. There was considerable theological and ideological coincidence among U.S. Protestants in Ronald Reagan's anti-communist movement, and these churches were major funders of missionaries and church leadership in Latin America. As such, the Marxist (or even the dependency-theory) categories Liberationists employed were a non-starter among evangelical communities (Grandin, 2007).

Applied Theology: Proto-Religious Civil Society

Though scholars documented a trend toward less integration of the Church and the state through the late 19th and early 20th Century, Medhurst argues that the Church still held onto some of the old "Christendom" thinking. However, the general political trends did not favor the Church's historical position, though outcomes varied from state

⁴ See Pope John Paul's *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 1986.

to state. In Colombia the Church retained an extant Concordat (Medhurst 1991: 193; Gill 1999: 24) that guaranteed the Church a privileged position and close relationship with the Colombian state. Shortly after its revolution, Mexico was militantly anti-clerical (Ibid) before settling on an officially secular state (as will be elaborated in Chapter Three), while the relations between the Catholic Church and Cuba broke down completely after its revolution. Most other political solutions fell somewhere in between. Through the post-independence period, the regional model was for the institutional church to ally as best it could with “conservative” parties, while opposing political parties usually calling themselves “liberal.” Anthony Gill (1999) argues an economic model to explain the moves the Church began to make once its political position became threatened. Gill holds that the Church’s actions are analogous to the moves a corporation would make when its monopoly is endangered. In particular, Gill’s model is applied in light of the rise of Protestantism. Gill attributes this rise to the trend of liberal governments introducing freedom of worship into their constitutions (Gill, 1999, 24).

Catholic Action was one of the most direct experiments Catholicism offered for civil society and could have been put to great effect in Mexico. Originating in Europe at the end of the 19th Century, it became established in Latin America in the 1930s (Tombs 2002: 58-59). Catholic Action resulted from a reformulation of Catholic social teaching, which Pope Pius XI reconstituted as “social Catholicism” in the 1920s (Bell 2001: 45). Under this regime, also called “New Christendom” (Bell 2001: 45), the church pulled out of formal politics and pushed lay action. Catholic Action brought together many smaller groups under its umbrella, all organized around discrete social issues. Its approach

anticipated the base-community model of Liberation Theology, which appeared in the 1960s. Action groups, organized around a single social concern, employed the method of see-judge-act (Tombs: 59; Dawson 2000). Catholic Action was focused on alleviation of immediate material problems and, unlike Liberation Theology, did not seek systemic change in fundamental social hierarchies. Rather, it sought to promote traditional Catholic spiritual values to those in need. In that sense, it was a bridge behavior between purely Thomistic passivity and restive Liberation.

Christian Democracy parties, based on Catholic social teaching, were emerging across the continent (Medhurst, 1991; Berryman, 1987; Tombs, 2002), as well. This “secular” political work carried out by Christian Democracy parties began opening spaces for new theological ideas. In the case of Chile, one of the countries with the earliest and strongest Protestant growth curves, the strength of Christian Democrats is linked to Catholic defensiveness against the new religious competitor (Medhurst, 1991). Gill (1999) goes the farthest in drawing a causal connection between Protestantism and the rise of progressive Catholic politics on the continent. The Christian Democracy party was under pressure to appeal to the poor who were being wooed, at least as far back as the 1950s, by competing Protestant-Pentecostal theologies. Christian Democrats recognized they were out of touch with the poor (Medhurst 1991: 195) and had to find a way back into their graces. Thus, armed with the growing influence of progressive theologies, Chile’s Christian Democrats were the first Catholics on the continent to advocate for land reform and large-scale political participation from the underclasses (Ibid).

Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs)

In light of the fact that the poor lack resources for political struggle, Liberationists began asking how this salvation/justice would be achieved. The answer was to pool resources, knowledge, and action in the Base Ecclesial Community (CEB) for political transformation. CEBs have become scholars' primary measure of the strength of Liberation Theology today. Examinations of CEBs generally fall into two categories: studies of the decline of CEBs or investigations of the local political successes they achieved. The literature focuses on Brazil (Dawson, 1999; de Theije, 1999; Drogus, 2000), which had the largest concentration of CEBs and where Liberation Theology made its greatest political inroads. At its peak, there were as many as 100,000 CEBs active in Brazil (Dawson 1999: 122), fully 50% of the continent-wide total (Gooren 2002: 30). Central America is another focal point of CEB success (Canin and Stein, 2000). Drogus (2000) argues that CEBs were instrumental in the political gains that women made, even though CEBs were "embedded in a religious structure that continues to discriminate against women in many ways..." (Drogus 2000: 86). Women comprised the vast majority of the participants in CEBs and the overt political nature of CEBs in turn positioned women as axis of political change (Drogus 2000: 86).

Marjo de Theije (1999) argues that CEBs are in decline in name but not content. Rather, charismatic Catholicism is vying to fill the gap that CEB failures created. Indeed, the Catholic charismatic renewal (CCR) offers a small-group, problem-solving model that critics view as actively opposed to the CEB model (De Theije 1999: 111). The CCR

model focuses on individual problems and emphasizes a pietistic religious experience. De Theije objects to those that theorize that religious individualization must come at the expense of collective action (Ibid). De Theije insightfully argues that “observers usually emphasize the meaning of the movement in a national and international context, overlooking the peculiarities and distinctive traits of local elaborations of charismatic teachings” (1999: 112).

Problematizing the Politics of Liberation

Petrella’s claim that Liberation Theology is the most important theological movement of the 20th Century turns out to be belied by the numbers of converts. The literature demonstrates that the actual number of adherents was never very large. Smith (1991) estimated that there were only 200,000 Base Ecclesial Communities (CEB) at the height of Liberation Theology’s influence. With each with community numbering approximately 70 members, there were never more than five million adherents, even in the 1960s (Smith, C 1991; Gooren 2002: 30). Gooren (2002) points out that in fact the only country that retains an active Liberation-Theology movement is Brazil. Free-market advocates are especially quick to dismiss the impact of Liberation Theology. Lynch (1998) argues that today “Liberation Theology has the power to excite no one outside the faculties of North American and European universities and seminaries” (Lynch 1998, paragraph 27). He contends that the 1968 CELAM conference in Medellin, just one month after the term was first spoken, was not the dawn of the movement, but its noontime and that the rank and file never truly agreed with the tenets of the elites that

created it. Why did Liberation Theology not grip the masses? Why did radical politics not seize the day? Liberation Theology had the human condition in its favor, after all. The social and religious conditions in Latin America could not have been more ripe for an ideological explosion. Yet it never occurred.

Some state this question in terms of outright failure. Gooren (2002) in his study of religion and poverty in Guatemala City argues that structural obstacles impeded the growth of Liberation Theology rather than any fault of the idea itself. He concludes that in Guatemala the poor created their own theology of liberation focused on self-improvement through Protestant business ethics rather than Liberation Theology's vague promises of collective gain through social change (Gooren: 40). Bedford (1999) in a similar vein argues that the "recently impoverished" in Latin America include now numbers of formerly non-Pentecostal Protestants. These newly poor Protestants are now gravitating to the prosperity gospel, "which promises rapid physical healing and does not challenge structural injustices" (Bedford 1999: 997). They are opting for a different form of liberation.

Gooren sees both external and internal constraints as preventing the Liberation movement from gaining traction in the Guatemalan context. The primary external factor was that the Guatemalan military was actively targeting mobilized persons on the political left in the 1970s. Liberation Theology with its reputation for radicalizing its adherents became a conspicuous target of the military. The risk of violence limited CEB appeal. A second external factor was the economic crisis of the 1980's, which moved workers into the informal sector. Gooren argues that this economic sector was "far

removed from the Marxist-inspired criticism of capitalism common in Liberation Theology” (Gooren 2002: 31). Gooren is essentially arguing that economic/social atomization preempted the movement’s establishment. He attributes this to generalized disillusionment with politics as a means to social change. This second external factor only obtains, however, in the context of the more important factor of violent reprisals. This is because Guatemalan Christians were continuing to associate with one another in many different ways all through this period, including the obvious church associations. Nothing inherent in economic atomization prevents people from commiserating about their plight in the context of organized religious expressions. Remove the threat of violence, especially during the critical period of the 1970’s when Liberation Theology was most virulent, and I would argue the counterfactual position that the movement would be more prevalent.

Gooren identifies internal factors as well, beginning with Pope John Paul II’s souring on Liberation Theology and his effort to reign in priests who advocated it. Gooren also posits the very interesting theory that poor converts to Christianity began to see CEBs as too tied to politics and not tied enough to spirituality (Gooren: 31). This resulted in an out-migration into Protestant churches. Lynch (1998) agrees with Gooren but blames Liberation Theology’s failure to expand on critical strategic miscalculations by liberationists themselves. He anticipates Gooren when he notes that many people, the poor especially, look to religion as precisely an escape from the banality of daily life. Religion put into the service of politics, then, supposedly brings no relief. The second strategic failure was that the Liberationist’s church loyalties trumped their social agenda.

They were “determined to remain inside the church, even if they [had] strong and frequent disagreements with its teachings” (Lynch 1998: paragraph 43). Even as Pope John Paul II began actively moving against them, the Liberationist priests never abandoned the church. Liberationists also expressed a suffocating vanguardism in their relationship with CEBs (Lynch; Levine 1995: 108) by constantly stressing the political even if it did not coincide with the daily routines of the members.

Post-Marxist Liberation and The Movement for Peace and Reconciliation

The post-Marxist school is represented by Jung Mo Sung in Brazil (2005), who argues that confusing Liberation Theology and Marxism does a disservice to both concepts. He argues that the foundational “epistemological novelties” of Liberation Theology were its methodology and the perspective of the poor and that these should always figure into Christian discourse (Jung 2005: 1; Bedford 1999: 996). Bedford (1999) adds that Liberation Theology created an awareness that evil can live in social structures, not just people. It also sensitized Northern theologians that they too were “producing contextual theology, from a perspective no less particular than that of their Latin American colleagues” (Bedford 1999: 996). This is the form of Liberation thought that best describes the “political theory” that underpins the Movement for Peace and Reconciliation. In Javier Sicilia’s words and approach to civil society, one can detect his effort to see life from below, from the viewpoint of the victim, and then to encourage the state to exercise an “option for the victim.”

Jung argues that Liberation Theology must continue to have a role. He

acknowledges that, in the failure of Marxism, Liberation Theology became estranged from activism, hampering its public voice. Its social critique remains intact, however. Jung argues that Liberation Theology must remain critical of the economic order, but not with Marxist ends. Without a credible economic alternative to capitalism, Jung argues that Liberation Theology rescues the humanity of the individual in an increasingly globalized and homogenizing environment. Bedford (1999) describes this as the “dignifying” exercise that Liberation Theology can and should become for the poor (Bedford: 1000). Here Jung explores this concept further:

“Let us take as an example, the reduction of the individual to an economic actor. When the capitalist market system tells a person excluded from the market that he or she does not have the right to eat for not being a consumer (without money to act out the role of consumer), what is really happening is the negation of the subjectness of this person and his or her reduction to an economic role...In the face of such a situation the following kind of protest of the poor is not uncommon: ‘I am poor, but I am a child of God, too!’” (Jung 2005: 14).

Bedford (1999) argues that the future of Liberation Theology lies with Protestantism. It should attempt to bring the explosive energy of the Pentecostal movement to reckon with structural injustice while bearing in mind where liberationists have overreached in this project in the past. She points out that the most popular usage of the word *liberacion* in Latin America today is in the context of an exorcism, which is one of the signature rituals of the Pentecostal movement (Bedford 1999: 998). Indeed, some neo-Pentecostal communities are beginning to directly engage the pain of the poor, using slogans such as “Pare de Sufrir” (End the Suffering), although without direct influence from liberationists (Bedford 1999: 998). I would argue that this sort of change is emblematic of the fact that Liberation Theology reset the Christian table with these ideas.

Liberationist ideas now constitute a kind of default setting for poor Christians—even those who were once suspicious of its Marxist sympathies. In particular, Bedford wishes to avoid over-romanticizing the role of the poor in changing history. They are not “noble savages” untainted by evil, nor do they have the resources to sustain a long-term fight against global capital. Bedford shows that even founding Liberationists now recognize some hubris in their approach, which is evidenced by Hugo Assmann’s inquiry why no one pointed out to him back in the 1970’s that his phrase “The oppressed people, lord of history,” sounded so pompous (Bedford 1999: 997, 1000). Liberationists are not disavowing their theory; rather, they are reinterpreting it in light of new realities after the “end of history.”

Beyond Class & System Thought

Going hand in hand with the post-Marxist Liberation thought are schools that seek to layer onto the class analysis other distinctions that also result in oppression. Some Liberation theologians anticipated that with the fall of communism, the monopoly that class categories had on Liberation Theology discourse would weaken. And indeed that has happened. These new schools could be broadly thought of as identity theologies or neo-Liberationist theologies, though that is not a term that appears on the literature. Sectors of the neo-Liberationist literature, while still certainly “theology” in the sense of studying God, would certainly be post-Christian and in some cases anti-Christian.

Present-day iterations consider Liberation Theology *primarily* a social or political movement rather than a Christian reformation (Chiappari 2002: 62), and they draw their

impetus from that distinction. Unlike the founding Liberation Theologians, like Gutierrez, who attempted to root their critique of social structures in the orthodox doctrinal teaching of Catholic tradition (while rejecting the Church's dominant social expressions), neo-Liberationist literature draws directly from the traditions in Liberation Theology itself (as a starting point) that are most beneficial to the respective movement. Feminist, gay/lesbian, and racial Liberation schools have expanded and in some cases subverted the strictly economic critiques normally associated with Liberation Theology.

While the racial and sexual politics are relatively late coming to Liberation Theology, the place of women in the movement has always been quite prominent. Women made up the vast majority of the participants in the CEBs (Drogus, 2000). Critics of Liberation Theology point out, however, that one of the failures of the movement was not providing a sufficiently relevant program to retain women. Lynch (1998) argues that CEBs were sometimes convened for purposes unrelated to politics (like social sewing), yet activists would insist on injecting theory into the conversations. This drove women away. Lynch relies on an essentialist argument to make this case, however, insisting that Latin American women were impatient with theory and preferred concrete actions (Lynch 1995: paragraph 46). But a very robust feminist literature has emerged nevertheless. Examples include the Womanist theology of U.S. black women [see de Lima Silva 2005], the *Mujerista* theology of U.S. Hispanic women, and the emergent spirituality/theology of American Indian women (Grey 1999: 89). Grey (1999) notes that the feminist tradition picked up on the powerful "life" discourse in Liberation Theology. This neo-Liberation literature engages in the search "for a new ethic and a new culture

[that] resists the logic of domination/submission of patriarchy” and deepens the “profound project of transforming the culture of violence into a culture which affirms and celebrates life” (Grey 1999: 98).

The Protestant Moment in Latin America: Mass Thomism or Mass Liberation?

A key reason Liberation thinkers see the future in Protestantism is that the number of non-Catholic Christians is growing every year in Latin America. This process is the biggest driver of change in the region. Even bastions of Catholicism once thought impregnable to religious competitors, such as Brazil, are contending with seismic shifts in their religious populations. Protestants have been present in Latin America since the late 19th Century. Their numbers were small and they remained politically insignificant for several generations after the arrival of the first missionaries. Indeed, these non-native Protestant missionaries had little use for politics even in their countries of origin. Thus, it was no surprise that Protestant missionaries, anxious not to trigger the ire of the local authorities, were content to remain outside the political fracas and to focus themselves instead on quietly converting those who would listen.

Willems (1967) noted that some Protestants arrived in Latin America as immigrants (rather than missionaries) and intentionally retained their native language and worship customs as a barrier to new participants (Willems 1967: 3). They had little interest in replicating their religious communities in the New World. But the numbers and political postures of Protestants in Latin America began to undergo dramatic changes in the course of the 20th Century. A few Protestants even rose to power, such as

Guatemala's General Efraim Rios-Montt. Protestant growth trends were consistent through the mid-20th century, and then boomed in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. After a long slow build, the Latin American continent seemed to be suddenly throwing off centuries of religious tradition. What is more, this process seemed to catch social scientists by surprise.

David Stoll's 1990 watershed work, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant*, marked the "Protestant turn" in Latin American scholarship on religion. The most important scholarship undertaken at the country level prior to Stoll in 1990 was Emilio Willems' *Followers of the New Faith* (1967). In the years between Willems and Stoll, the scholarly energy was absorbed by Liberation Theology. Willems published his work, which was based on research conducted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, just as the Vatican II movement was underway. The famous CELAM conference of Latin American Catholic bishops had yet to take place. Stoll, meanwhile, published his work just as it was becoming evident that Liberation Theology was not going to be a long-term force among the Latin American poor. Questions began to emerge as to why marginalized and optionless poor were turning to Protestant Pentecostalism instead of the much more politically attuned Liberation Theology. The scholarship that came after Stoll focuses on this question of "why not?" Liberation Theology. Willems sought to understand Protestant growth but especially the ways that missionaries, of all religious stripes, function as agents of cultural change, and he utilized the Protestant missionary experience to demonstrate this. In doing so, Willems established the parameters of scholarly inquiry for the next decade and beyond by proving that Protestant missionaries

of North American and predominantly evangelical extractions were having the greatest successes in gaining converts and convincing those converts to adopt certain behavioral changes.

Willems' overarching conclusion, which has been confirmed by studies since, is that Protestants were most effective at gaining converts in moments of economic or social upheaval. Protestantization was both a cause of and caused by cultural *change*. He found that Protestants were concentrated in the urban metropolises and in rural, frontier areas. His contention was that Protestants' growth thrived most in an environment of long-term exposure to cultural exchange, which is more likely to occur in a place like Sao Paulo or Mexico's borderlands with the United States. Willems argues that, especially in large industrializing cities, the ascetic Protestant ethic appealed to the working middle class and working poor precisely because they were already hard working, disciplined, if under-rewarded, people. It is essential, however, that one understand cultural change at the hands of Protestant proselytism as embedded in a broader web of cultural changes. That is, Latin American culture was changing, regardless of inputs from Protestants.

Willems developed the notion of "religious caudillism" (Willems 1967: 120) as a pathology primarily observed among the Pentecostal poor. He argues that the lack of sophistication among the poor was exploited by charismatic, messianic figures that mixed religion and nationalism to build their congregations into very large institutions. For all of his protests that his is not a Weberian analysis, Willems constructed a decidedly market-logic, rational-choice viewpoint. He acknowledges that there are many reasons for choosing a religion or a "social identity" and that its utility is just one. But all things

being equal, Willems (also Gill, 1999) argues that Protestantism at some level was meeting a need, just as any market-savvy product would do. Thus, Willems often quotes his subjects as emphasizing their lazy, unproductive lives prior to conversion to Protestant Christianity with their fulfilling, prosperous lives after conversion.

Willems is interested in why Pentecostalism succeeded against what he called “folk Catholicism.” Willems argues that Pentecostalism coincided with existing cultural practices, in this case, mysticism:

Pentecostalism picked up the mystical tradition of Latin American folk Catholicism and converted it into a set of institutions that have a direct bearing on the sociocultural changes affecting the lower classes. Pentecostalism, along with Seventh Day Adventism and a few other sects, resumes an ancient tradition of messianism which, in Brazil at least, can be traced back to messianic Sebastianism of the sixteenth century (Willems 1967: 134).

Willems also was one of the first to identify the self-conscious anti-intellectualism that is present among sectors of Pentecostalism:

As a rule, the Pentecostals are proud of being uneducated and simple people, untrained for any intellectual task. Successful proselytism, especially the ability to hold the attention of a casual crowd and to make converts is invariably attributed to the presence of the Spirit in the preacher rather than to his intellectual skill (Willems 1967: 140).

Willems links this anti-intellectualism to a rigid otherworldliness, which is the notion that only what happens after one dies matters and that the present world is not of lasting concern. This politically stagnant otherworldliness is in fact a variety of Catholic Thomism that stood at odds with Liberation Theology, though it enters Latin American Protestantism via the missionaries from the USA. Thus, this expression of Thomism immigrates to Latin America bundled with anti-Catholic biases and North American

geopolitical influences. This Thomistic dualism was exported from Catholicism in the Reformation by Martin Luther with his founding of Protestantism, and is evidenced by Luther's "two-kingdoms" motif. On the one hand lies the Kingdom of God, and on the other is the Kingdom of the World. There is a clear division between secular and sacred, though the degree to which these spheres can or should cooperate has been a matter for succeeding generations of Protestants of all varieties to contest. What is a matter of consensus is that these spheres are distinct and that they have divergent priorities, privileges, and mandates in the real world. Nygren (2002) argues that Luther's intent is evident as far back 1523 in his *Von Weltlicher Obrigkeit* (On Secular Authority), one of his oldest statements of this motif. Luther states that all people (and institutions) can be divided into those who belong to the kingdom of God and those who belong to the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of God should have distinct political characteristics, Luther says. Chief among them is the absence of a Leviathan due to the *absence of the need for* applications of state-based power:

"Behold, these [people of the kingdom of God] need neither sword nor law. And if all the world were made up of true Christians, there would be no need for ruler, king, lord, sword or law, for where would be the use of them? The Holy Ghost which abideth in their hearts teacheth them and bringeth it to pass that they do no wrong, but love all men. . . . And it may not be that the sword of the world and the law of the world should find labour to do among Christians" (Martin Luther, 1523, quoted in Nygren, 2002).

The purpose here is not to exhaustively treat Thomism's maturation in North American Protestantism, but simply to establish its vigorous presence there. This dualistic understanding of secular (political) and sacred (personal/pietistic) realms saturated

European Protestantism⁵. The development of the missionary projects from U.S. evangelicals and low-church Protestants engineered its re-encounter with the aging Thomism of the Catholic, colonial Christendom project, which had also begun to come under pressure within the Catholic Church in the 19th and under 20th centuries, which coincided with the greatest Protestant inroads in the region.

Willems painted with too broad a brush, and later scholars challenged the notion that Pentecostals have no use for temporal pursuits such as politics or professional acclaim. Still, Willems' conclusion that Pentecostals are in effect the new Thomists became the scholarly conventional wisdom. Willems critiques this detrimental withdrawal from political affairs:

To evaluate the disruptive effects which nonparticipation exerts on neighborhood organization one ought to consider the fact that the working party requires the co-operation of large groups of people and covers practically all kinds of work, such as weeding, harvesting, road and bridge repairs, and house construction. If the Protestants constitute a minority, as they usually do, nonparticipation affects them rather than the community; if they form compact neighborhoods they may rely on their own mutual aid organizations, but in either case the cleavage between Protestants and non-Protestants splits the rural community right down to its very foundations (Willems 1967: 167).

Willem's concern is what would happen to this same community if Protestants with an otherworldly posture were to become a majority. Willems concludes that in the political arena the tendency of Protestants toward withdrawal was already falling away by the time of his writing. While generalizing Pentecostal tendencies is difficult, the most significant finding was that Protestants tended to engage politics in a manner that roughly

⁵ Here again the work of H. Richard Niebuhr (1951) is very helpful in tracing the intellectual and cultural roots of this sacred-vs.-secular construction of the political problem within Protestant thought. The most energetic missionary operations of the North American church were typically from the denominations that were most committed to the view.

corresponded to the rate of democratization. Greater indices of democracy correlated with greater Protestant participation. Willems also underscores the Latin American Protestant allergy to the ideologically driven politics of mid-20th Century. To the degree that Cold War ideological conflicts influenced politics, it depressed Protestant participation (Willems 1967: 221).

The other watershed work on Protestants in Latin America is David Stoll's (1990) *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* Whereas Willems' focus was in part on the cultural effects of Protestantization, Stoll's concern is primarily about political outcomes. Stoll observed many of the same phenomena that Willems saw; however, Stoll evaluated his observations in response to Liberation Theology. Writing as Liberation Theology's popularity began to wane, the end of Ronald Reagan's counter-insurgency campaigns in Central America, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, Stoll wanted to understand how evangelical Protestants who, despite their "indifference to oppression," manage to attract the poor out of the socially active Catholic church. Stoll says that at first glance:

“[It] is easier to see how Latin American evangelicals maintain the status quo than how they change it. In all but religion they seem dedicated less to protest than to conformity, less makers of revolution than products of failed ones. In Latin America, it is easy to conclude, the role that Protestants played in the European Reformation has passed to radical Catholics (Stoll 1990: xiv).

Stoll's work focused on evangelicals, whom he saw as standing at an important political crossroad at the time of this writing:

“For readers alarmed by evangelical growth, I want to provide a sense of its open-ended nature. For evangelicals, I wish to dramatize the danger of allowing their missions to be harnessed to U.S. militarism by the religious right. Although stressing that evangelical Protestantism must be understood from the ground, as a popular movement, I want to emphasize the clear and present danger that it is

being manipulated by the U.S. government” (Stoll 1990: xv).

Stoll deepens Willems’ analysis of why evangelicals, upon entering a new country, were not likely to engage in politics or, if they did, were likely to support the status quo.

Willems links this posture to theology: Protestants were not concerned about this temporal world but about the afterlife. Stoll argues it was more politically pragmatic than this. He contends that Protestants might have seen unseemly dictators as allies against the Catholic Church, which was at times very inhospitable to Protestant competition. He also argued that, by passively supporting the regime in power, evangelicals sensed that they were ensuring their freedom of worship and freedom to proselytize (Stoll, 1990, 18).

Stoll also links the expressions of political Protestantism in Latin America to events and trends within North American Protestantism driven by polemical symbols of that era, such as the television preacher Pat Robertson. Robertson, and others of his ilk, were not blind accomplices of the Reagan political project (Stoll, 1990, 43). Rather, North American evangelicals used Latin American evangelicals to advance their own domestic, U.S. political agenda.

Stoll identifies the three most prominent political postures of evangelicals active at the time of Stoll's writing. The first are those engaging in a “social strike” (Stoll: 129). This group had withdrawn from the wickedness of “worldly” life, which especially included the very dirty business of politics. This group inherited fundamentalist theology and was constituted mostly of Pentecostals, which have turned out to be the largest group of non-Catholic Christians. The “social strike” ironically supported the status quo thereby protecting and providing opportunities for increased “wickedness,” especially in the

political realm. The second group Stoll terms the “liberals.” These were the descendants of the first wave of Protestantism in Latin America, the mainline denominations. Owing to the fights these groups had to undertake against the institutional Catholic Church for civil liberties, the modern mainline adherents were inclined to support reformists, even revolutionary ideologies (Stoll, 129). This group could be found fighting for the Mexican revolution and supporting the reformist leadership of Arbenz in Guatemala, for example. The third group were the “revolutionaries,” who emerged out of politically polarized “liberals” in the wake of the reactionary regimes and anti-communist dictatorships that sprouted in the 1960s and 1970s. Stoll says that, caught between submission, protest, and the power struggles between right and left, the “revolutionaries” emerged.

Stoll credits these left-intellectual Protestants, organized primarily in the Southern Cone, with being “the first (non-Catholic) liberation theologians in Latin America” (Stoll: 130). The Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua featured significant contributions from evangelical congregations. Some offered material support to Sandinistas including hiding the fighters (Stoll, 138). Liberation Theology, Stoll argues, brought the American Religious Right to Latin America. It was a powerful motivator for North American churches to respond by raising money and redoubling their efforts in the political realm. Stoll demonstrates the schizophrenic political nature of Latin American evangelicalism in the 1980s. There was a tendency among evangelicals to side with U.S. geopolitical goals, but many were simply caught up in the wars and counterinsurgencies and desired to be left alone. This prompted many pragmatic political postures that did not necessarily have a root in theology or even in principle. It was a choice bred from simple self-preservation

at times:

One reason evangelical churches were growing so quickly was that they served as a haven from government violence. According to one evangelical leader, soldiers dragged him, his wife, and four children out of their car, put them up against a wall, and were about to shoot them as a Marxist cell group when he persuaded them to look at the religious literature in the vehicle; it saved their lives (Stoll: 167).

Stoll highlights problematic aspects of the evangelical ascendancy, such as their support for Rios-Montt's rise to power in Guatemala for example. Rios-Montt was a vocal evangelical who commandeered the national television broadcasts to in effect preach the evangelical gospel on Sundays during the same era he was exterminating ideological rivals in the highlands. The reality is less that Rios-Montt somehow “stands for” evangelicals in Latin America than that Rios-Montt is an example of the uneasy relationship evangelicalism had with political power. Stoll also argued that power of the Religious Right in the United States at that time moved Reagan and the Religious Right to highlight the Contras in Nicaragua, whom they “baptized...as Christian freedom fighters” (Stoll, 222). Evangelicals in Nicaragua became political pawns for U.S. geopolitics.

Evangelical Political Identity in Latin America

The questions that Stoll and Willems addressed have been explored in greater detail by those who have followed. Freston (2008) analyzed the global evangelical Christian explosion and its implications for democracy and civil society. Fully half of all Protestants in Guatemala, Brazil and Chile, Nigeria and Kenya are Pentecostal. Freston's

theoretical concern is that, even as evangelical populations have exploded and democratic transitions in the Global South have accelerated, the consolidation of democracy is lagging dramatically. This phenomena is also an aggravating factor in the Christianity-and-criminality research agenda.

Freston defines evangelicals as 1) oriented toward conversions, 2) reserving a special place for the Bible, 3) focusing on the crucifixion of Christ, and 4) heavily invested in missionary and evangelism work (Freston, 2008, p 4). This in turn, is linked to democratic consolidation, defined as “democracy acquiring a deep and widespread legitimacy among all major elite groups and the citizenry at large (Freston, 2008, p 8). The modern political identity of evangelicals, was forged in opposition to the Catholic Church. Due to the varying levels of access the Catholic Church acquired in political power and land concessions, the particular country experience and identity of evangelicals is also varying. Steigenga (2001) found that much of Protestantism in Central America still has an outsider's sense of self. He phrases this as Protestantism being “externally imposed” (Steigenga, 2001, p141). He also found that evangelicals are marginally more likely than Catholics to view engagements with politics as unsavory or not worthwhile. More recent scholarship suggests that evangelicals have evolved toward viewing politics as a necessary evil.

Wightman (2007) sees Pentecostals in Bolivia as having developed a robust political identity. Her investigation of the annual March for Jesus is just one example. Pentecostals use this march to intentionally step into the public square as political entities and as Christians. There are very strong nationalistic overtones to the march, which bore

flags, banners and symbols (Wightman: 251), though it is an international exercise that ties together evangelicals in many countries. The march lacks specific policy goals, but in Bolivia “taking the streets” is a legitimate and storied political activity.

Hanson (2006) argues that the rising sense of Pentecostal identity has caused shifts in the Catholic sense of identity. The Catholic Church chose the poor, but the poor are choosing the Pentecostals (Hanson 2006: 281). This creates a kind of feedback loop as the Catholic Church alters its tactics, including to the point of importing charismatic and renewalist practices from the United States. The Catholic Church also continues to seek legislative protections, such as the Chilean Church's efforts to prohibit the legal registration of churches with fewer than 200 attendees (Hanson 2006: 282). This type of defensive response will feed into the existing Protestant identity, which was forged in response to similar tactics in previous generations. The important difference is that the calculus of power is beginning to shift, and Protestants have more political and economic resources with which to defend themselves. This contest promises to become more prominent in the next decade, especially if current Pentecostal growth trends continue.

Evangelicals & Democracy

While the facts of evangelical expansion in Latin America are a matter of consensus, their value to democracy is a matter of scholarly controversy. Steigenga (2001) found that the more conservative a Protestant adherent is, the more likely that person is to support whatever regime is currently in power. Evangelicals of conservative extractions view their political mandate as obeying the governing authorities (also in

Stoll, 1990). Progressive evangelicals are much more likely to challenge the status quo, but are not any more likely to challenge democracy. Steigenga links the quiescence of Protestant conservatives to the historical marginalization of Protestants. The early missionaries avoided politics out of pragmatism (to avoid persecution) and over time that ethic has coalesced into a political value.

Arguing for a positive interpretation of evangelicalism *vis a vis* democracy, Samson (2008) holds that in contemporary Guatemala “evangelicals express themselves in the political arena in a manner consistent with [a] conceptualization liberal democracy” (Samson 2008: 67). Samson argues this while retaining the consensus position that evangelicals, as a whole, in Guatemala have not been openly at odds with the ruling regime at any time since they were invited into the country by Justo Rufino Barrios in 1882. His purpose here is to move the analysis of evangelicals in Guatemala away from the tragic presidencies of Rios Montt and Jorge Serrano and toward what he views as the new mainstream of evangelical political activity. Samson enters critiques Stoll’s projections of an impending (in 1994) “spiritual hegemony” (Samson 2008: 70; Stoll 1994) in the case of Guatemala, which is considered to be one of the big evangelical successes. Samson argues that evangelicals have not achieved the kind of influence that Stoll predicted. In fact:

“Any such perception is undercut by the fact that Rios Montt and [Jorge] Serrano left the presidency under clouds related to human rights violations and corruption...In addition, the resurgence of interest in Maya spirituality and diverse expressions of Catholicism complicate impressions of evangelical dominance...Although claims as high as one-third have been common in recent years, few would disagree that the rate of increase slowed drastically in the late 1990s. Studies earlier in the decade indicate that 20-25 percent of the population is more accurate” (Samson 2008: 70, 71).

Samson's research and interviews with contemporary evangelicals shows an increasing appreciation for religious ecumenism. Samson also found strong evidence of evangelicals who are highly sensitized to “a reality of exclusion of sectarianism, of intolerance” (Samson: 76). The language of transformation has penetrated the public discourse of evangelicals on all sides of the political spectrum.

Samson is one of the few researchers urging consideration of the political practices of evangelicals at the local level in rural locations. Samson argues that such practices in rural areas:

“allow for the construction and maintenance of either democratic or authoritarian political systems. The reason is that the countryside is often the locus of forces that can be disruptive and destabilizing for democracy, while simultaneously, the focus on institutional arrangements in the urban environment neglects the relationship between political participation and the control of resources in rural areas” (Samson, 2008, p 81).

Here, too, Samson sees a difference in the perspectives of Presbyterian, rural mayors he interviewed and neopentecostals. The Presbyterian mayors, inheritors of the old mainline “liberal” ideas, see themselves as called to work in the world; whereas neopentecostals see themselves as “destined to rule the world in the name of God” (Samson, 2008, p 83). Samson errs in that Presbyterians are not generally considered to be in the evangelical community, neither self-labeled nor by self-described evangelicals. Samson anticipates this dissertation’s work, however:

“Protestants and the internal diversity of the Protestant community represent...social, political, and cultural pluralism within the nation. As such, consideration of evangelical subjects is best done [by] viewing religion not only as a contested field of identity and influence within the context of a state but also

as a sphere of transnational activity wherein people and resources...reach across national boundaries, disregarding or contravening the principle of sovereignty” (Samson, 86).

Annis (2000) focuses on the role of evangelicals and cultural change in a Mayan community. He notes that the literature is beginning, as implied in Samson, to move away from explaining how the Protestant explosion happened and toward specific examples of changes Protestants are affecting. Anthropological studies are picking up on this trend especially and investigating how indigenous populations, through processes identified by Willems, converted to Protestantism and analyzing the cultural shifts that follow.

Another important case study addressed the role of evangelicals in Fujimori's Peru. Dario Lopez Rodriguez (2008) argues against recent scholarship that indicated that Fujimori had benefited from evangelical support via the CONEP (Cleary 1997, 11; Dodson 1997, 35; Bastian 1997, 160-161). The suggestion among these scholars is that there was an identifiable identity agenda that benefited Fujimori. Rodriguez argues that in fact, evangelicals were not well organized politically at this time and had little macro group politics. They accounted for no more than 5 percent of the population, and they did not vote cohesively for Cambio 90. Indeed, evangelical candidates in Cambio 90 marshaled a mere 100,000 votes (Rodriguez 2008: 134). Rodriguez further maintains that evangelicals were certainly “present” in the election of Fujimori but that Mario Vargas Llosa and the Catholic Church went looking for scapegoats after Fujimori showed surprisingly well in the first round of voting. In the campaigns going into the second round of voting, Llosa generated a belief that evangelicals had launched Fujimori to

prominence. Rodriguez makes an insightful analysis of the dubious implications of the successes that pro-Fujimori evangelical candidates had in Cambio 90—one of whom was elected second vice president:

“The fact that eighteen evangelicals without previous political experience could reach congress and an equally inexperienced Baptist pastor could be elected second vice president were clear signs of the disintegration of Peruvian public life and of a crisis in the party system” (Rodriguez 2008: 134).

Rodriguez’s point here bears underscoring because this was an over-representation of evangelicals given their percentage of the total population. The issue was not that evangelicals were making a concerted move into politics as an interest block. Rather, the presence of this set of pro-Fujimori evangelicals was a symbol of the deeper crisis that was playing out in Peruvian politics at the time. The central issue is that these were political novices, and it was a worrisome trend for Peru's democracy that beginners were getting elected while the Shining Path crisis was becoming extreme. Cleary (1997) noted that Peruvian Protestants greeted the arrival of evangelicals with high hopes, but disillusionment followed on quickly once these inexperienced politicians began making mistakes (Cleary 1997: 12). Failures of this nature set back the political development of evangelicals and shape public perception of their capabilities.

One of the most interesting cases to emerge in the study of Latin American evangelicals and political action is the case of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil, also known as the Universal Church. Fonseca (2008) set out to survey and analyze the role of important evangelical political players in Brazil's politics, and the Universal Church has become the prototype of evangelical political activity. Fonseca's

approach, as is characteristic of the literature, is highly narrative driven. It is much more qualitative than quantitative; however, the evidence Fonseca compiles is very extensive. He profiles examples of evangelical mayors, political party affiliates, and local organizers. In the process, he provides a very broad and detailed picture of a surprisingly sophisticated political presence for evangelicals.

Brazil is a very important case for the study of evangelicals and politics, and it has been since Willems and d'Epina's work in the 1960s. Brazil was a hotbed of Liberation Theology in the 1970s and 1980s, and the country has since become one of the truly startling examples the Pentecostal explosion. But the evangelical political awakening came in 1986 with the election of thirty-two evangelical federal deputies in the Constituent Assembly. The 2000 census showed that Protestants accounted for just over 15 percent of the population, while Pentecostals accounted for 68% of all Protestants (Fonseca 2008: 163). The Pew Forum study in 2006 showed that the numbers had grown yet again, with Pentecostals accounting for more than 70% of all Protestants and almost 15% of the population at large (Pew Forum 2006: Executive Summary). Fonseca found that the character of political evangelical discourse is one of "opposition to the federal government, with greater prominence of evangelical politicians who regard themselves as on the left or center-left" (Fonseca 2008: 164).

The Universal Church, for its part, dominates the Liberal Party (LP) (Fonseca 2008: 175). It is very intentional about politics, going so far as to have a full-time political coordinator on its church staff. The rise of the Universal Church coincides with the rise of the evangelical politics in the United States, and in some ways parallels the

organizational structures and national-level agenda seen in the U.S. The Universal Church campaigns for increased party membership around the country. It has a huge media empire, including television and newspaper holdings. It began focusing on its own political candidates in 1998 (Fonseca 2008: 183), and succeeded in controlling twenty-nine votes in the congress through an alliance with the Social Liberal Party, which it also controls (Fonseca 2008: 179). The shrewdness of the Universal Church is evident in that it disperses its candidates through many different parties (though its focus is the Liberal Party), but the candidates may and will act together on occasion. The Universal Church, however, has not moved to start its own party. Perhaps due to the successes of the Universal Church, other evangelical political parties are proliferating. Fonseca identifies many that operate at the local or state levels only.

Fonseca's study shows that evangelicals in Brazil are fully participating in electoral politics. They are playing the game, as it is structured in Brazil, and doing so quite well. The case of the Universal Church certainly opens the normative question of whether any Church or religious group should be present in politics and whether it should have such a focused political agenda. Regarding the more objective research question of how evangelicals are relating to democracy, Fonseca demonstrates that evangelicals are highly active at the local, regional and national levels. He furthermore shows that their political interests are becoming more vested in the democratic system with each electoral cycle.

Levine (2008) sought to distill some of the major themes out of recent scholarship on evangelicals and politics in Latin America. He sees that the literature is aiming toward

1) mapping the careers of activists and political candidates and officeholders; 2) exploring the relationship between evangelical growth and democratization; and 3) how evangelicals in politics support or detract from the creation and maintenance of social capital. Levine argues that the impact of evangelicals in politics in Latin America generally (the case of Brazil notwithstanding) is an indirect effect. His research indicates that evangelicals were not a significant part of the process of democratization in Latin America and have only very recently moved from “a religious discourse that viewed politics as alien, corrupted, and dangerous...to [seeing] politics as a legitimate and even necessary field of action for the faithful” (Levine 2008: 216).

Evangelicals and Civil Society

This trend in the literature is simply a more nuanced investigation of whether evangelicals are good for democracy. There is a consensus in the literature that the appearance of evangelicals on the religious scene is valuable because it has injected a new religious pluralism into what had been religious stasis for many years. There is no consensus in the literature as to whether this religious pluralism has translated into a substantive political pluralism. Steigenga (2001) sees Protestantism as superficially pluralistic:

“If civil society is understood simply as the growth of autonomous, voluntary organizations, there is little doubt that increasing religious pluralism enriches civil society in Central America. However, more demanding definitions of civil society require a clearer articulation of the links between associational participation and democratic deepening...[Recent studies] conclude that Protestantism may...do more to reinforce patronage and clientelism than to deepen democracy” (Steigenga 2001: 146).

Levine (2008) disagrees noting that, regarding the question of civil society, much of the

democratization literature is rediscovering Tocqueville's studies of the 1830s. Tocqueville saw religion as supporting democracy at best indirectly, which religion was forced to do in the absence of a state religion. This turn to Tocqueville as a device for understanding civil society and evangelicals dates at least to Dodson (1997). Dodson certainly anticipates Levine's argument, though he diverges at the same time. Dodson is hopeful about this Tocquevillian possibility, which presupposes an equality of condition. In the U.S. this was a middle-class equality. Dodson sees the equality of condition in Latin America as one of poverty. With Protestantism's outsider sense of identity in Latin America layered onto this equality of condition, the expectation holds that the necessarily indirect influence of Protestantism will foment civil-society expressions in Latin America. Levine argues that the skills acquired in congregationalist-style worship (public speaking, literacy, making connections in the community) are inherently democratic skills. Thus, Levine contends that the presence of religion is a net gain for democracy. Indeed, evangelical churches can provide important democratic primers to their converts.

One of the strongest critiques of the prospect of evangelicals and civil society comes from Bastian (1986) who sees the window of opportunity for Protestants to be true protesters having been relegated to the distant past. Protestantism's energy, Bastian argues, was spent by the 20th Century and even it no longer really challenges the dominant status quo (Bastian 1986: 42; in Dodson 1997: 31). Bastian contends that Pentecostalism owes its successes to the same old patronage systems and thus is a socially and politically stagnating force. Bastian's position is coming under more and more pressure as the picture of Pentecostals moves beyond sweeping generalizations.

Dodson counters Bastian with the example of Liceo Cristiano, which is a network of schools and social programs run by Pentecostals in El Salvador, providing basic medical and dental care as well as nutritional supplements for its clients. Dodson sees opportunities like those created in Liceo as the first and perhaps only opportunity some poor Latin Americans will get to engage in an associational activities in an egalitarian setting. It follows that skills acquired through this association, given that it is “civic” in the sense intended by Tocqueville (Dodson: 34), will pay other political dividends under democratic regimes. This does not challenge Bastian's point that evangelicals are not carrying the Protestant torch of oppositional politics, but it challenges the notion that Pentecostals are resistant to civic action.

Wightman (2007) also challenges the prevailing negative view of Pentecostals *vis a vis* civil society. She argues from her case study of Bolivia that Pentecostals are becoming extremely active in civil-society activities but also in formal politics. The explosive growth in Bolivia is in part a response to long-term upheavals made more acute in the 1990s with the onset of aggressive neoliberal reforms. Wightman argues that the discourse of healing is ubiquitous among Pentecostals and that, perhaps surprisingly, the goal is a very concrete, material healing of not just physical ills but social and economic ones as well (Wightman 2007: 243). Wightman sees this discourse as a political framework that has animated many different responses to “illness”, oppression and structural obstacles. The cultural mandate that Wightman observed is very similar to that observed by Annis (2000), which he related to economics (see next section). Culture must be reformed, and this reformation can take place in a variety of ways, politics being

just one.

In her study of churches and civil society following the Salvadoran civil war Gomez (2001) argued that “religious participation can contribute to a renewal of individual and collective identities and to the reestablishment of commitment, solidarity, and civic behavior among the most vulnerable and marginalized sectors of Salvadoran society, especially young people” (Gomez 2001: 125). Gomez saw that Pentecostal activities in the years after the war were substantive but did not carry any of the “structural-political vision” one would see with Liberation Theology. In this sense, the projects aimed at poverty reduction and the meeting of material needs were inward looking and designed to bring more converts into the congregation. Gomez would, therefore, agree with Steigenga (2001) that Pentecostalism can tend toward superficial expressions of civil society.

Latin American Evangelicals & Capitalism

Annis (2000) is exemplary of the literature that explores the Weberian argument that Protestantism and capitalism are mutually beneficial. His study took a Guatemalan case study of the Mayan village of San Antonio. The beauty of this study is the conservative, moralistic evangelicalism that is prominent in this Mayan village is very incongruous with the traditional culture. Protestant converts behave very differently on the personal level, and they begin to make radical changes to their community activities as well.

Annis notes that the Maya view Protestantism as being “cheaper” than

Catholicism. It literally costs one less to be Protestant (Annis 2000: 197), and the locals would often speak depreciatively of converts becoming Protestant out of a search for money. The Protestant missionaries that served San Antonio contributed to this perception because they frequently discussed the conversions in the context of economic progress. Converts have rags-to-riches stories, and they are taught to think of folk Catholicism as a wasteful, expensive diversion. What is very important in Annis' study is his conclusion that the experience of Protestants in this village does support the Weberian argument. Annis notes:

“ideological rationalization of personal gain is not the only—and probably not even the most important—incentive to conversion; yet, by and large, Protestants do seem better geared and far more motivated than Catholics to pursue lifestyles that will either lift them out of poverty or protect hard-won financial gain” (Annis 2000: 206).

Annis shows that Protestant religious-economic values caused converts to begin even thinking of wealth differently. Non-Protestants thought of their land as wealth, while Protestants began to view formal-market income as a sign of wealth. They retained a strong sense of land as wealth; however, Protestants were inclined to develop sources of income that were not dependent on land or farming. Furthermore, Annis found that those Protestants who continued farming were able to extract more income out of less land than their Catholic counterparts. This sort of phenomenon has tremendous political implications. As evangelicals (which is a synonymous term for “Protestant” in Guatemala) move into the middle class, their political interests can become aligned with interests far beyond the borders of their community. Whereas, prior to conversion, their concerns would have been predicted by traditional commitments related to farming and

ancestor worship, their prosperous post-conversion commitments would align more with protecting their gains.

A final valuable insight from Annis' study is his echoing of Willems' thesis of cultural change at the hands of missionaries. Annis' take on this question also places him at odds with much of the scholarly literature in a generally positive assessment of

Protestant cultural impact:

Despite their frequent right-wing political identification today, in at least one sense the early Protestant missionaries were grassroots revolutionaries. They viewed Indians as being spiritually, biologically, and economically enslaved. In their eyes, the Church, alcohol, and debt were the instruments of that enslavement—and they, the missionaries, were the liberators. Unlike the contemporary liberationist Catholic Church—which considers Indians to be *politically*, and from there, economically enslaved—the missionaries did not attack or even necessarily question the organized structure of oppression. They did not challenge the *finca* owners or the government; rather, they attacked the culture (Annis, 2000, p 215).

Conclusions

We can think of the literature on Protestants and evangelicals in Latin America as going through four phases. First was the phase represented by Willems and d'Epinau of a scholarly “discovering” of the Protestants in Latin America. Their shadow was cast over the next decade as histories of Protestantism and church-state relations emerged attempting to account for the coming political contest between Catholics and Protestants. The second phase overlapped with the first phase as the Liberation Theology movement leaped onto the fore. The discussions moved to attempt to relate Protestantism and Liberation Theology and to predictions of one or another's demise. Liberation Theology is, of course, a Catholic story, although it brought many evangelicals into its sphere. The

third phase is represented by Stoll and Martin and ran for much of the 1990s. This phase attempted to make sense of the failure of Liberation Theology to capture the masses and to begin to address the questions of a mobilized and increasingly politically minded Protestant minority. There was also some attention in this phase (also evident in Stoll) of accounting for U.S. influence on Latin evangelicals. The fourth phase is the present one, and is represented by the majority of the literature I have reviewed for this essay. The literature has largely moved beyond Cold War dichotomies (Levine 2008: 221), and it has moved on to parse more deeply the question of how evangelicals relate to and serve democratization. Of overriding interest is the Pentecostal explosion. Also of increasing interest is the phenomenon of charismatic (or “renewalist”) Catholics who look, worship, and act very much like Pentecostal Protestants. The Pew Forum, for example, reports “renewalist” Catholics at more than 30% of the Brazilian population.

It is also true that the literature is less concerned presently with Protestants, properly defined, than evangelicals. And it is less concerned with evangelicals than Pentecostals. The literature is beginning to take an interest as well in the charismatic renewal movement in Catholicism, which shares many characteristics with Pentecostalism, though would likely have a more favorable disposition toward the political discussions of structural oppression. As Pentecostalism evolves and matures politically in Latin America, and with the tremendous energy the movement currently has, the political baton as “voice of the poor” may well have already passed to Pentecostals.

Other trends in the literature that bear further exploration are discussions of transnational connections. Levine (2000) identifies this gap, and Baia (2001) discussed the shifting identities of Peruvian Catholics. Gomez and Vasquez (2001) have written provocative material on youth gangs and religion in El Salvador and Washington. In sum, the number of works on non-Catholic Christians in Latin America is growing, and rightfully so, given the important shifts underway in the Americas and in global Christianity. As Pentecostalism evolves and matures politically in Latin America, and with the tremendous energy the movement currently has, the political baton as “voice of the poor” may well have already passed to Pentecostals.

CHAPTER THREE: RELIGION, ILLIBERALITY, & CIVIL SOCIETY

Overview & Statement of Purpose

This chapter develops the premise that religion, until very recently, has been a uniquely powerful and unsafe force in Mexico's public square. A robust and critical analysis of religious actors mobilizing against narco-violence requires treatment of religion's causal role in Mexico's illiberality and democratic foot dragging. The complexity and tragedy of Mexican history with regard to religion is impossible to capture in one chapter, but it is possible to demonstrate patterns and cleavages that bear on the cases under investigation in this dissertation. While Mexico has domesticated religion, the present-day civility was born of tremendous national pain and repeated struggle. Transfers of executive power in Mexico were frequently internecine affairs, bloody and unstable, while religion was the wedge that cracked open the state. Through the post-independence era, the state was interpreted and reinterpreted by agents of religion and politics and the product was a permanent antagonism between the two. As Pomerleau (1981) noted:

“In the context of these recurring conflicts, the Mexican church developed into a unique national institution, suspicious of, and eventually isolated from, the political and intellectual mainstream of Mexico. The Mexican state was influenced by these same forces and in reaction hardened its anticlericalism, its authoritarianism, and its paternalism” (1981, 540).

The state's long negotiation with religion has left the country with its most profound

dysfunctions and a stagnant political dynamic that offers little progress while retarding the growth of healthy institutions outside the state, especially civil society. This is in part a failure of the state, which has suffered through ambitious-yet-weak, liberal reformers that favored a secular public square and strong, reactionary actors that favored formal state linkages with religion. Indeed, the “Conservative” and “Liberal” parties that dominated the first century of Mexican politics were defined by their posture toward religion (read the Catholic Church, though later that would come to include Protestants) in public life. This “flat circle” of Mexican politics, which predominated until at least the 1920s, is also a failure of elite Catholic institutions, which acting according to their Thomistic disposition during the colonial era and into the early independence of Mexico (see chapter 2 of this dissertation), willfully ignored social inequality and lack of economic development as intractable expressions of divinely ordained hierarchies.

This chapter addresses Mexico’s struggles with religion and corresponding illiberal tendencies across four eras: Conservative, Reform, Secular, and Truce. This struggle has rendered religiously motivated actors - whether Protestant or Catholic - tentative and vulnerable in the public square because the proper vocabulary and scope of action for religion are still contested to this day. This reality had a causal role in the tendency of religion to “lay low” or to opt for radical politics, including hot wars, in Mexico. This chapter argues, however, that contemporary expressions of religious civil society profiled in this dissertation offer an alternative model for religious expression in legitimate politics - a “safe” model in this historical sense. Against 200 years of religious illiberal behavior, they are representative of a new phase of religiously based,

democratically liberal political actors reflective of the modern “truce” between religion and the state. New spaces, however small, are opening for civil society in public life - partly out of the state’s need for partners in managing the crisis of violence.

The Conservative Era: Independence through 1855

The first three centuries of Mexico’s (then called New Spain) existence, government served as little more than a means of wringing the most wealth possible from the colony only to send it off to Spain (Thayer, 2005). The dominant economic model was feudal, with large landholding elites, including the Catholic Church, overseeing small bands of peasant workers and residents on their lands. At its peak, it is estimated that the Catholic Church controlled between one-quarter and one-half of surveyed lands, to say nothing of the many physical structures of schools, hospitals and church buildings (James, 1940; Reich, 1997). The requirements of governing New Spain’s vast territory and the increasing demand for Spanish troops back in Europe, which was in the midst of the upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars, meant that the security needs of New Spain went largely unmet. To deal with this lack, colonial administrators raised a fighting force from among the Creoles, the second-generation, New World-born descendents of Europeans. To entice the Creole warriors, they were exempted from taxes and were the beneficiaries of military resources and training (Watkins, 2003). This system of privilege created became a homegrown, European pedigreed, Catholic-conservative elite, economically and racially stratified above the *mestizos* who were of mixed European and indigenous blood. The Creoles were not Spanish loyalists, however, and were among the key

agitators for independence, though they favored the presence of the institutional-national Church. The Catholic Church in this era desired justice for the souls of the *mestizos* but not for their economic prospects. Thus, “the church” was already complicit in the inequalities of the day, proselytizing indigenous peoples while courting political power offered by the Creoles and the Spanish crown.

Religion was embedded in the formative events of Mexico’s early years, and almost always accompanied by bloodshed. In September of 1810, it was the Creole priest Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla who sparked the first anti-imperial rebellion in the tiny town of Dolores (Watkins, 2003). Hidalgo’s famous Grito de Dolores (Cry of Dolores) speech is celebrated as the core of the national ideal of racial equality, and its anniversary is observed as the day of independence. The Cry of Dolores called for aggressive, liberal reforms, most notably the full equality of all peoples in New Spain. Hidalgo also demanded that Spanish rule be ended because Spain was subjected to the influence of the “godless French,” under the overtly imperial Napoleon Bonaparte (Watkins, 2003). Finally, Hidalgo demanded that land holdings that had accumulated into very few hands be redistributed equitably. Hidalgo’s ensuing attack on Spain’s colonial capital in Mexico City with a haphazard and poorly prepared force of primarily *mestizo* fighters earned him the title of “Father of Mexican Independence.” Hidalgo’s battle quickly devolved into a class war, however, with the masses redressing their innumerable grievances against the colonial and Creole elites as they marched toward the capital. In Guanajuato, Hidalgo’s undisciplined indigenous and *mestizo* army massacred the Creole population. This bloodletting cost Hidalgo the support of the Creoles across the country, and would

ultimately concretize the very racial and economic inequalities that Hidalgo sought to purge. The colonial and Creole elites, motivated by their fears of this surging chaos, the potential loss of privilege, and the violence of the Guanajuato massacre, closed ranks behind the crown (Watkins, 2003). The Spanish forces in Mexico City easily repelled the motley rebel force in November 1810, after just a two-month uprising. Hidalgo was captured in the northern deserts, attempting to flee to the U.S. He was executed shortly after in 1811, but not before being excommunicated from the priesthood.

In 1812 another Catholic priest, Father Jose Maria Morelos, picked up the revolutionary baton. Like Hidalgo, Morelos' failure was inextricably linked to race and power. Where Hidalgo was a Creole, Morelos was born of European and native American blood, a *mestizo*. Morelos' ascension, though it was a potential gain for New Spain, represented an immediate threat to the privilege and station of Creoles (Watkins, 2003). Spanish king Ferdinand VII moved to crush Morelos' revolutionary movement, capturing and executing him in 1815. While it suited the Creole elite to have the *mestizo* gadfly Morelos removed, the Spanish crown's assertive behavior did not sit well with them. When Ferdinand's enemies in Spain rose up against him in 1820, the wealthy Creoles of New Spain seized their opportunity to press for independence.

This realignment created a "conservative revolution" (Watkins, 2003) led by the pro-church Gen. Augustín Iturbide, who joined forces temporarily with liberal revolutionaries. In 1821, the coalition issued a formal declaration of independence. Iturbide was made emperor of Mexico in 1822, but was deposed and executed in 1824. The ensuing few years of turmoil offered Spain a chance to retake their lost colony. In

1829, behind the charismatic leadership of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna Perez de Lebron, the Mexican troops repelled the Spanish. Santa Anna was thoroughly conservative and supported the fusion of religion and the state. His hand would be at the national helm for decades. Beyond his religious zealotry, Santa Anna's naked political ambitions blossomed following his rise to prominence in the defeat of the Spanish. He participated in numerous cloak-and-dagger episodes, including two coups against sitting presidents, often in defense of religious privilege as well as personal ambition.

Santa Anna was elected president in 1833 but passed the presidency to Valentín Gomez Farias, whom some historians believe Santa Anna wished to use as a foil to test liberal reforms. It is more likely Faria's secular preferences caught his political benefactor off guard as Farias worked quickly to strip powerful traditional institutions of their influence. Faria made the first ever move to dismantle the *fueros* system of special privileges that had protected the Catholic and military elite from taxation and the legal system. Farias decreed that the payment of tithes was no longer compulsory. Church leaders alone could no longer determine who held ecclesial offices. No more would the church and military be exempt from taxes, nor would they be permitted to try crimes in their own parallel courts. While these liberal reforms enticed some segments of Mexican society, Farias' reforms were profoundly threatening to the established power base. Appalled by the liberal reforms, Santa Anna deposed Farias in 1834, and redrafted the constitution, undoing nearly all liberal reforms and restoring the power of religion. Santa Anna ruled by fiat or through puppets for the next 20 years. Santa Anna's leadership was egomaniacal and marked by fatal blunders, including the loss of the half of Mexico's

territory in the Mexican-American wars (1846-1848), and his demise would ultimately turn the country toward a bloody, secular future.

The Liberal / Reform Era To The Mexican Revolution (1855-1910)

A group of liberal-minded reformers gathered in exile in the USA, and from their base in New Orleans plotted a future for Mexico after Santa Anna. In 1854, the group led by Benito Juarez returned to Mexico to install their liberal Plan de Ayutla, successfully forcing Santa Anna into exile and inaugurating the Era of Reform. The Reform years between Santa Anna and the Mexican Revolution were marked by secular gains and swift reversals. Pomerleau (1981) says that this critical phase of political development from the 1830s to 1860s

“[was] a result of the frequency of alterations between the conservative and liberal forces. Ironically, both liberal and conservative politicians needed the church’s resources to establish an effective political administration, whether this meant reestablishing an authoritarian state modeled on a monarchy, or redesigning a liberal state based on Enlightenment ideas from the European and North American experiences” (Pomerleau, 1981, 543).

A coalition of conservatives composed of Catholic clergy, wealthy landowners, and sympathetic military officers launched the War of Reform in opposition to the Plan de Ayutla. After three years of fighting (1858-1861), Juarez and the liberals triumphed, permitting him to aggressively reform organized religion. Three laws, named for their authors and enacted under the new constitution were of greatest long-term impact on the role of the religion: the Law Juárez, Ley Lerdo, and Ley Iglesias, each of which sought greater separation of church and state. Ley Juarez “had as its goal to promote social

equality in the eyes of the law by suppressing *fueros* and the special courts that the military and the church enjoyed and that were a form of inherited privilege dating to colonial times for only certain groups and corporations” (Museo de Las Constituciones). The Plan also curtailed the Church’s legal rights to charge fees and raise revenue with the backing of the state (Watkins, 2003). The Plan de Ayutla banned slavery in the Mexican territory altogether, almost a decade before the U.S. did so. Education was secularized as well, and protections for civil liberties were installed. The Plan de Ayutla established a one-term limit with no reelection permitted for presidents (Watkins, 2003).

Though Benito Juarez had won the War of Reform, the Mexican government ended the campaign without the resources to pay its debts to European powers. The French came to collect on the debt, taking control of Mexico from 1861-1867. They deposed Benito Juarez, though he remained an active rebel and installed a member of the Hapsburg family, Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph, with the full backing of the Catholic church in Rome. Maximilian disappointed his conservative supporters by allowing some of Juarez’s liberal reforms, such as land redistribution, to stand. Despite that political olive branch to liberal rebels, Maximilian could not coopt the resurgent Juarez who expelled the French and executed Maximilian in 1867. Mexico regained its sovereignty with the presidency of Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada (1872-1876), whose presidency was uncompromising with regard to the religion in public life and represented a point of no return for the state on this question of religion (Pomerleau, 1981). Lerdo de Tejada succeeded in isolating religion and its attendant institutions from public life.

The 30-year, authoritarian rule of Porfirio Diaz (1877-1910; also known as the

“Porfiriato”) that followed Lerdo de Tejada is symbolic of Mexico’s dichotomies. A liberal reformer in some respects, Diaz was controversial for his iron rule. The *mestizo* Diaz initially trained to be a priest but abandoned that work in his adolescence for life in the military where he excelled and gained access to power. He was hardened in his youth fighting the civil wars of politicized religion perpetrated by Mexico’s faulty presidents and their rivals. He retained a great mistrust for popular opinion and democratic politics in his country as a result. He supported the ideal of democracy, but only for enlightened peoples, which he did not believe Mexican citizens to be.

Diaz’s rule is a critical historical period that marked the country’s transition from backwater to regional power. Diaz desired stability and national economic growth at any cost. Thus, he was ruthless in subduing banditry and insurrection, but won wide support for his investment in infrastructure. He was shrewd in his dealings with the *mestizo* and Creole factions. Though Diaz was a liberal, he recognized that religion could be a useful tool of governance within certain parameters. He kept religious elites on the periphery of formal politics and calm by not enforcing the 1857 constitution’s anticlerical provisions. However, he irritated Catholic traditionalists by opening Mexico to greater religious pluralism, particularly U.S.-based, Protestant missionaries. For the first time, Protestant numbers began to grow under his watch and became a notable presence in the country thereafter (Schmitt, 1983). Protestant historians were effusive in praise of their protector. George Winton’s 1905 history of Mexico described Diaz as a “‘dazzling genius,’ a ‘popular hero’ whose valor, generosity, devotion to good government instilled confidence in and admiration for him in the Mexican people” (quoted in Schmitt, 1983, 258).

Diaz built Mexico's economy on the backs and labors of the poor, the pain of which began to turn the masses against him. The Catholic Church's exclusion from formal politics and the growing unrest among the poor allowed minor social renaissance in the church with the Social Congresses of the early Twentieth Century that convened from 1903-1909 (Pomerleau, 1981, 544). Building on Catholic Social Teaching incorporated in the papal encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII (see chapter 2), they also drew their inspiration from European social-welfare thought. This was very much tied to the intellectual and theological innovations that were affecting the Latin American region as a whole. It is too generous to say that organized religion had accepted its status as a second-rate power in the Mexican state, but the church elites did recognize their political weakness while pressing its strengths as being uniquely suited to manage the conscience of the people. And so the Catholic establishment began agitating for what were typically liberal causes: defense of the landless, indigenous populations, and more equitable social relations.

This progressive turn was not, however, a structural shift on religion in Mexican public life. As Mexico descended into the quagmire of the Mexican Revolution, elites came to see religion as an even greater rival due to overlapping social aims. Catholic social teaching, which had achieved many liberal gains in other Latin American nations, was not that far afield from the political and social aims of the state, but in the peculiarities of the Mexican context, the social teachings came with what were perceived to be potentially lethal doses of religious and clerical authority and usurpation of political power. And so those teaching represented a rival to power (Schell, 2003). Mexican

Protestants of this era, who were still very closely tied to American missionary leadership conscientiously avoided formal politics. Though some Protestant leaders disapproved of the autocratic and repressive nature of the Diaz regime, they reserved their criticisms for private communications with their supporters in the U.S., recognizing they were unpopular with the political and popular classes in Mexico (Schmitt, 1983, p 262).

The Secular Era

While Mexico never again accepted a state church after the constitution of 1857 and the Porfiriato, the Mexican people were not ready for a secular state. The secularization process undertaken by Diaz coupled with his repressive tactics and economic failures created an unsustainable tension. The anger erupted in the national tumult of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917, which became yet another and decisive religious upheaval, ultimately claiming the lives of millions over the ensuing decade (McCaa, 2001). Porfirio Diaz went into exile, and the Mexican state descended into chaos, while the presidency changed hands three times and no president served a full term.

Historians date the end of the Mexican Revolution to 1917 and the publication of a new constitution that is still in force today, along with the election of Venustiano Carranza. In reality this “end” was momentary reprieve, as the violence continued for another decade. Carranza was deposed and killed within three years by disgruntled former general Alvaro Obregon. Eventually a fanatically secular state emerged under Obregon’s successor Plutarcho Calles, an avowed atheist and former general, who took

office in 1924. The anti-clerical movement that ensued held sway for much of the country's modern history in a form that was unusually intense compared to other nations (Mabry, 1978). For secularist liberals, even fanatics like Calles, anti-clericism was a natural outcome of generations of religious elites' meddling and interminable manipulation by political agents whose religious compunctions were their guiding principles. Mexican politicians were simply fed up:

Anticlericalism has been seen by its exponents as born of the domination of Mexico's living with a Church more concerned with the temporal than the spiritual, a Church allied to reaction, indifferent to the education and economic improvement of the masses, suffering from corruption and venality, and opposed to political, economic, and social liberties" (James, 1940, 116).

Calles' interpretation of the 1917 constitution came very close to open persecution of religious people. Many Catholic bishops fled the country. Others were forced into servile roles in their parishes. The 1917 constitution completely changed the tenor of the relationship of religion of all kinds to political authority. Whereas prior to the new constitution, religion was always entangled with elite politics, whether as protagonist or antagonist, the formal religious institutions now

"had no legal standing, as the Constitution recognizes no corporate existence or juridical personality in the 'religious association known as churches.' It can own no property, either churches or schools or residences; and any buildings or properties that even indirectly might serve religious purposes are subject to nationalization. The Church is thus by law isolated from all other activities of society; for connections of religious institutions or of clericals with private institutions or enterprises..." (James, 1940).

Furthermore, the 1917 Constitution ensured that these restrictions were enforced upon ministers of any religious creed. No person vested with official religious authority would

be permitted to criticize the fundamental laws of the country. It was not the intent of the government and the new constitution to remove religion from the lives of ordinary Mexicans (James 1940), nor would that have been possible without even greater investments of state resources and assuredly tremendous bloodshed, of which the country had enough already. The intent was, however, to relegate religion to the realm of private affairs with little or no bearing on the political trajectory of the country. Private religious life continued to function, and the prime religious festivals, such as that of the Virgin of Guadalupe continued to be observed in “much of their former brilliance” (James, 1940; Reich, 1997).

What Mexico’s liberals sought was a truly modern and republican state, something like what existed in the U.S. and Europe at the time. In the previous generation, they had “fought for a nineteenth-century Mexico against a Church which they felt clung to eighteenth-century ideals” (Schell, 2003). They now sought a twentieth-century state and were still facing at best a nineteenth-century church. The deeper problem was that Mexico was not organized socially and economically like the countries its liberal elites aspired to emulate. Wealth patterns and the opportunity structures in Mexican society were still almost pre-modern and feudalistic in their unequal distribution. Even in the years just prior to the Mexican Revolution, half of the country’s wealth was still in the hands of the Catholic institutions, and the remainder was hoarded by an oligarchy whose liberal commitments extended only as far as what would cost them nothing economically. The result was stagnation of reform and continued building of social pressures as the world around Mexico continued to modernize, and especially as

prosperity and global influence began to enrich its northern neighbor.

Current scholarship views the two decades following the Revolution as a period of extreme tensions between the church and state. If church leaders spoke out to denounce the new legal provision, the state wrapped those provisions in even more legislation and enforcements. The miscalculation here was in the state's overreaction. Critics of this new liberal and secular regime came to believe that it smacked of totalitarianism. The old contest of attempting to leash religion in public life was replaced with a palpable fear among the religious class that they would be forced into total subservience to the state. The state had begun to colonize "all social forms, not just religious ones" (James 1940, 116.).

Just as with all other significant shifts in the balance of power between the church and the state in Mexico, this change also met a violent backlash. The Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929) exploded in bloody protest - once again an agitation of Mexico's underclass in the southern states, opposing efforts of centralized control. The majority of the Cristero fighters were Catholic laity, and despite their fervor, the fighting was inconclusive. As many as 40,000 Cristeros fought during the height of the conflict (Portes Gil, 1964; Mabry, 1978). The composition of the guerrilla forces reveals that Mexico's elites even in attempting to liberalize and modernize its politics continued to fail to understand the needs and desires of their impoverished, non-white/mestizo masses. These were peasants fighting for their faith against the loss of that source of meaning and stability as well as against the exploitation of the upper classes in the form of an economically liberalizing, secular state (Meyer, 1971; Mabry, 1978). The Cristeros were fighting alone, abandoned

by the church and crushed by the state. But the Cristeros were traditionalists, rather than counter-revolutionaries. Their opposition to the Mexican Revolution in that sense was more coincidental than ideological. They feared losing a way of life and having a belief system crushed.

It is here in the Secular Era that we also see even the even small Protestant numerical gains becoming a source of suspicion. There were allegations that the Revolution had “Protestant overtones,” though no proof has been found that Protestants drove official actions (Baldwin, 1983, p 230). At the time of the 1910 Revolution, non-Catholics, including indigenous religions, amounted to no more than a few percent of the population. Therefore, the worries about the Protestant overtones of the anti-revolution were less about brute numbers than about linkages to an imperial United States, which had taken on a role in brokering negotiations to end the Revolutionary violence. In the eyes of Mexico, the U.S. had been an untrustworthy neighbor for most of country’s history, and any of its proxies were therefore also suspect. Protestant missionaries of this era wanted only to be left alone, and so they did not engage in politics. With nothing to be gained from choosing sides in what was a complex, multi-sided civil war, they simply kept their heads down.

The Uneasy Truce: Beyond Anticlericalism

At best, the new secular norm that prevailed for most of the 20th century was a “truce” (James, 1940) and not a true resolution. The state moderated in its enforcement of the secularizing codes, but it did not abandon the codes themselves until the 1990s. The

initial secularizing push did nothing to ease tensions, but it did block any avenue for religion to shape the public square. What energy the Catholic institutions had for reform was redirected into the laity to secure for it themselves; however, the Mexican state was not open to input from the religious sector at this time. Pope Pius XI took special note of the Mexican case in his Pastoral Letter of February 2, 1926, and called on Catholic citizens to act in view of their full civil and political rights to enact “solid and deep” social action based on Catholic social teaching (James 1940, 114). The pope also recognized in this letter that there was no future for the church to be tied formally to the political instruments of coercive power, and indeed Pope Pius’ words conceded the full privatization of the faith in Mexico.

For its part, the government expressed a cautious hope that the church would now turn its attention and resources to “erection of cultural centers, hospitals, maternity houses, orphanages, or similar works of social assistance” (Secretaria de Gobernación, 1939). Nevertheless, Mexican public life confronted a gaping hole left by the expulsion of the considerable presence of religion. By 1940, these shifts had largely been consolidated, and the church confirmed in its second-rate status. Among the many indignities religious institutions suffered,

“...its clergy were forbidden to wear clerical garb, to vote, to celebrate public religious ceremonies, and to engage in politics. Although in practice many of these prohibitions were ignored by both church and state, their existence was a constant threat. The unity of the hierarchy had been sundered by the internecine strife fostered by the government. Thousands of the faithful had died in struggles against a government which tended to view the faith as subversive. Its modest pre-revolutionary social reform movement, advanced in the days of its origins and incorporated in part by "socialistic" secular governments, was (now) held to be reactionary, proto-fascist, and obscurantist” (Mabry 1978).

In the contest between the secular state and a weakened institutional religion, the church was doomed to fail because, even for the masses, institutional religion had come to represent “an irrelevant European doctrine and its servants as exploiters of the masses” (Quirk, 1950). While some scholars have argued that the church had lost both the masses and the state, the fact remains that in the era of iron anticlericalism, lay organizations such as Catholic Action, which appeared in Mexico only in the wake of the Revolution, had as many as 400,000 members (Reich, 1997). Catholic Action cells were the places to which that discussion migrated in order to avoid the political by instead retreating to the civic realm (Reich, 1997).

What followed the suffering and upheavals of the Revolutionary and Secular period and the deepening anticlerical turn through the mid-century, was a long, slow thaw. Scholars have found that, though the spirit of antagonism persisted, much of the active persecution of the religion began to recede. Religion and the state have entered a period of rapprochements. The era of open conflict ended and a policy of nonenforcement of the draconian anti-clerical laws prevailed after 1940 and the installation of president Manuel Avila Camacho who made the celebrated remark that “I’m a believer” (Reich, 1997), a comment that was interpreted to mean that the state finally allowed that religion would be a legitimate part of Mexican life broadly defined.

Though the state had largely settled the question of religion’s role in politics, the now domesticated Church continues to pass through phases of being more or less content with its diminished role. In the early 1980s, the Church began to assert itself once again, though not with the intent of securing political power. Rather, religious speech in the

public square had begun to take on a more temperate dimension of moral conscience in defense of democratic ideals. It is only in the three decades following on from this change, together with the deepening pressures from economic and narco-trafficking catastrophes that we begin to see something like the birthing of religious civil societies. This shift was evidenced the Catholic church's pivot back to the public square in documents such as the Global Pastoral Plan of 1980-1981, which spoke on behalf of Mexico's bishops and was highly critical of the strategic political stagnation orchestrated by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The Pastoral Plan argued that democracy had stalled in Mexico, and to the degree democracy existed at all, it was at best theoretical (GlobalSecurity.org, 2016). Furthermore, the Plan Pastoral alleged that

“[the] ruling PRI monopolized power, producing apathy and frustration among citizens and judicial corruption. The principal worker and peasant unions were subject to political control. Peasants and Indians constituted an exploited, marginalized mass barely living at a subsistence level and subject to continual repression” (GlobalSecurity.org, 2016).

At times, religion has settled for cooptation, or perhaps it pressed the only advantage it has - depending on one's point of view. For example, in exchange for the non-enforcement of anti-church laws, religious leaders have occasionally thrown their weight behind one or another policy or candidate. This took place in the hotly contested 1988 election of Carlos Salinas de Gortari when the president elect, weakened by his narrow margin of victory, was compelled to bring Cardinal Corripio Ahumada and five bishops to attend his inauguration as a sign of Church support (Reich, 1997). They obliged.

While the relationship moderated, the cynicism was still prevalent. The thaw

continued with the state legalizing religious education, public religious ceremonies, and church ownership of property. It also permitted clerics once again to vote, and the state reestablished diplomatic ties to the Vatican in 1992. This softening of an anticlerical stance did not precipitate an explosion of religious civil society, and in fact, the Church came out against any reaction by civil society in the wake of Salinas' election. And though the state has shown a clear willingness to offer institutional religion a few carrots, it retains its stick: the constitutional provisions against the church have not been removed. Reich (1997) argues that this contemporary frigid "handshake" actually enhances the political influence of each rival and follows on from other autocratic countries' attempts to manage their unruly religious institutions.

"Ironically, the anticlerical Constitution of 1917, born of an attempt to limit the prerogatives of the Catholic Church, ultimately strengthened that institution by forcing it to develop elaborate survival strategies. The reality of this religious power is revealed when scholars examine functional relationships between church and state rather than assume their polarization...In fact, comparative study of other societies where cooperation has taken place despite anticlericalism, such as Brazil, Cuba, France, and the former Soviet Union, suggests that concordats have been essential in facilitating modernization." (Reich, 1997 pp).

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the Catholic church sought a more visible place in the public square, but has not sought political power. The contemporary challenge that is bringing religious institutions back to the political table across the region and not just in Mexico is the out migration of average Catholics from the church. One of the prime destinations for this out migration is simple non-participation in religious life. But another prime recipient of these Catholic divorces so to speak, are evangelical churches. Therefore, this more intentional move back to the public square is the Church is

defending itself against the creeping concern that it is too insular and cares too little for the real lives of its people.

That dis-ease is driving people to charismatic Protestant and similar religious communities that focus on pietistic and especially ascetic forms of life. One illustrative case is that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), which began its work in Mexico in 1885 with 400 colonists, growing to 4,000 by 1895. The numbers grew slowly until 1961, when with some 25,000 members nationwide, the church established a “stake,” or organized congregational network. Like all churches in Mexico, the LDS church was prevented by Mexican law from property ownership or involving clergy in public life. In 1975, the LDS established its first temple in Mexico City. LDS numbers progressed to a quarter of a million by 1983. As part of the religious deregulation of the 1990s, the LDS church began to purchase property and organize more formally for its growing flocks, and the church’s numbers exploded. Since 1983, the church has grown 540%, and Mexico is now home to the largest LDS community outside the United States, with nearly 1.3 million members in, according to LDS statistics (Alvaradejo, 2016).

Where the Catholic church in general and Catholic congregants in particular are markedly *less* concerned about hot-button moral questions like abortion, sex outside of heterosexual marriage, alcohol abuse (Pew Forum, Nov. 2014), non-Catholic communities are exceedingly focused on the daily lives and quotidian behaviors of their congregants. This is especially true of the careful regulation of vices, such as indolence, sexual promiscuity, and addictions of any kind. This difference of emphasis is both

behavioral-functional and theological. It stems directly from the Protestant notion of being salt and light in one's community. That is, there is a deep emphasis on being noticeably different from those outside the religious community. In a world that is "dark" and "lost," this renewed (read: non-Catholic) person brings "light." And to a world that that is flavorless and decaying, this renewed, non-Catholic person brings "salt," that flavoring and preserving mineral.

The competitive threat from other religious sources is becoming an existential crisis for the Catholic church for several reasons. First, the non-Catholic explosion is visible throughout Latin America. This is a mega-trend that shows no signs of slowing, and it will change the balance of religious power, and therefore political power, in one generation (Pew Forum, 2014). While Mexico is showing significant religious change, it lags behind the most active of the nations experiencing a Catholic exodus. As illustrated by the LDS case, Mexico is not immune to broader trends, and they are not favorable for Mexican Catholic churches. Second, the religious violence in Mexico is largely settle, and some stability has come to the generational conflict of religion and the state. This opened up space for non-Catholic institutions to move forward in a more predictable legal environment. Third, Protestants and other non-Catholics, while still considered somewhat exotic, are not thought to be subversive and their practices are not perceived to be as un-Mexican as they once were. The prominence of non-Catholics in Mexican and Latin American public life has grown. There are examples of non-Catholic leaders, sports personalities, popular-culture figures, media practitioners and activists that are demonstrating the normalcy of religious alternatives to the Catholicism.

Palacios (2008) discusses how the non-Catholic flourishing began to take shape politically in Mexico. Palacios identifies the Protestant presence in Mexican politics from 1910 through 1926 as an unprecedented showing for Protestants in Latin America. More recently, Protestants have benefited somewhat from the aggressively secular nature of Mexican politics; and Protestants have generally been supportive of anti-clerical politics and supported the governing regime. In Mexico, evangelicals have been involved with all major political parties (Palacios 2008: 39). They have also experimented with political party formation with minimal success. This all despite the fact that Mexican Protestants make up the smallest numbers of any Latin American country, with just 5% claiming to be evangelical (Palacios: 41). Palacios classifies Mexican evangelicals as “historical,” “pentecostal” or “neopentecostal.” The historicals date to the 19th Century and the beginnings of the Porfiriato, the Pentecostals came in the early 20th Century, and the neopentecostals, made up of mostly middle-class churches, arrived in the late 20th Century.

Palacios (2008) applies his evangelical typology to Mexican politics. He portrays Pentecostals fairly sympathetically, noting that during the prayer times of rural and urban Pentecostals, he detected religious attitudes that take an interest in political problems. This is consistent with the confused reactions of much of the literature that struggles to understand the dilemma of otherworldly Pentecostals concerning itself with this-worldly politics. Palacios' research also indicates that Pentecostal churches are organized in a democratic manner, with church leaders being voted out of their positions by absolute majorities. This contradicts older research, such as that of Willems, d'Epinay, and to

lesser degree Stoll, who emphasized the authoritarian nature of Pentecostalism. Palacios further found that women were encouraged to take positions of leadership, and that prohibitions against women in pastoral leadership were rare. The implication, not well demonstrated by Palacios, is that these democratic church organizations are a kind of proto-democratic exercise and foment democratic energy. Interestingly, it is the neo-Pentecostals that Palacios found to have the most tendencies toward withdrawal from politics. Neo-Pentecostals tend to be wealthier and more urban, but tend to depend more on prayer and supernatural intervention to cure social ills.

Conclusions

A thorough examination of how and why religious communities respond to narco-violence in Mexico today must first of all begin with the historical context that shapes the political space religious communities have to function. Religion is very much bound up in Mexican identity and self-image, and even nationalism. While this dissertation takes a favorable view of the religious-civil-society actors studied, the critical point must be made that religious actors and institutions have a great deal of blood on their hands in Mexico. Until the Mexican Revolution of 1917, the country did not enjoy more than a decade of stability or peace before it was plunged into coups and bloodshed. Three revolutions were planned in exile in the United States. Mexico's president was deposed by force numerous times, and puppet leaders installed on other occasions. In the first 32 years of independence,

“there were no fewer than 50 such transient rulers, with no occupant of the chief magistracy holding office until the close of his constitutional term. Mexico had

from one to six rulers a year, with the same incumbent twice in one year, and Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna who styled himself 'Most Serene Highness,' nine times in twenty years (Congressional Quarterly, 1926).

Loyalties and aversions to formal institutions of religion were without exception catalysts for violence in every upheaval. This reality has persuaded the Mexican state that religion is not a "safe" partner and must be kept under careful control. The ramifications for civil society are significant. While there were important experiments with something like a religious civil society especially just before the Mexican Revolution, the Third Sector never really took root. That lack of religious-based civil society - and really any civil society to speak of - is a deficit Mexico's democracy contends with still today. Given the near monopoly that the Catholic Church enjoyed (and still enjoys) over the faith lives of Mexicans, to so thoroughly exclude the Church and its representatives and lay people from acting on their belief system in their social and municipal environs ensures that a deep and vigorous stream of potential political and social development remains effectively dammed up and stifled.

This stands in stark contrast to the United States throughout the 20th Century, where the civil rights movement and racial-equality conversation was driven almost entirely from rural churches. It is in those small local religious venues where future leaders developed networks of activism and honed their organizational and oratorical skills. This important training and proving ground has been recognized by scholars of social movements as forming an essential foundation for activism and for sustaining the social and political energy required for large-scale systemic change. In Mexico, the opposite occurred as the state acted with urgency to secularize public life and to expunge

any vestige of clerical power from education, and to sever any possible access that religion would have to political influence.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RISE & ENTRENCHMENT OF MEXICO'S DRUG REGIME

Overview & Statement of Purpose

This chapter advances this dissertation's narrative by discussing factors leading to the rise of the drug industry and its turn to violence, while describing the present-day reach and organization of some of the most powerful cartels. Structural factors include weakness in Mexico's security apparatuses, vast economic incentives from the U.S. market and economic disruptions from integration in the neoliberal project. This discussion will also demonstrate depths of corruption and complicity of the Mexican state in the growth of cartels and the negative consequences for political society. These dystopian political and civic realities set out the parameters for citizen activism and the risks associated with it.

The rise and entrenchment of the drug cartels in Mexico - and other types of mercenary bands such as street gangs and petty criminality - is common across Central and northern South America, a region of unconsolidated democratic institutions contending with enormous gaps in governance and state monopolization of violence. Those gaps in governance have been flooded with huge quantities of private-sector violence. Venezuela, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, and Brazil - cases from across the spectrum of Latin American state wealth and strength - are each facing a chronic and

debilitating cancer of non-state violence. While this story of creeping private violence is mirrored elsewhere, it is also uniquely Mexican. In a now century-long narrative of the growth and entrenchment of a drug industry and the flimsy governing institutions that failed to halt its rise, there is no single smoking gun to which scholars can point. What is certain is that it is impossible to explain the persistence of organized crime in the country without accounting for the “permanent complicity” of the Mexican state (Padgett, 2016). Evidence of corruption and malfeasance is made public only once the culpable are beyond the reach of the law.

Economic Factors

Mexico continues to be an economic paradox. Its economy recently entered the trillion-dollar class, one of 14 economies clearing that threshold in 2015. The World Bank ranks Mexico’s as the world’s 13th largest economy, just ahead of Russia and just behind Australia (World Bank, 2014). Nevertheless, the country has not brought enough of its citizens into the middle class to offset the enormous economic incentive the drug trade offers. The cost to obtain a kilo of cocaine in Colombia is US \$2400. That kilo will net some \$120,000 on the streets in the U.S. after passing through Mexican hands (Corcoran, 2013). One pound of methamphetamine from the Sinaloan cartel could be bought from a border smuggler for \$6,000 and sold for up to \$40,000, according to ex-cartel-linked dealers (Potts, interview with former cartel operative, 2016). Successful distributors of Sinaloan meth in the U.S. earn “hundreds of thousands of dollars a week,” according to former sellers (Ibid). The psychological payoff for moving the drugs is big

as well. The cash, guns, and fear that gang affiliation provokes makes otherwise weak or marginalized men (though a few women have also reached elite levels in the cartels) feel strong and worthy. Such enormous profit margins and the power that accrue to the money have turned the leaders of the Mexican cartels into some of the world's wealthiest men over and over. They hold this distinction until they are killed, captured, or simply vanish without a trace, only to be replaced by the next contender.

The Council on Foreign Relations estimates that as much as 90% of the cocaine trafficked in the U.S. passes through Mexico, up from 77% in 2003, providing the Mexicans a near monopoly. In addition, Mexico has become a major source of heroin and the largest foreign source of both methamphetamine and marijuana for the U.S. market (CFR, 2014). While accurately estimating the drug economy is very difficult, it could account for as much as 3% of Mexico's GDP - generating revenue of up to \$30 billion annually and potentially employing 500,000 people (CFR, 2014). The illicit revenues and associated criminal enterprise, such as extortion, also leach productivity and investment from the legitimate economy, depressing GDP, the tax base, and economic development.

The threats of extortion and distorted markets creates powerful incentives for the productive class to abandon the communities most affected by violence. Mexican border cities have lost thousands of prosperous residents who took their families and fortunes to safer U.S. sister cities. Ciudad Juarez, in particular, saw many prosperous business owners abandon restaurants and stores and move them across the border to El Paso. While these "productive class" families hope to return home someday and start again, they report fears that the border towns will never be safe enough to house their families

as long as their business were prospering (Potts, subject interview, 2016). The vicious circle is complete as this hollowing-out of sources of employment deprives the underclass of even meager possibilities for advancement. This in turn makes the drug economy even more attractive.

Meanwhile, these financial windfalls fund the penetration of cartels and their distribution networks into the U.S. and other countries with startling success. The DEA's two-year investigation into the drug manufacture and distribution network of just the La Familia Michoacana's network alone netted hundreds of people in dozens of cities across the United States (O'Neil, 2010). The total number of cartel-linked operatives in the U.S. numbers into the thousands. *Sicarios* from Mexico are active in U.S. cities and towns, stealing away failed operatives and those who would threaten their highly profitable enterprises back to Mexico for beheadings, dismemberment, and disposal (Potts, interview with cartel operative, July 2016). The level of impunity in the U.S. is not comparable to that in Mexico, however, and this is well understood by the cartels themselves. An ex-cartel source says that hitmen and traffickers "would never try in the U.S. what we do in Mexico," and yet this same individual had ordered more "harm" (the operative's euphemism for fatal retaliation) against failed or intransigent underlings and competitors in the managed territory in a central-U.S. state than this DTO "middle manager" could even recall.

Part of the riddle is that Mexico is as violent as societies that are much poorer in Latin America. Over the course of the 20th century, Mexico fought its way into the upper tier of the global economic pack. That is no small feat. In 1990, Mexico's GDP was \$314

billion (roughly \$571 billion, adjusted for inflation), but Mexico's 2014 GDP of \$1.29 trillion places it in an elite global class, and makes it the fourth-largest economy in the Western hemisphere (World Bank, 2016). This marks impressive progress for an economy that endured multiple economic shocks and that slouched among the global lower middle class for much of the 20th century. Despite some positive economic and social trends, including a growing middle class, Mexico continues to struggle with marked levels of income inequality. In the OECD countries as of 2012, Mexico's inequality was surpassed only by Chile when ranked by GINI coefficient (OECD, 2015).

While inequality is not a determining factor for the sort of entrenched, organized violence we see in Mexico - the U.S. and Chile are not distant from Mexico's GINI, for example - inequality is a structural factor whose downward pressures on the most vulnerable and push those who might otherwise have no criminal or violent predilections to lives of violence. The Mexican NGO Equis, which focuses on justice for women, studied female drug mules they encountered in jails in Mexico City. Their conclusion was that the majority of the cases were collateral damage of the drug wars. These unfortunate women are the furthest one could imagine from the gunslinging hitmen that typify drug culture. Instead, they are impoverished single mothers that took on a transport assignment carrying a small quantity of marijuana to Mexico City to pay for the costly medical care for her child with cerebral palsy. Other "traffickers" profiled by Equis languishing in Mexican prisons with terms of more than 10 years include illiterate women over the age of 50, arrested because their spouses trafficked drugs. They are guilty by association only. Yet other prisoners from Guerrero state, deep in the drug-production heartland, do

not even speak Spanish. Their ignorance, destitution and lack of palatable economic options were their undoing (Expansión, 2016). They are rotting in prison primarily because they were easily apprehended, not because they pose a significant threat.

While the weak legal system and the drug regime grinds some of the country's poorest under its boots and others get sucked into its wake because they are powerless, there are individuals who purposefully enter the business from the underclass and ambitiously climb the drug-industry's corporate ladder. Many millions of Mexicans contend with poverty and inequality on a daily basis and never contemplate walking the seemingly gold-paved road that the cartels offer. A small portion of those economically afflicted millions, however, roll the dice on the life of a trafficker. The infamous leader of the Los Zetas, Miguel Treviño Morales, was initially nudged toward this life by experiences of economic inequality in his youth while washing the cars of the wealthy, including that of a local drug boss who eventually took Treviño under his wing (Corchado, 2013). The impassable gulf of wealth Treviño observed was something he detested and yet desired for himself. The seeming intractability of his station in life persuaded him of the necessity of a life of crime if he was to leave his life of drudgery. There were also predilections toward violence and criminality in Treviño. This was not a "good man" done in by bad economics only. This was a bad man given tremendous incentives to act on his worst inclinations.

While the economic gains offered by a life of crime are very high, those called on to fight the cartels are barely paid a living wage. This creates one of the key structural weaknesses that have allegedly facilitated the rise of the cartels: low salaries that public-

safety officers receive. There is so little reward for carrying out one's duty and little protection if one does that corruption or dereliction of duty are preferable. In the border state of Tamaulipas, which includes the Zetas home base of Nuevo Laredo, police officers earned 3,618 pesos per month in 2011, roughly \$250 (U.S.). That is well below even Mexico's national average of 12,000 pesos monthly, which is in turn an amount still below the country's poverty line as established by the Mexican government (Corcoran, 2011). It is estimated that these police officers could quadruple their earnings merely by looking the other way while traffickers do their work (Ibid). Fixing this breach is not, however, simply an economic matter of improving salaries. Pay rates for police officers vary across Mexico, and the higher pay rates do not necessarily correlate with zones of peace, nor low pay rates with corruption and violence. Indeed the highest-paid officers work in Baja California, a state constantly harangued by gangs, and the lowest paid are in the Caribbean state of Quintana Roo, among the most peaceful zones anywhere in the hemisphere (Corcoran, 2011). InSight Crime describes the intractability of the problem this way:

The [police officer's] salary can, of course, feed into other factors as well; a poorly paid police force is not likely to have a high level of morale and esprit de corps, which makes offices less likely to resist entreaties from criminals. This leads to a general climate of corruption, which makes more likely that an honest police officer would face pressure from his colleagues for turning down offers of illicit cash, and less likely that offending officers would be nabbed for wrongdoing. Viewed this way, police corruption becomes a self-perpetuating feedback loop, and if the authorities tinker with only one of the variables, whether by raising salaries or recruiting better qualified officers, the corrupting dynamic will likely remain intact (Corcoran, 2011).

Nevertheless, the most coveted plazas - Nuevo Laredo, Brownsville, Juarez and Tijuana stand out for the volume of commerce, and they therefore stand out for the demands that

cartel agents make on public-safety officers. Fully 45% of all U.S.-Mexico trade and 35% of the trucks themselves pass through Nuevo Laredo alone. That amounts to approximately U.S.D \$200 billion annually (Lee, 2014). Recent scholarly work has concluded that additional factors including expectations regarding impunity, the lack of clear moral imperatives, fear of the consequences of not colluding with traffickers, and the involvement of civil society all work together with reasonable pay to immunize police from colluding with cartels.

The Neoliberal Influence & NAFTA

Of considerable interest to analysts of the rise of the cartels is the effect of globalization. Complicating factors include looser transnational trade restrictions, borders made more culturally porous by transnational media and communication, and the advancement of technology that has facilitated both greater incursions of the state on the one hand in the form of surveillance, and the retraction of the state on the other due to impotence and underfunding. Chief among these concerns is the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, a neoliberal gem and landmark trade pact that purported to liberalize the economies of Canada, the U.S.A, and Mexico by deepening trade linkages through lowered tariffs upon its implementation in 1994. Twenty years after NAFTA's implementation its legacy is still deeply contested, shuffling as it did the deck of winners and losers. The difficulties in clearly evaluating NAFTA's legacy and impact is especially clear when we attempt to contextualize its role in the rise of the Mexican drug regime. NAFTA was the first free trade agreement that

included developed countries and a developing country, and so it was a target of heavy and critical scrutiny for fear that exploitation would be the inevitable outcome (Villarreal and Ferguson, 2015). The reality is perhaps more mixed and less clear. NAFTA's main targets were the elimination of barriers to trade in agriculture, textiles and automobiles (Sergie, 2014). While NAFTA has had positive and negative effects, economists agree that precisely measuring those effects is impossible, since other powerful factors such as currency fluctuations and inflation prejudice the data (Villarreal and Ferguson, 2015). In the same way, estimating how Mexico would have developed otherwise, and the whether the regime of violence would have become entrenched without NAFTA, is likewise impossible. What is known is that Mexico was on a path of growth from 1960-1980 that, had it continued, would have put it on par with European states' standards of living (Weisbrot, et al., 2014). The resulting relative economic parity could also have deflected the political tensions in the U.S. today over immigration (Ibid). Furthermore, there is a consensus that "disruptions" in the targeted sectors were inevitable as a result of the agreement, but disruption would likely have come due to the larger movement of global economic integration nevertheless.

Trade among the NAFTA parties grew from \$290 billion in 1994 to over \$1 trillion in 2012, and the the \$1.7 billion trade surplus the U.S. enjoyed in 1993 became a \$61.4 billion deficit by 2012 (Sergie, 2014). Travel and investment across borders of the NAFTA community have grown significantly as well since its implementation. This is a far more significant statistic for Mexico than it is for the U.S., since trade with Mexico accounts for a small portion of the U.S. economy. For this reason, the Congressional

Budget Office rejected a direct link between NAFTA and the trade boom over the same period (see figure 4.1), since trade and cross-border activities were already growing in the region and, according to CBO analysis, would have continued to grow even without NAFTA (CBO, 2003). Some studies credit NAFTA with creating additional value and efficiency primarily in supply chains and the net of U.S.-produced goods and technology contained in finished products. Estimates are that in NAFTA-governed trade, the U.S. “content” of manufactured goods is as high as 40% in Mexican-traded goods and 25% in Canadian goods. This is in contrast to goods created in China, outside of NAFTA, which contain only 4% U.S. content (Villareal and Ferguson, 2015). In sum, the criticism of NAFTA is that for all the grand promises of revolutionizing three large economies, the agreement only nominally moved GDP in the party countries.

The viewpoint from Mexico is also one of a mixed legacy for NAFTA, but overall the voices are more critical. Mexico has reaped some benefit from NAFTA, but the benefits have not been equally distributed (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2015). Meanwhile, two of the big arguments used to sell NAFTA in the U.S. were that it would narrow the gap in per capita GDP between Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. By the same token, the arguments went, improvements in per capita GDP would reduce the number of Mexican citizens attempting to enter the United States illegally. In fact, neither of those promises came to fruition. GDP in Mexico grew only 1.2% over the last 20 years, lagging behind regional competitors such as Brazil, Chile and Peru (Sergie, 2014). On indices of brute economic improvement, Mexico has fared poorly in comparison with regional peers in the NAFTA years. Weisbrot, et al. (2014), describe the problem as follows: “Mexico’s

growth ranks 18th of 20 countries (in Latin America). From these numbers, and in the absence of any natural disaster or war in Mexico during the past 20 years that could account for such poor economic performance, it would be difficult to argue that Mexico would have done even worse in the absence of NAFTA.” Furthermore, Mexico’s national poverty rate of 52.3% (as of 2012) is virtually unchanged over the poverty rate of 52.4% in 1994 when NAFTA went into effect (Weisbrot, 2014, January). The number of illegal immigrants in the U.S. from Mexico has exploded over that same period, doubling to 12 million, despite the fierce recession in the U.S. in 2007 and 2008 and increased deportation (Casteñada, 2014).

The correlates of the implementation of NAFTA and the rise of public and private violence are noteworthy. On the very day NAFTA came into force on January 1, 1994, Mexico was confronted with the anti-globalist, pro-indigenous-rights Zapatista insurgency in the southern state of Chiapas. One year later, Mexico was plunged into a currency crisis, which became a canvas onto which opponents of NAFTA painted their objections. Critics argued that the timing of NAFTA’s implementation and the peso crisis were simply too coincidental not to be coincidental, while NAFTA supporters argued the crisis was simply the chickens of bad macroeconomic policy coming home to roost (Hufbauer and Schott, 2014). While NAFTA could have contributed to the peso crisis, it without doubt did contribute to the U.S. decision to bail Mexico out with a debt restructuring, a deal that ultimately was a win-win for Mexico and the U.S. when Mexico’s currency stabilized and the U.S. loans were repaid with a profit of \$600 million (Hufbauer and Schott, 2014, 11).

Mexico has faced the biggest negative impact in the area of agriculture, however, which is also where NAFTA's effects on the development of the drug regime are most prominent. And so it is also in this sector that criticisms of NAFTA are the most vigorous. While the most positive interpretations of the data hint at "disruptions" in the agricultural sector, the negative reviews are blistering. According to critical analysis, NAFTA "cut a path of destruction" through Mexico in the wake of its implementation, driving down wages and driving unemployment up (Carleson, 2013). The Mexican agriculture sector, like many developing world locations, is largely without a middle class. To this day, the most rural zones of Mexico, including and perhaps especially those in the Golden Triangle, retain strong elements of feudalism in their economic and social organization. There are large landowners, and there are very poor laborers. And there are few others, but among those few others are cartel operatives who offer small-time farmers and poor laborers a living wage.

Subsistence agriculture fills some gaps for some workers, but most live with considerably vulnerability to shifts in commodity values. It is no surprise, then, that the vast majority of illegal, unskilled immigration into the U.S. originates in regions that are heavily dependent on agriculture. Likewise, as these unskilled, poor and vulnerable citizens migrate north, the border becomes a natural catchpoint. Not only are these migrants the same ones robbed en masse, murdered and so often found in mass graves in the desert in north Mexico, it is also the young disaffected men in the migrant wave that are targeted by the cartels for recruitment, either as footsoldiers or as extremely inexpensive hitmen.

Critics' estimates suggest NAFTA resulted in a 19% drop in employment in agriculture and may have displaced as many as 2 million farm workers and their families in the 20 years since it was implemented (Carleson, 2013; Weisbrot, et al., 2014). And while border cities like Juarez periodically enjoy plentiful jobs in the maquiladora sector to absorb some of that demand, the lack of protections and sturdy labor laws mean that those jobs can be exploitative and offer at best underemployment with low pay and no job security for unskilled labor.

These disruptions in the Mexican agricultural sector were indeed heavily influenced by NAFTA, but they were not only influenced by NAFTA. At the same time, Mexico on its own embarked on a series of neoliberal structural reforms, including major adjustments to land-tenure policies. There were policy efforts to privatize the agribusiness sector by closing down state-based enterprises and eliminating subsidies, including the federally operated CONASUPO, which had existed in part to purchase agricultural products at fixed prices on behalf of the state (Villarreal, 2010, 11). In addition, in these years, Mexico also reformed its Agrarian Land Law, which reversed a land grant to community groups (called *ejidos*) that followed the 1910 revolution and social upheaval. Those lands would now revert to the private sector entirely (Ibid). The net effect is that many thousands of workers were expelled from the agricultural sector and forced into migration and/or alternative modes of employment, sometimes on the margins of the law.

There are two key geographical zones in Mexico's drug trade: the areas of production and the border "plazas" for transporting and exporting of drugs to the U.S.

Production of drugs in Mexico, since the introduction of narcotic poppies, had concentrated in the “Golden Triangle” states of Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua. This is a poor, politically neglected region remains mired in feudal economic models. So it was ripe for illicit activity, and today those ongoing gaps in governance pin private citizens between the twin threats of grinding poverty and killer cartels. A Sinaloan farmer told an intrepid Mexican reporter who gained access to the area that:

“To live in the Sierra is to live in a constant state of neglect, where one is always ‘at the mercy of God.’ If you don’t hunt a hare, deer or wild boar, there is hardly any meat to be had, unless you bring something with you from Culiacan. But besides the food, you also have to pay for electricity, oil, clothing, shoes and school supplies for the children; even though one can plant beans, squash and tomatoes, having money is essential to living there.

And yet there is no work to be had, no industry to create jobs, so it is difficult to stay afloat. And that is why locals continue to grow marijuana: despite encroaching signs of civilization like paved roads and electricity, it is the only product they can be sure will sell” (Vega, 2012, translated by Ramsey, 2012).

This particular set of NAFTA effects, then, maps onto the cartel hot zones with frightening precision. The victims, activists and officials I have interviewed also point to the effects of internal migration to the border towns as a driving factor in criminality and local disruption. Indeed, many of the subjects of this study are first or second-generation internal migrants themselves who left towns in the south or in the Sierra to escape the very violence that followed them to the border or to escape the poverty of a subsistence lifestyle. The success they acquired with restaurants, agri-businesses, and even those who had success in growing larger churches converted them into targets for extortion or for kidnapping of their children.

State & Security Weakness

Mexico's cartels have been predatory actors displaying increased aggression for most of the 20th century, but the violence has become the extraordinary crisis it is today as the technological and violence-making capacities of the cartels have come to rival those of the state. In May of 2015, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel used a rocket-propelled grenade to destroy an army helicopter carrying troops, killing six, which was an unprecedented attack (Robins-Early, 2015).

Especially prominent are the intractable failures of the Mexican security and justice system. Mexico has shown an inability to capture and hold high-value cartel operatives. Mexico in 2016 implemented the first major reform to its archaic Napoleonic legal system. The opaque nature of the legal system made the process of apprehending and prosecuting criminals very difficult and opportunities for corruption very easy. An example of this bizarrely stringent yet inefficient system was the requirement - recently jettisoned - that murders be prosecuted within 72 hours. If suspects were not identified and evidence compiled within this time period the standards for conviction become insurmountably high, and the net effect is that prosecutors and police officers simply abandoned the chase. Therefore, only about 2-3% of murderers will be apprehended and successfully prosecuted in Ciudad Juarez.

This entrenchment of prosecutorial and security failure was illustrated with the alleged escape of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzman from the maximum-security Altiplano Federal Prison on July 11, 2015. Though Guzman, a leader in the powerful and deadly Sinaloa Cartel, has been arguably the most wanted man in Mexico and neighboring

countries for years, Guzman escaped through an extraordinary, mile-long, ventilated tunnel, complete with a motorcycle on a track, leading from his shower in his cell to an abandoned house. At the appointed time, Guzman simply walked out of his cell. It defies believability that Guzman and his accomplices could have achieved such an impressive result without the assistance or willful ignorance of officials in the prison system. The Mexican public, especially the press and intelligentsia, reacted to Guzman's escape with mockery and disgust. Shortly after the escape, 80% of Mexicans polled doubted the government's version of events (*El Universal*, July 28, 2015). Sixty-five percent did not believe the government was even capable of recapturing El Chapo, despite his official status as the highest-priority law enforcement target in the country. Forty-three percent believed authorities directly assisted his escape (Ibid).

Guzman was finally apprehended more than a year later by Mexican investigative units who had trailed U.S. actor Sean Penn to a clandestine interview arranged for *Rolling Stone* magazine. This remarkable and sad chapter stands as a stark symbol of the entrenched corruption that hobbles the country, which penetrates many areas of Mexican public life. But this disruption of political life is a fact of life in Central America and Mexico. The UN Office on Crime and Drugs found that:

“Taken as a whole, Latin America and the Caribbean are arguably the most violent region of the world, according to the murder figures collected by the World Health Organisation, the United Nations Surveys of Crime and Criminal Justice Systems (CTS), and Interpol. By any reckoning, Venezuela, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Jamaica are among the most dangerous countries today. Beneath them are a second tier of countries with murder rates nearly as severe, including Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, and even small islands such as St Lucia. There appears to be a strong relationship between the high rates of violence and the drug trade. The drug trade fuels violence in a variety of ways, and, in extreme cases, can even feed

insurgency. The best known example is clearly Colombia, where both insurgent groups and reactionary paramilitaries have had an economic interest in prolonging instability due to the profits deriving from cocaine. For over 20 years, Colombia has dominated the world cocaine trade, and for much of that time, it has had the world's highest murder rate" (UNODC, 2008).

A multi-country study of Central American crime regimes and their connection with elites found that the region's states are the most violent in the world where there is not an open war.

As Mexico's rising tide of violence lapped at the shore of the United States, the gruesome trend only served to prove to American officials that Mexico was unable to manage its affairs. Relentlessly bloody coverage of acts of violence in Mexican media, as well as sensationalistic coverage in the U.S. media of the worst atrocities served primarily to press the question in Mexicans minds about the capacities of their state. In the U.S., the hundreds of stories focusing in mass murders near the border raised the spectacle of narco-terrorism, which piggybacked onto the creeping phobias in the U.S. around political terrorism. At the height of the drug conflict in 2012, then-U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton claimed that the violence in Mexico was taking on the characteristics of an insurgency (Leiken, 2012). Mexico's then-president Calderon rejected that accusation and refused to submit to "the Colombia analogy," saying Mexico was "a vast and progressive democracy, with a growing economy..." (Leiken, 2012). While the violence on the U.S.' southern border did not go unnoticed by policy makers, it was not anyone's top priority. U.S. policymakers' attention was squarely on the flagging war in Iraq and winding down U.S. presence in Afghanistan at that time. Even as late as 2006, when the violence really began to spike, U.S. aid for fighting drug production and

trafficking was directed to Colombia and the Caribbean to the tune of \$600 million annually, while Mexico received only \$40 million (O'Neil, 2010).

To the degree that U.S. security apparatuses were focused on Mexico, their perspectives were heavily informed by crises elsewhere on the globe and with respect to drug trafficking itself, the DEA was working from lessons learned especially by the Colombian experience. Given the urgent attention and resources dedicated to tamping down Iraqi insurgencies and guerrillas, U.S. analysts were primed to frame Mexico's troubles in the vein of a terrorist political insurgency. That wartime framing is reflected in Mrs. Clinton's assessment that the violence smacked of an insurgency, though that line of argument did not become decisive. Even if the U.S. had pressed this line of argument with Mexico, it is unlikely Calderon would have been swayed by it entirely. Already deeply unpopular during these years, Calderon would have become a pariah if he had conceded to American pressures to militarize the conflict or to permit American security assets freer - and publicly acknowledged - access to sovereign Mexican territory. In defending his own choices to militarize the response to the cartels, Calderon did discuss the cartels as threats to the state, but his strategic aim with this discourse was to legitimize his heavy handed use of Mexican military police and soldiers as a response to the violence.

Meanwhile, Mexican sovereignty in the troubled border region, and the "hottest" states of Michoacan, Sinaloa and Guerrero was already compromised by cartels to the point that "governance" - and especially a dependable security state - was a parodic term. It is these sorts of "brown zones" where the Weberian state is so weak that give some

credence to Calderon's arguments that the cartels posed threats to the state and could entertain the objective of replacing the state (Finnegan, 2010).

The cartels recognized that a framing of the conflict that pitted them against the legitimate state did not benefit them. The Zetas hung *narcomantas* (banners in prominent locations carrying messages from cartels) emphasizing that their quarrels were not with the state but with their "disrespectful" business rivals. In point of fact, there is scant evidence that Mexico's cartels have now - or ever had - their sights set on becoming territorial warlords, or that they aim to control sovereign authority in the conventional sense. In that respect, Calderon was not wrong to reject the Colombia comparisons. Colombia's rebels and drug gangs were certainly violent, if less imaginative in their violent displays than were Mexico's criminal gangs. Colombia's insurgents were kidnappers, extorters, torturers, and ultimately murderers, certainly similar to Mexican cartels. And of course, the Colombian drug regime came of age in a period when there were profound existential threats to the Colombian state. Collusion between and warfare among the overtly state-threatening insurgent groups such as FARC and the business-first cartels blurred the lines of the parties, even as the state also perpetrated acts of tremendous violence and brutality in response. Drug enterprise, when brought under the control of insurgents in the Colombian case, was an economic means to an expressly political end. And for a time, drugs helped FARC functionally govern as a para-state in vast portions of Colombia. Drugs funded their occupation of territory and assisted in holding the legitimate Colombian state on the periphery using organized coercive and military tactics.

Mexican gangs do not display territorial ambitions in the sense of desiring to replace the state, though they do present a tremendous and material threat to governance and civic life. Therefore, framing the crisis as a “clear and present danger” to the U.S. or Mexico as sovereign states serves primarily to benefit the U.S. and Mexico’s desires to utilize military resources in their response and to defend that choice. To the degree that territory is at issue, it is at issue between rival gangs for sales and transit rights, not for political control. Cartel bosses have a storied history, however, of behaving as benevolent dictators inside their territories, buying the public’s neutrality, if not affection, with ostentatious acts of social charity, or morally dubious gifts to local churches and charities, usually connected to the Catholic church. La Familia Michoacana, in addition to having some of the most overtly religious overtones to their cartel, also have shown a penchant for organizing their leadership on a local-governance or municipal-governance model. La Familia is an example of a cartel founded, it claims, in self-defense out of necessity due to the absence of the state. If one can muster any sympathy for the cartels at all, it would be only in that moment of naive conception when the autodefensas formed in the gaps in the security state and a desire protect their vulnerable neighbors against the horrors of other narcotraffickers by acting on behalf of an impotent or indifferent state. Even well-born autodefensas rarely hold to their moral high ground, however, and the template is that they soon turn to wanton violence and criminality. La Familia Michoacana is one such autodefensa-cum-cartel. Yet at the root in these restive localities, however, is a deep desire for more of the state, not less. Once an ambitious pretender is consolidated as a cartel, however, a hobbled state, an indifferent state, or a cowed state

serves the cartels better than an outright failed state. In this scenario, a high-functioning and stable political system is merely an obstacle to profits, and control of the state does not represent a worthwhile end for the radically utilitarian Mexican cartels. Rather, it is pockets of Hobbesian anarchy in an otherwise sturdy state that offer the brightest prospects for the drug regime.

Cartoonish displays of death utilized by Mexican cartels were not part of the repertoire of Colombian drug gangs. Their “business cultures” were different in that respect. Total indifference to private citizens has become a mark of Mexican-cartel depravity, as evidenced by the ongoing destruction of economic refugee populations migrating from Central America and rural Mexico that continue to be discovered in mass graves in the Mexican desert near the U.S. border. While the deaths of private citizens in the course of drug violence is not unprecedented in Latin America, it has found exceptional use in Mexico.

The era of the Cold War and the proxy conflicts in that global ideological struggle produced stomach-turning stories of noncombatant deaths across the region. Idealistic motives for violence do not impart any vindication nor eliminate guilt. It does, however, offer a logic. The cynical criminality of Latin America’s modern crisis of violence is borne primarily of simple avarice. Death is not any more palatable if it comes at the hands of a utopian fantasy. But it is perhaps more understandable. Peru’s destructive battle with Shining Path, which turned every party to the conflict into criminals, stands as the hemisphere’s most deadly ideological conflict. Guatemala’s years with Rios Montt dug dozens of mass graves. Colombia has given thousands of lives to its battles with

leftist insurgents and its legendary cartels. When Pablo Escobar, primarily due to his own arrogance, went to war against the Colombian state, there was considerable collateral damage from bombings. But this took place as part of Escobar's personal war against the state in his rage at the possibility of deportation. Escobar's lashing out was, strictly speaking, drug-funded terrorism. He aimed to alter the formal apparatus of the law in his favor. He used his wealth and power to bleed citizens until the state changed its policy.

Mexican cartels meanwhile also bleed citizens and the state but not for political control. They desire autonomy. Because cartels have no particular political objective, all forms of government, especially local government suffers. The Mexican crisis is without doubt a political crisis, but it is felt most in the local, civic space, not the sovereign national political space. Mexico's crisis is complicated due to its historical struggles with effective governance across its large and forbidding geography, as well. This confluence of factors is what manifests the present crisis as a political one and, by coincidence, a territorial one, pulling in players such as minority churches and civil (and "uncivil") society in ways that have not traditionally participated actively in Mexican political life.

The country is vast, and in some respects it is politically progressive. As a democracy, however, its qualifications are minimal at best. Some of Mexico's failings as a democracy are precisely the failings that permitted the cartels to become endemic in Mexican politics. For most of the 20th century, at a time when drug families were expanding out from their roots as a mom-and-pop operations, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) party ruled Mexico. The country was effectively a one-party oligarchy for nearly a century. Once the cartels were able to establish access to political

power, the lack of an effective political opposition meant that those points of access were dependable and stable. Therefore, in some very important respects, Mexico does merit the Colombia analogy, in that the state has - either through strategic intransigence or malignant neglect - left portions of the country under-governed and in the effective grasp of narco-actors. And of course, gangs have no vision for civic life. And by other broader measures, the country remains one of the most corrupt in the world. The World Justice Project ranks Mexico 73 out of 97 countries in its annual Rule of Law index (World Justice, 2015). Mexico's struggles with corruption are compounded by the fact that its southern neighbors are also among the world's most corrupt countries. And Guatemala, the country with which Mexico share its second-longest border is even more corrupt (Grayson, 2014). Were Mexico's southern neighbors disposed to clean up their act, it is not at all certain they would be strong enough on their own to resist the outflow of violent and brutal actors emanating from Mexico.

The Drug Panorama: Corruption and Official Complicity

Even for seasoned students of this Balkanized and internecine conflict, keeping the names and factions straight is a challenge. Speaking definitively about the shadowy and constantly shifting drug society is impossible, but broad strokes and patterns give some clarity about the impact the drug regime has had on Mexico's civic development. In 2010, Mexican drug gangs murdered on average one mayor per month, a gubernatorial candidate, and an "alarming numbers" of civil servants (Beittel, 2011). This led to speculations about whether gangs were running their businesses or intending to infiltrate

and weaken the state. But this kind of violence is late in coming. For much of the 20th century, there were few factions and little competition in the drug game. Even as late as 2006 and the beginning of the inferno, Eduardo Guerrero Gutierrez identified just six important cartels (Tuckman, 2012). By 2011, five years into Calderon's anti-drug crackdown, Guerrero counted 16 trafficking groups. And speaking to MVS radio in 2012, then attorney general Jesús Murillo Karam claimed his team was working to identify as many 80 sub-groups and splinter traffickers that had broken out as Calderon's offensive began to pick off the established leaders (Guardian, 2012). With as many as 80 small splinter gangs now operating, I will for manageability refer to the cartel power players. As of this writing, these are the leading drug trafficking organizations: The Sinaloa Cartel, the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, the Juarez Cartel, the Beltran-Leyva Organization, La Familia Michoacana, Knights Templar, and Jalisco Cartel New Generation (JCNG).

The drug trade first took root in Mexico in the late 19th Century, at a time when the country was in the authoritarian grip of Porfirio Diaz. Despite Diaz's penchant for law and order, Mexico's hinterlands were always under-governed and central authority contested. This weakness was exploited first by the Chinese immigrants who brought opium poppies and began cultivating them where they would flourish in the dry climate of Mexico's western mountains in the suitable climates of Sinaloa State and the Sierra Madre Occidental Range on the Pacific Coast. Their descendants launched Mexico's first drug trafficking rings. While many observers tend to consider the Colombians to be the model for drug organization in the West, it is was Chinese immigration to Mexico that initiated the hemispheric drug trade (Astorga, 2003). The Colombians were not

commercial drug powerhouses till the mid-1970s (Becker, 2013, 4). The Chinese immigrants were an ambitious community that had spread from Sinaloa up to cities on Mexico's northwest border. Most were bilingual in Spanish and Mandarin and many had Mexican-Christian names (Grillo, 2016).

As the Porfiriato began to weaken and Mexico slipped into economic crisis in the first decade of the 1900s, the Chinese built a network that could harvest the poppies, convert them into gum, and market the opium to Chinese dealers on the U.S. side, in defiance of American law (Grillo, 2016). The list of early arrested traffickers includes Patricio Hong, Felipe Wong, and Luis Siam (Ibid). Once poppies were commercialized, transporters took advantage of the opening of secret routes for cross-border smuggling of alcohol that emerged during Prohibition in the U.S. in the 1920s (Tuckman, 2012), during some of the worst of the post-Mexican-Revolution violence. Northern governors and provincial officials were willing partners in protecting these outlaws in exchange for a cut of the business (Padgett, 2016). As a result, though politics were bloody and chaotic in the first few decades of the 20th Century, the commercial drug trade was stable and largely static at this stage of development. Opium remained the dominant illegal cash crop for the first half of the 20th century, though it remained a fairly small and unassuming sector of the black-market economy.

The business was, however, profitable enough to attract attention from government officials. High-level corruption and mutual aid among drug traffickers and Mexican officials was well documented at least as far back as 1947, when General Pablo Macías Valenzuela, ex-Secretary of War and Navy and governor of the state of Sinaloa

from 1945-1950, was suspected of protecting an opium-trafficking ring (Astorga, 2003). The Mexican political system after the Revolution was ripe to launch an illicit drug trade. There was access to the U.S. market, the cross-border trafficking routes that had been developed during Prohibition, and there were the tremendous social and political upheavals - including deaths and displacement - that followed from the Revolution and the Cristeros War. The early days of the drug regime in Mexico were such that almost every drug organization had direct links to a political patron, perhaps even a blood relative. Luis Astorga (2003) describes the situation as follows:

The political system that emerged after the Mexican Revolution was a state party system, a social pyramid with the President at the top, concentrating powers over the legislative and the judicial branches. Governors' fidelity - most of them military officers formed on the battlefields - was in many cases assured in exchange of a certain liberty to do any kind of business. The limits were the President's will, their own entrepreneurial capacity, and their ethical dispositions.

In that context, drug trafficking was just another profitable business that could be achieved by powerful members of the "revolutionary family," because of the political positions occupied by some of them at a given moment. Controlled, tolerated or regulated by mighty politicians in northern states, drug trafficking seems to have been a business that was developed from within the power structure, and drug traffickers do not give the impression of having emerged as an early autonomous specialised social group, but rather as a new class of outlaws that depended closely on political and police protection and was banned from political activity, according to recent U.S.A. and Mexican archives and newspaper archives investigations (Astorga, 2003).

Marijuana surged in popularity as an illegal intoxicant in the 1960s in the U.S., though it had been grown in the Western Hemisphere with the full blessing and encouragement of governing powers since the time of Columbus, primarily for construction of ropes and sails for the transoceanic shipbuilding industry (Paulraj, 2013). Recreational use of marijuana locally in Mexico dated to the 1840s among prisoners and

soldiers, prior even to the introduction of opium poppies (Paulraj, 2013; Astorga, 2003). As the media began to sensationalize reports of antisocial behavior by marijuana users in the late 19th Century, public opinion - and eventually government opinion - turned decisively against the plant in Latin America generally. Municipalities began banning the substance as early as 1869 in Mexico City well before North American officials began focusing on the drug (Paulraj, 2014). This effort culminated in Mexico banning marijuana use and its cultivation anywhere in the country in 1920. In the new constitution of 1917, congressman Dr. José María Rodríguez proposed an amendment to article 73, which gave powers to the Congress to dictate laws on citizenship and general health in the country, among other powers. Rodríguez's reasons for the amendment were concerns about alcoholism and the "selling of substances which poison the individual and degenerate the (Mexican) race" (Astorga, 2003). Rodríguez identified opium, morphine, ether, cocaine, and marijuana as prime offenders.

The Drug Trade Turns to Violence

Marijuana and opium opened the drug trafficking routes to the U.S., and dominated the "nonviolent" era of the drug business. Entrenchment and aggression came with the introduction and popularity of cocaine in the 1980s and then methamphetamine in 2000s. The local market in Mexico has grown, but it has never had either the gross demand or economic heft of the U.S. market. As cocaine began to penetrate the market it also changed the center of gravity in the region from Colombia to Mexico, a profoundly important shift that began in the 1980s. As with much of the drug business in the Western

hemisphere, shifts on the supply side, such as alternative pipelines from South America to the U.S., can be traced back to evolutions in U.S. and Mexican policies ostensibly manage the demand for drugs, and inputs in Plan Colombia to eradicate production and distribution in Colombia.

The drug trade was a generally peaceful affair for the first half of the 20th century first because of the very cozy relationship traffickers had with politicians and the ample literal physical space available to take in new traffickers (Astorga, 2003). The rise and consolidation of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) that dominated and shaped Mexico's monopolistic and clientilistic political culture ensured this. Early traffickers were close associates and friends of the authorities. Antonio Wong Yin who trafficked in the 1930s was a confidant of the mayor of Torreón, the governor of Coahuila, and the general charged with control of that section of the country (Corcoran, 2013). There were already fortunes being made with opium and marijuana in the 1930s, and so the incentive was strong for both state leaders and traffickers to cultivate cozy relations (Astorga, 2003). The model of traffickers developing close, personal associations with Mexico's leaders is still in effect today, though great effort is taken to obscure those links and to protect leaders from prosecution when discovered.

So stable was this relationship that Mexican media even published arguments to the UN and international community to allow opium poppy cultivation in Sinaloa in the 1940s. Mexican government, with its treaties and close relations with the U.S. had to play at rejecting such arguments, even as politicians protected and profited from the arrangement. The publisher of *El Diario de Culiacán*, a paper whose editorial position

had publicly favored legalized opium-poppy cultivation, later became the Attorney General of Sinaloa state (Astorga, 2003). The turn to violence came with the next generation of traffickers, the children and extended relatives of the first trafficking families who were born into the illicit privilege of these wealthy and powerful networks. There was also steadily less “space” to occupy in the drug trade, as well. Fewer discrete territories put pressure on those who wished to make their mark on the business.

Though violence was not unknown in trafficking circles, it did not become endemic until the mid 20th Century. In the 1950s, killings had become more common, but they clustered in predictable areas and ways, such as cantinas where alcohol and guns mixed. But in Culiacan (a city in the sierra of Sinaloa) of the 1950s, the local press had already begun describing the city as a “new Chicago” with “gangsters in sandals” (Astorga, 2003). It was also not uncommon for traffickers to have conflicts with police, but the skirmishes were in a contained environment that did not affect innocent people (Ibid). A mark of the slow turn to violence occurred in 1968, when the chief of the Judicial Police was shot and killed in Sinaloa, one of the first senior officials victimized. The older generation of traffickers, who were blamed for the killing, in turn blamed the younger generation. The old norms of the trafficking business were coming under pressure from the new guard, who refused to obey the hierarchies of the business and to keep their battles away from cities. The youngsters started using machine guns and high-caliber pistols (Astorga, 2003). The 1970s were a new era for Mexico’s drug cartels with this new harder edge:

A new generation was emerging and trying to impose its own law. Decades of drug trafficking and generations of traffickers had produced a new breed of

tougher players, richer and more powerful at a younger age than their ancestors. They were more sure of themselves. They did not hide. They moved to other new and respected middle-class neighbourhoods, drove cars with American license plates and had many parties where *tambora*, regional music, played for days; they were proud of being drug traffickers. As for the rest of society, their attitude was a mix of astonishment, fear, admiration and respect. If violence did not touch them directly, they were not particularly worried and had no explicit and public moral judgement against the traffickers' way of life or business (Astorga, 2003).

Against this social indifference and official corruption, the money and power of the trafficking networks grew, and the volume of drugs entering U.S. grew. The U.S. began to take notice and push back on Mexico. Richard Nixon is credited with first declaring a “war on drugs” in 1969, two months after taking office, in response to the 1960s’ upheavals in social and sexual norms, accompanied by an increasing acceptance of recreational drugs. Of special concern was growing drug use among soldiers in Vietnam (Doyle, 2003). Marijuana ingressing from Mexico was his first target. Ignoring his advisors’ recommendations to decriminalize personal use of the drug, Nixon instead put marijuana on Schedule One and increased federal investment of human and financial resources dramatically⁶. While drug policies at the U.S. state level meandered toward more tolerance in the late 1970s, with 11 states electing to decriminalize marijuana, that reprieve did not last long (Drug Policy Alliance, 2015). Nixon launched Operation Intercept, a unilateral effort kept secret from Mexico, to capture drugs and smugglers at the border (Doyle, 2003). The U.S. also began to pressure Mexico to act against its burgeoning narco-businesses, but the Mexicans were initially uncooperative.

⁶ Nixon appointed Republican Pennsylvania governor Raymond Shafer to convene the commission, which delivered its recommendations to decriminalize marijuana for personal use as far back as 1972. That was entirely ignored in favor of the law-enforcement model (Drug Policy Alliance, 2015). Forty years on, decriminalization is once again being advocated aggressively at international level by the heads of states most affected by crises of violence.

After years of pressure and a few experiments in cooperation, the first official move Mexico made against the cartels, Operation Condor launched in 1970, became a case study of unintended consequences. Intended as a strike at the production of opium poppies and marijuana production with a force of 10,000 soldiers sent to Sinaloa to uproot plants, its moral authority was compromised already. These same soldiers and leaders had also participated in the massacre of students in Mexico City in 1968 (Astorga, 2003). Operation Condor did manage to disrupt some aspects of production, make many arrests, complete with torture and disappearances. By 1978, the Mexican government claimed it had ended drug trafficking in the country, a laughable assertion even then (Katel, 2008).

Ronald Reagan's agenda, correlated closely with the support he garnered from newly powerful segments of the conservative Christian wing of the Republican Party. Key constituencies here included the Moral Majority, National Right to Life and the Christian Coalition. These all emphasized the assertion of an evangelical, Christian moral sensibility into politics. Reagan's wife Nancy was the architect of the famous "Just Say No" campaign, which did raise the profile of the drug problem, though it did not create a significant dent in consumption. And though the U.S. was in the throes of the "culture wars" around personal morality and the public square, American appetites for drugs continued to grow, dragging weaker supplier states into its wake. The demand for cocaine in particular from the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the power base of international drug trafficking shifting from Colombia to Mexico as the U.S. drug interdiction efforts shut down the Colombians' access to Miami. New routes overland utilizing the Mexicans'

longstanding smuggling expertise were established.

The true legacy of Operation Condor's shakeup was nothing more than a redistribution and re-establishment of the trafficking system. Operation Condor's disruption of the marked the beginning of the violent era. It gave Mexico the Guadalajara Federation. Small-time players fled to other parts of the country or they were arrested, but the powerful trafficking families all escaped capture. They instead moved out of the villages in the sierra and down to Guadalajara, shifting their focus to cocaine (Shannon, 1988, p 115). The footsoldiers and drug technicians who escaped capture became a diaspora of seasoned traffickers, spreading out into the key border plazas just as the turn to cocaine would really begin to bring profits. And in typical fashion, some government and military leaders switched allegiances in the process, among them Carlos Aguilar Garza from the Mexico Attorney General's office who oversaw Operation Condor. He eventually became a drug trafficker himself (Astorga, 2003). Felix Gallardo, the first of the great drug lords, was originally a bodyguard for the governor of Sinaloa. He settled into drug operations in Guadalajara in the wake of Condor (Corcoran, 2013). It is the case that Operation Condor cut some cords in the web of personalized corruption, but in so doing generated lasting enmity between traffickers and the Mexican government, both for cowering to U.S. demands, and for the army's heavy handed tactics, which in some cases violated personal bonds of friendship. The lower-level operatives who fled or were mistreated in the operations were also left with deep disgust for the state agents. The shift from opium to cocaine might have occurred anyway, but Operation Condor's defoliation attacks on marijuana and opium crops hastened that shift in tandem with a network of

traffickers with motives for greater violence. The scene was set for the 1980s and the Kiki Camarena affair, detailed below, that would push Mexico over the edge.

The Guadalajara / Sinaloa Federation

Despite the recent fragmentation of many cartels, the Sinaloa Federation (sometimes called the Guadalajara Cartel), remains the oldest and most important drug trafficking organization (DTO) in Mexico. It is a long-lived alliance of several of the earliest trafficking families formed out of the ashes of their businesses during Operation Condor. As of this writing, the Sinaloa Federation is still considered the most powerful crime organization in the Western hemisphere, and among the most impressive such networks globally.⁷ The Sinaloa cartel has established beachheads in major cities across the Americas, from New York City to Buenos Aires. It is known to operate in 17 Mexican states and perhaps as many as 50 other countries (InSight Crime, 2016). The Sinaloans are now responsible for the bulk of the heroin sold in the U.S. The Sinaloa group has produced some of Mexico's most storied and feared characters, most recently Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman. These bandits have captured the popular imagination, as well. Sinaloan traffickers are the most frequent subjects of the *narcocorridos*, the songs by norteña musicians that lionize their favorite outlaws.

Sinaloan tentacles reach into all areas of government, especially at the local level,

⁷ Declarations about which cartel is the strongest are speculative and the sort of statements journalists rely on to get readers. Despite the defections the Sinaloa cartel has experienced, its intercontinental geographic reach remains unequaled by any other Mexican cartel and its revenues are astounding. Those are simple metrics of strength. At the time of this writing, however, another cartel alliance, the Jalisco Cartel New Generation (JCNG), is making a violent play to become the "strongest," and Mexican officials are on the record stating that the JCNG could threaten the Sinaloans. If that is the case, it is all but certain that the upheaval will bring tremendous carnage to the same cities that have suffered so much already.

but national government also. Its penetration into Mexican national security and governance apparatuses is sobering, with videos having been secretly recorded of high-level, government officials striking deals with the leaders of the Sinaloa cartel, among others (Corchado, 2014). Allegedly, its contacts go deepest in the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), though the PAN has gone to great lengths to disavow any connections, going so far as to issue press releases and propaganda videos to that effect (InSight Crime, 2016). The cartel is willing to murder and intimidate journalists, local police, and politicians, but it is nevertheless known as being comparatively mild compared to other cartels in their dealings with civilians. The Sinaloans likewise eschew the macabre execution dramas and staging of bodies like some of its rival groups. Indeed, the cartel has become known to prefer “the bribe over the bullet” and to foster deep, long term influence with influential political figures. They are, however, ruthless with their rivals and with traitors within their ranks (Potts, interview with ex-cartel operative, July 2016).

The Sinaloa Cartel has been so resilient in part because it has not vested all its authority and power in a single figurehead. Instead, the cartel has opted for hydra model, with a non-hierarchical partnership of several powerful players in the Mexican drug trade (Schuppe, 2015). Thus, when it loses a principle player like El Chapo Guzman, the operations can quickly close ranks under other leaders. It has held to this alliance model since its inception in the 1960s. The Federation was initially a common interest of four farming families based in the region around their namesake city of Guadalajara. The families molded themselves in the manner of the Italian and Sicilian mafia families, with an emphasis on a sort of public decorum and a code of criminal honor. And like the

Italian mafia, the Guadalajara group built up its power and ranks on a foundation of tribal loyalty, blood relations, even clan intermarriages, and insular secrecy. Most of the key players still today are blood relatives, nephews, cousins, and the in-laws or spouses of relatives of the first families. Fractures and family feuds have also turned some segments of the extended families into mortal enemies. The network has even been called the “Blood Alliance” for its robust tribal loyalties (Schuppe, 2015). The Sinaloans learned from the model of the Cali Cartel of Colombia, whose strategy was to keep a low profile and avoid violence by purchasing loyalty from political and government security officials and to ingratiate itself with the economic elite. Behind that carefully woven and effective blanket of protection, the alliance began exploiting the growing U.S. appetite for illicit drugs by cultivating marijuana and later moving into harder drugs like methamphetamine and heroin. The Sinaloan Cartel later moved into heroin distribution, and they now control most of the U.S. market.

The Cartel Diaspora

While the Sinaloa cartel is quicker to bargain with civilians than to bludgeon them into submission, the cartel is ruthless with rival gangs, traitors in its own ranks, and public officials when they are deemed to be disloyal, or worse, incorruptible. The Federation’s growing hubris in the 1980s also led to its most costly misstep, which in turn has profoundly wounded Mexico. In February 1985, while still known as the Guadalajara Federation, five of the cartel’s enforcers kidnapped Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, a decorated DEA undercover agent, while he was eating lunch with his wife in a

Guadalajara cafe. Kiki Camarena had gained information on the whereabouts of Rafael Caro-Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, two the most secretive and powerful cartel heads. The masked gunmen took Camarena to a ranch 70 miles north of Guadalajara, and they beat and tortured Camarena for several days to find out what he knew, eventually crushing most of the bones in his body and his skull, before dumping his body, along with that of his pilot, still bound and gagged in the desert (Murphy, 1988). The outraged U.S. government and DEA reacted heatedly, harassing the cartel and pressuring the Mexican government to move against the cartel.

The resulting international security operations did indeed crack the Federation open, but in so doing, it scattered seeds of destruction across the country. The cartel leaders fled, and the remaining bands of capos and enforcers established themselves around the country, creating the hydra-headed, amorphous beast that drug trafficking has become in Mexico today. Though the murder of Kiki Camarena was the end of the Guadalajara cartel, the power vacuum created in the takedown of the Guadalajara alliance was also the first significant step toward the wanton violence that marks the present crisis. The weakened Sinaloa Federation re-emerged out of the Guadalajaran wreckage, but doing so took time. To recover its clout, the renamed Sinaloan Cartel played a rougher game in the years after and began to regain lost ground, with a new generation of leaders moving to the forefront. Guzman, for his part, is something of a crime genius, and his effectiveness at controlling government officials, attacking his enemies and his business acumen in getting his product to market built him into a legend (Insight Crime, 2013). His various escapes from prison and his powerful network while still in prison

made a mockery of the Mexican justice system. At the time of this writing, the Mexican courts had cleared the way for Guzman, currently held in a maximum-security prison in Ciudad Juarez, to be extradited to the U.S. and prosecuted there.

Even more than the re-born Sinaloan Cartel and its leftovers of the Guadalajara Federation, however, it was the newly orphaned “children” of the Guadalajara Federation that began to push the envelope on violence. Some of the next-generation cartels retained the “genteel” Sinaloan preference for negotiation before violence, but most did not. The spinoff groups included some of the most violent and notorious actors of the last 30 years, who carved the nation up into geographical territories, littering them with bodies in their efforts to control the plazas, establish overland routes, and forge transnational alliances with Colombian drug cartels and distribution networks in the U.S.. These splinter groups would sometimes ally with the new-look Sinaloans, and at other times they would be fighting it to the death.

The Juarez Cartel

The most powerful group that emerged directly and immediately from the Sinaloan diaspora was the Juarez Cartel, Mexico’s second-oldest discrete cartel. The cartel takes its name from its home city, Ciudad Juarez, the sprawling and struggling metropolis across from El Paso, TX. In an almost literary contrast, through the worst of Mexico’s violence, from 2008-2012, Juarez reigned as the world’s most violent city, while El Paso ranked as one of North America’s most peaceful large cities. Like Tijuana, Juarez is especially precious turf because of its large U.S. sister city, one of the critically

important and potentially fabulously wealthy *plaza* entries to the U.S. market.

Co-founded by Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, a one-time commander with the Mexican federal police, and the renowned criminal Pablo Acosta Villarreal, known by his nickname El Zorro de Ojinaga ("The Ojinaga Fox"), the cartel was born in 1985 immediately after Kiki Camarena's murder and the subsequent crackdown (Getty, 2004). The Ojinaga Fox was killed by U.S. and Mexican security agents in 1987. Rafael Aguilar Guajardo assumed control of the cartel and kept it together for a few years, but was murdered by his supremely ambitious and ingenious lieutenant Amado Carrillo-Fuentes in 1993 who would set a new standard for dark excellence in leading a drug cartel.

The next four years under the leadership of Carrillo-Fuentes, "El Señor de los Cielos" (Lord of the Skies) are instructive of the politically corrosive and seemingly irresistible power of the cartels. Under Carrillo-Fuentes' leadership, the power and reach of the Juarez Cartel exploded. In 1997, at the time of his death during failed plastic surgery, Carrillo-Fuentes was thought to be the richest criminal in the world, with a personal fortune estimated at some \$25 billion (U.S.). In the wake of Carrillo-Fuentes' death, damning information came to light about the amount of corruption and the levels of government it contaminated. It was discovered, for example, that Carrillo-Fuentes was paying some \$500 million dollars per year in bribes in Mexico and abroad (Anderson, 1997). His nickname "Lord of the Skies" was drawn from his fleet of Boeing aircraft with which he patrolled the skies with near complete impunity for a time between Mexico and Colombia to move drugs into Mexico, which he then carried overland into the U.S. He was also known to fly around the world to places such as Russia and Cuba seeking

hideouts from international law enforcement and new bases of operation (Anderson, 1997). Furthering the contradictions of the life of a drug lord, Carrillo-Fuentes was known to be a large benefactor of the Catholic Church in Mexico. Several times Carrillo attempted to broker live-and-let-live deals with Mexican officials. In moves and countermoves like something out of a noirish crime drama, Mexican officials took Carrillo's millions and then reneged on the "deal," harassed and shook him down again, and struck more deals. The head of Mexico's anti-drug agency, Gen. Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, was arrested in 1997 for working with Carrillo, and then-president Zedillo disbanded the entire agency thereafter, despairing of any possibility of rooting out corrupt staff. There are few clean hands among the power players in government, though officials did not ignore the cartel criminals entirely. With these lucrative side deals in place, corrupt Mexican officials pursued their quarry, in part to placate critics in Mexico and especially in the United States, but not enough to kill their illicit golden goose. The Washington Post reported:

"The fact that so much information is emerging now that Carrillo is dead underscores...the untouchability he enjoyed during his years as one of the world's top drug lords. It follows a time-honored tradition in Mexico that the most damning information about powerful people gets aired only after they lose their influence and the information loses its urgency – after the money and drugs have left the country, after the principals are dead, have left office or are hiding elsewhere" (Anderson, 1997).

In the wake of Carrillo's death in 1997, the Juarez cartel entered a period of reorganization and internal strife that weakened the gang and created an opening for its rivals. The clash of this titan with the resurgent Sinaloans led to the astounding spike in murders and violence in Ciudad Juarez from 2009-2012, which pushed a bloodied Juarez onto the

world's front pages as the most violent city on the planet. The Sinaloans, persisting in their efforts to regain their former glory, pushed into the territory of the Juarez cartel. Relative calm was restored thereafter in 2012 once the Sinaloans wrested control of that plaza from the hands of the Juarez cartel.

The Gulf Cartel / Zetas

The third powerful drug gang I will profile is the Gulf Cartel and its enforcement arm cum cartel spinoff, the Zetas. The Gulf Cartel, based in Matamoros in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, across from Brownsville, TX, has at times also competed for the title of “most powerful cartel in Mexico.” Tamaulipas remains the most violent state as a whole at the time of this writing, and its provincial leadership has some of the oldest and deepest ties to organized crime. Two of the state's former PRI governors are fugitives wanted in the U.S. for drug-related charges in connection with corruption from Gulf Cartel operations (Bonello, 2016)⁸. The Gulf Cartel has its roots in the alcohol bootlegging and smuggling in the 1930s, but became a power player in 1984 as one of the first Mexican cartels to broker a deal with the Colombian Cali Cartel to establish overland routes for cocaine after Miami was closed. This became the new model for other border cartels, such as Amado Carrillo and the Juarez Cartel. The Gulf Cartel was aggressive about buying off officials, with documented contacts in all levels of government, reaching as high as the attorney general's office. Tamaulipas provincial government is so compromised by corruption, it led one researcher to describe the drug

⁸ Tomás Yarrington (1999-2005) and Eugenio Hernández Flores (2005-2010) are wanted in the U.S. on racketeering and bribery charges, as well as drug-related charges.

trade their eas “government-sponsored drug trafficking” (Padgett, quoted in Bonella, 2016).

Within the broader story of the rise of the cartels, it is the emergence and independence of the Gulf Cartel’s enforcers Los Zetas in 1997 that is one of the most sobering developments. Their arrival has been one of the most disruptive events for both security institutions and for the cartels themselves since the Mexican War on Drugs began. The Zetas are the product of a unique confluence of events and circumstances. The one-time enforcement arm of the Gulf Cartel wanted a bigger piece of the action. Composed of defectors from elite forces in the Mexican special forces air group, the Zetas have literally muscled their way into the drug trafficking game (Buch, 2013). The Zetas moved their base of operations to Nuevo Laredo, just across the border from Laredo, Texas.

Fear of the Zetas grips the region such that people avoid speaking their name aloud in public, lest they draw the attention of one of the Zeta informants or enforcers (Grayson, 2014). Pastors and church leaders in Tamaulipas hesitate to speak out in their services or prayers against the violent actors, even when members of the congregation have been kidnapped and ransomed or murdered. They report fearing that cartel operatives could be present in their churches and “no one knows who is listening” (Potts, 2016, Interview III). The Zetas’ dominance is the product of the near-psychopathic leadership of Miguel Treviño Morales, alias Z-40 or El Cuarenta (“The Forty”). Even among the Mexican-cartel “murderer’s row” of leaders, Z-40 is special. One of Treviños prized hitmen, Rosalio Reta, spoke about his boss from prison and told investigators

Treviño could not sleep without killing something, be it an animal or a human (Buch, 2013). Another Zeta hitman, Wenceslao Tovar, testified in federal court in Laredo, TX, in 2012 that Treviño's forces trained new recruits to kill at a ranch near the town of San Fernando in Tamaulipas state, where more than 200 mutilated bodies were discovered. Tovar witnessed Treviño behead three of the captives. Upon their arrival at the Treviño's training ranch, any Zeta recruits that had not yet killed another human being were given machetes or sledgehammers and a victim, bound and gagged, on which to practice their craft. The future hitmen would then murder the defenseless victims in order to "lose their fear" of death and killing (Buch, 2013).

Zeta techniques and aggression were "game changers" that made over the business of drugs in Mexico. As a cadre of military-trained killers, they made up for a lack of business acumen by becoming extremely comfortable with death. It is they who have shown the most attraction to theatrical attacks. They are known for staging their elaborately destructed bodies, posting of *narcomantas* (banners containing messages to law enforcement, vigilante groups and rivals), vigorous persecution of the press, and for preferring maximal violence to negotiation, as well as utter disregard for bystanders and "noncombatants." The relatives and children of government officials, journalists, civil servants, attorneys and business people in their territory are routinely captured and subjected to barbarities as depraved as anything that could be concocted in a Hollywood horror movie. Among the most infamous of the Zeta techniques is the *guiso*, or stew (Grayson, 2014). The doomed individual is chopped into bits and submerged in a metal drum of gasoline and cooked until the remains are unrecognizably human, even to DNA

forensics.⁹

Zeta techniques created an arms-and-violence race, with emerging players and rival groups upping the violence ante in response to the brutality of the Zetas. The state - along with other critical public institutions such as the press - simply withers around the Zetas. The leading newspaper in Nuevo Laredo ceased reporting on crime out of fear for the safety of the reporters. This is not to say that there have not been major blows struck against them, but the cartel has managed to expand across international borders, with permanent outposts in Guatemala and in some large cities in the U.S. (Grayson, 2014). Their tentacles reach into many Mexican states, as well, but their locus of power is in the north of Mexico, at their peak in 2012 controlling most of the border from the Gulf of Mexico to the state of Baja California.

The Zetas helmed the chaos that drove Juarez into an abyss of violence from 2006-2012 in an effort to unseat the Juarez Cartel, to fend off an incursion of the resurgent Sinaloans, and to establish themselves against their one-time benefactors, the Gulf Cartel. While much political hay is made in the U.S. about the threat that cartel chaos will migrate across the border, and though this is not an entirely irrational concern, it has not become a significant threat. Still, Zeta agents were responsible for the only true spillover violence that intruded into U.S. territory in Laredo, TX as part of this fight with rival gangs where the Zetas tracked down some of their victims (Dudley, 2012). Nothing is forever in the world of the cartels, however. And so, despite their fearsome tactics and

⁹ Grayson (2014) describes in excruciating detail some of the horrors suffered by the unfortunate family members and loved ones who fall afoul of the Zetas. The indignity of the *guiso* disposal of the dead is only slightly less horrific than the tortures the victims suffer leading to their (merciful) death.

reputation, the Zetas are coming under tremendous pressure from other rising groups in the new multi-polar world of splintered cartels. It is discouraging to predict what sort of clashes and collateral damage await as groups work to unseat this entrenched factory of horrors that has set the bar so high for violence already.

La Familia (Michoacana) & Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templar)

La Familia and its spinoff, the Caballeros Templarios, illustrate several important aspects of this crisis: the vague line between defender and oppressor, the blurry distinctions between legitimate commerce, government and crime activity, and how religion can be put to use by any side of this conflict. La Familia came into existence as one of the first *autodefensas* (vigilante or self-defense) groups in Michoacan state in the 1980s, though it has spawned others. It could be read as a case of “uncivil society” that the crisis has spawned. It is understandable that a community would organize a cadre of defenders in an era when the state had little inclination or aptitude to corral violent actors that operated with impunity there. But La Familia quickly turned itself into a machine of profit and violence as corrupt and wanton as those it claimed to be purging. Michoacan continues to be a hotbed for the emergence of bands of vigilantes and autodefensas.

Never circumspect in its use of violence, La Familia has in the last decade become known for indulging in some of the most spectacular forms of violence, in part in an effort to strengthen their hand in the marketplace of violence that has come to define the drug regime. La Familia tossed five severed heads onto a dance floor in the city of Uruapan in Michoacan state. Along with the heads, the cartel offered this note: “La

Familia doesn't kill for money, kill women or kill innocents. Only those who deserve to die will die. Let everyone know that this is divine justice” (The Economist, 2009). This sort of technique should come as no surprise, since they were closely allied with and trained by the Zetas. The two groups have since begun a bloody divorce. La Familia views its shows of violence as a necessary evil to intimidate the Zetas, and also to fend off the new and frightening Jalisco Cartel New Generation out of its territories.

La Familia is also noteworthy for its use of an unusual management “executive council” model comprised of legitimate businesspeople and community and government leaders making some of the decisions along with secretive traffickers and enforcers (DEA, 2009). Along with attempting to show a public face of legitimacy, La Familia trades in extremely pious, religious language drawing on the teachings of U.S. evangelical leader John Eldredge, who advocates an idiosyncratic approach to Christian practice focused on “masculine Christianity.” Eldredge of course rejected any connection to the cartel and lamented their use of his books, noting that the Bible has been used to justify many horrendous acts (Christianity Today, 2010). La Familia cultivates a strong sense of religious and tribal loyalty and retributive justice. La Familia has something of a “Robin Hood” mentality and revels in stealing from the rich to give to their poor. The operatives also frequently hand out Bibles (DEA, 2009). They claim to believe they are defending their homes and doing God’s work, as evidenced by the note in the disco. Their strange pieties have made them objects of morbid curiosity as well as targets of mockery. *Zeta narcomantas* have compared La Familia to ISIS and to a cult crazed by their meth addiction.

At the height of its powers, La Familia operated as the *de facto* state in Michoacan. La Familia is perhaps the closest a cartel has come in Mexico to positioning itself as some sort of rival sovereign entity, though we must be very careful with that language. With a presence in nearly 60% of Michoacan's municipalities, the cartel would resolve civilian disputes, conduct acts of charity and provide jobs. It is estimated that La Familia is extracting tributes from up to 85% of the legitimate business in the state (InSight Crime). The cartel has expanded its presence to other areas of the country.

The Knights Templar (or Caballeros Templarios) are a recent but important splinter from La Familia Michoacana. Coming from within the core of La Familia, The Knights Templar retain some of the regional loyalties and deep connection to the local culture that has benefitted La Familia. The split with La Familia likely came in part due to the Knights' unmitigated hatred for Los Zetas. The Knights single out Los Zetas frequently as being a scourge they aim to expunge from their homeland. They claim to have replaced La Familia within the last five years, but recent raids by Mexican police have discovered active Familia cells, according to government sources. At best the Knights Templar are rivals for the same territory. They retain the same penchant for extreme violence as La Familia, the same rhetoric of self-righteous defense of the defenseless, and a cult-like devotion to Christianity. Even their name is a symbol of their religious fervor. They are not, however, devotees of any American evangelical leader. Their name harkens back to the Middle Ages when a set of mounted holy warriors took vows of poverty and promised to defend Christian pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. The modern Knights Templar announced their intentions in posted narcomantas claiming

that they will be “taking over the altruistic actions of La Familia,” but the Knights’ own future is uncertain, due to becoming targets of Michoacan’s cottage industry of vigilante and self-defense groups.

Jalisco New Generation (JNG)

The JNG is another late-coming contender to the title of strongest cartel in Mexico, and it is raising serious concerns in the Mexican security and analyst community. If recent reports are to be believed, this cartel is the most frightening gang to come onto the scene since the Zetas. Founded sometime around 2012, the gang has made a concerted effort to challenge the Sinaloans in the wake of the arrest of El Chapo Guzman. It appears they have the money and the potency to attract the attention of the Mexican elite forces. In 2015, a Mexican transport helicopter carrying 16 elite soldiers was en route to capture “El Mencho,” one of the cartel’s heads. The helicopter came under fire from Russian-made anti-aircraft RPG missiles was nearly destroyed, and six soldiers were killed. Mexican investigators also found a cache of 15,000 machine guns in Guadalajara held for use by operatives (Loret de Mola, 2015). With assets like military-grade anti-aircraft weaponry, it is possible that JNG will destabilize the cartel hierarchies once again, but at the time of this writing, they remain mostly a threatening wildcard.

Beltran-Leyva Organization (BLO)

Other vicious splinter groups that formed out of the post-Camarena-murder era include the Beltran-Leyva Organization (BLO), formed by Hector “El H” Beltran-Leyva

and his three brothers. The BLO were primarily domestic foot soldiers and traffickers for bigger fish. But they were very violent, throwing their lot in with the Zetas and later functioning as the armed wing of the Juarez Cartel, known as La Linea (The Line). While the BLO has weakened significantly in recent years as their family leaders have been arrested or killed, the BLO was among the most feared gangs in Mexico for a time (InSight Crime).

The Tijuana Cartel

The Tijuana Cartel also has a past that reaches deep into the Sinaloan cradle of drug trafficking and functioned as a key player managing the Guadalajara Cartel's cross-border work in the strategic city of Tijuana. In its heyday, it was headed by Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, alias "El Padrino," another legendary figure in Mexico's drug lore. Like the other cartels, the last decade has been costly to the leadership of the organization. With deaths and arrests, the Tijuana Cartel has declined and is now confined to the city of Tijuana and the U.S. municipalities across the border. Its plazas remain extremely valuable, keeping the cartel wealthy and a threat.

The Tijuana group is now noteworthy because it is the first Mexican cartel headed by a woman, Enedina Arellano-Felix, "La Narcomami," sister of the cartel's founders and the mother of the Arellano-Felix brothers, all of whom were killed or arrested, leaving her in charge. La Narcomami is no novice, however. She had long been overseeing finances of the organization and laundering money. The Tijuana cartel is now a mortal rival of the Sinaloans, though the Sinaloans are strong enough again now to

dominate the region around the city. That tense rivalry has driven spikes of violence along the western border region, though calm has come since 2010 when a truce between the Tijuana and Sinaloan cartels went into effect. The fear is that this truce is weakening, and the city could be poised to erupt into a bloodbath again (InSight Crime Tijuana). The Tijuana Cartel was also responsible for innovative violence with techniques such as the “baseballistas,” an appalling practice of hanging victims from the rafters and beating them to death with baseball bats. They also created their own “pozole” - the Tijuana version of the Zeta’s “stew,” where victims are dissolved in vats of acid and their liquified remains poured down the drain (Epstein, 2015).

Conclusions and Implications for Cases

It is very difficult to give a complete and accurate account of the cartel networks, alliances and government penetration. The relationship and personnel shift too often and usually in secret. Tomás Zerón, director of Mexico’s Attorney General’s office of criminal investigation, has argued that there might only be two drug cartels left in Mexico, if the standard hierarchical model of cartel organization is applied. Now that many cartels have lost their leaders, however, Mr. Zerón believes there could be “hundreds of splinter groups” that have sprung up in their wake (Croda, 2015). This is contradicted by recent declassified documents and information from the Mexican government obtained that indicates that all nine cartels are still in operation, although the number of active cells has fallen (Animal Político, 2016). Gaining information on these networks is almost as demanding and resource intensive as spying during the Cold War,

and it is at least as dangerous. U.S. law enforcement and even media have a history of utilizing informants who put themselves in great peril to offer paid information.

These sources often vanish without a trace. Despite the efforts to penetrate the shroud of secrecy, it is sometimes not clear if a cartel leader is in fact living or dead, even - or perhaps especially - when authorities produce a body. What is not difficult is to extrapolate the effects of the amorphous cartels on Mexico's broader social and political life, since they operate in nearly 60% of Mexico's states (see Figure 4.2).

Though the networks are inherently mysterious, the cartels constitute, as some analysts have put it, Mexico's "other 1%" - an extraordinarily small and extraordinarily influential portion of the population. In assessing cartel violence and the civic and governmental response, it is important to take care not to overstate or understate the problem. While we must acknowledge the outsized power of Mexico's "other one percent," it is also essential to avoid heralding an apocalypse where there is none. Mexico as a sovereign state is not in danger of ceasing to exist, or of being unable to function in ways that are recognizable of a modern state. That only serves to underscore the truth that the ongoing violence of the drug war, in terms of cost to human life will be Mexico's deadliest period since the Cristero Wars (Valle-Jones, 2010). For its part, the Mexican government has doubled down on the strategy of hunting high-value targets, which has succeeded in cutting the heads off of some snakes but then immediately creates more and perhaps deadlier snakes. This approach has come under pressure as the collateral damage has become intolerable. The shifts in cartel leadership and power, driven by the state as it kills or arrests kingpins, are almost always followed by explosive surges in violence,

which put uncontainable stresses on municipalities.

It is hard to more succinctly describe the current challenges to democracy and governance across the region than this:

The Americas have a drug problem. South America produces almost all of the world's cocaine, and North America consumes half of it. (Most of the rest goes to Europe.) The American hemisphere produces more than half of the world's cannabis herb, and 10 percent of North Americans smoke it at least once a year. The illicit trade in heroin, synthetic drugs and chemical precursors is predominantly intra-regional. In short, drug demand in the Americas is largely satisfied by drug supply in the Americas. The problem should be treated as a hemispheric security issue. The victims are the countries and communities caught in the crossfire. Drug-related crime and the violence that it fuels in Central America, parts of the Caribbean, and Mexico are a threat to public safety and an impediment to development. It is what the public and foreign investors fear the most" (UNODC, 2008).

Nevertheless, the consequences to Mexican democracy of failing to establish true control over the cartels has profoundly distorted every affected country's development. There are costs to GDP. The UN estimated in 2007 that El Salvador lost 11% of its national economic output to gang violence related to drug trafficking (UNODC, 2008). The failures have come at the cost of stability domestically, and have remained a point of great diplomatic contention, which exacerbates tensions along the border with the United States, Mexico's most important geopolitical relationship. Effects of these failures are most obvious when we consider how Mexican citizens view and interact with the state. It is essential, however, to establish that there are different Mexicos, and so there are different experiences Mexicans have of the state and of their democracy. Not all parts of the country are equally affected by the violence, nor is the violence consistently present in those areas where it is typically found. The violence is a chronic illness that flares up

without a great deal of warning, but its threat is constant, and that threat shapes democratic practice, and equally importantly, it shapes democratic expectation.

An example of this reality is the famous coastal city of Acapulco, a municipality of 800,000 people that was once a very popular travel destination for U.S. pop-culture icons like Elvis Presley. Though the city is in one of the most violent states, it had been somewhat protected from the violence. It was an internationally known gem, after all. Yet in recent years, the city has become a battleground and has vaulted itself onto the list of Mexico's most violent municipalities. At the time of this writing, repeated gun battles in the streets among cartel rivals and Mexican security forces have nearly destroyed the city's vaunted and precious tourism industry. In April 2016, the city's hotel occupation rate had dropped to less than 30% and business were closed. Economic losses due to the fighting are estimated into the hundreds of millions of dollars in just the first few months of the year. Veracruz, on Mexico's Caribbean coast has had similar plunges into violence, which have come at a great cost to civic leaders, and especially members of the press. Then there are the border cities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo, whose tales of death and destruction would fill many hundreds of pages on their own. This is without even accounting for the tertiary violence that clusters around the warfare, such as the femicide crisis that affected Juarez in the 1990s and early 2000s. And of course the violence that is meted out on highly vulnerable populations such as migrants and unaccompanied minors.

Meanwhile, in Mexico City, which the government has worked very hard to protect for reasons of international and domestic reputation, but which has also benefitted

from being a negotiated neutral zone among the drug cartels where their families may live in relative safety, the drug wars can seem very far removed and not a topic of great concern. The lack of a direct threat to the capital region means that the urgency around the response has lagged in the farther-flung zones of the country. The violence has clustered in the areas of drug production and border trafficking. Sinaloa state's murder rate of 50 per 100,000 people was, in 2006 even before the worst of the spikes of violence, 25% higher than Mexico City's murder rate (UNODC, 2008, 32). This is a phenomenon that is evident across the region. The rural provinces of Izabal and Petén in Guatemala, border and coastal regions where drug gangs are known to dump their transport vehicles or offload drugs for international movement, have murder rates higher than the capital city. Other countries in Central America show a similar pattern of this rural indifference to deadly violence (UNODC, 2008, 32).

In its necessary effort to control the cartels, the Mexican state ceases to be an effective ally and defender of citizens under these harsh conditions. Rather, it is another menace to their safety and well being. While Mexican state has shown some ability to tamp down violence - as in Juarez, where murders have dropped drastically since 2012 and the state also moves against the private sector, and it has shown a troubling habit of ignoring the private actors that are eroding the state and instead lashing out violently against those citizens that offer no existential threat of any kind. In modern the era of muscular cartels, where government agents and powerful officials have been caught striking deals with cartel bosses, Mexican security forces have massacred students and anti-government protesters in huge numbers. The latest example is an ongoing

investigation into a horrific case of the disappearance of 43 students in southern Mexico. The facts of the case are contested by the Mexican government, but an international panel condemned the killings and blamed police and state security forces, not cartel hitmen, as the government initially suggested (Semple, 2016). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights spent six months investigating this crime in making its conclusions, but the commission was highly critical of the damage the public-security apparatuses had done to those under their protection. The commission found that citizens were paralyzed by fear:

The Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (IGIE) has been able to carry out its evaluation work, but has had to face an enormous level of fear, -still very much present nowadays- to be able to carry out its research activities in Iguala. Numerous witnesses did not want to speak; others did so in an atmosphere of considerable fear and requesting confidentiality, while others provided information only after numerous previous contacts carried out through confidence networks. Fear is not solely a response to the level of aggression endured, but also to the degree of control that is perceptible in the area by the perpetrators or their accomplices, and to the lack of protection felt by the witnesses against possible actions that could be carried out against them. Protection of witnesses is a key element in this process and its importance has been pointed out to the state authorities (Ayotzinapa Report, 2016; pp 8-9).

Recent scholarship has found that, in the Mexican context, these democratic dysfunctions, as they have come under extraordinary pressure from violent actors, have forced the growth of space for citizen participation outside of the typical patterns of democratic activity such as formal voting activities (Ley, 2015). This is necessarily the case because cartel activity and state retribution have so hollowed out the democratic process that citizens are left with little recourse in the formal political space.

It is an open question as to whether Mexican democratic weakness came first or if

corruption had so salted the country's political soil that democracy could never take root. But despite the dramatic changes that took place in Mexico in 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) ending 90 years of continuous one-party rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the events did not usher in a truly stable institutionalized democracy that Mexico observers had hoped. Rather than being a transformative event in Mexican political history, the end of PRI dominance did not shake the "pervasive sense that something has gone terribly wrong..."¹⁰, beyond the beheadings and dismal employment numbers (Tuckman, 2012). More troubling is Tuckman's assertion that dysfunction has metastasized in recent years. Rather than contracting following the first peaceful transition of power, "the worst traits" of illiberal governance that used to be limited only to the regime "now have been socialized across the entire political class...The PRI is probably the worst offender, but corruption, nepotism, clientilism, ineptitude authoritarianism, cynicism and impunity touch all parties" (Tuckman, 2012, 3-4).

Meanwhile, the victims of violence are beginning to use their voice and to demand more and better defenses from the government (Ley, 2015). This coming together "does not amount to an effervescence of citizen organization" (Tuckman, 2012; 5). But, borne of frustration and desperation, at the very least the new voices suggest some space is opening for citizens to redress grievances. Meanwhile, in those locations where the cartels are dominant, speaking out remains a frightfully dangerous proposition and will likely remain so for years to come. According to DEA testimony,

¹⁰ Tuckman (2012) emphasizes how the drug wars have in fact masked how much of political business in Mexico continues to be conducted in the same manner as it always has been.

“A good illustration of the extent of corruption in Mexico was revealed when officials, seeking the extradition of two of Arellano-Felix's contract killers, who are currently incarcerated in the United States, submitted papers indicating that the State Attorney General and almost **90% of the law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges in Tijuana and the State of Baja California have been compromised and are on the payroll of the Arellano-Felix brothers.** In addition, several high ranking police officers regularly provide the names of witnesses who give statements against the Arellano-Felixes and have even provided information that assisted in locating targets for assassination. Just recently, the Federal Police in Baja California Norte were replaced with military troops, a tacit admission of the level of corruption in that area” (boldface type added) (DEA Congressional Testimony, March 12, 1993).

It is easy, when confronted with the fact that only one in ten officials is not on the payroll of a drug cartel, to lose hope of ever building anything like a trustworthy civic and democratic life.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MESSENGER ANGELS OF PSALM 100 CHURCH

Overview and Statement of Purpose for All Case Studies

The three narrative case reports that follow are constructed from first-person observations, formal subject interviews, existing case reports, news reports, organizational documentation, training materials, and third-party input (including unaffiliated members of civil society, political figures and security officials). These accounts were collected over the course of two years. The narrative compilations focus on the program leaders, who are public figures and agreed to be interviewed by name. References to all other supporters and participants of the organization(s) will be purposely vague or names will be changed to protect identities due to the location in this sensitive city or due to the subject's preference to have their name withheld from publication. These cautions are also mandated by the Institutional Review Board of George Mason University, which approved the research.

For each of the case studies, I have organized the narratives to work outward from the intellectual and theological "center" of each case. In the cases of Palm 100 and Thrive Without Bribes, the "center" is a single, evangelical congregation. Therefore, those narratives begin by describing the characteristics of the church and its surroundings. I then discuss the demographic and theological characteristics of the church from which the civil-society actions emerge. The narratives proceed by presenting the key individuals

in that local congregation that best articulate and incarnate the activities. In the case of the Movement for Peace, which is not linked to a single church, the “center” is Javier Sicilia, and his deep commitment to the Catholic Church and Liberation Theology.

As described in the Introduction, the phenomena of greatest political interest are the structured actions these actors carry out. These actions include the discrete weekly protests from Psalm 100, the episodic beautification work and later anti-corruption training program by Thrive Without Bribes, and the mass marches and dialogs of the Movement for Peace. Therefore, a section of each narrative is dedicated to an anatomy of a regional action. However, these civil-society actions are unintelligible if assessed separately from their communities and / or the input from their religious traditions. Therefore, each narrative refers back frequently to the community and theology, which is in keeping with the actors’ framing of the activities.

Indeed, for all cases, religious elements saturate the full scope of the actions, preparation, the regional action itself, and the actors’ assessments of the efficacy of their work. These are religious acts projected into a secular space. My fieldwork, therefore, was also keenly interested in the objectives of each actor, given the reality that religion has carefully circumscribed limits in Mexican politics. How do they understand themselves in this secular, civic space? What change do they expect to see? Each of these cases is working on the problem of violence and corruption teased out for these actors in theological language in words like “sin” and “evil.” A key theoretical concern that stems from the core problematic of what scholars may expect from religious actors in Mexico is the degree to which these groups are pursuing systemic versus personal change and how

that change is understood in this context. This does correlate somewhat to resources they command, the theological sophistication (which is measured by the relative level of educational attainment of project leaders) and religious tradition. A discussion of this aspect of each case is picked up in a concluding section on each case's impacts. I have laid the narratives out beginning with Psalm 100, followed by Thrive Without Bribes, and concluding with the Movement for Peace. This arrangement corresponds roughly to their location on a loose continuum of economic strength - from low to medium to high. This progression also corresponds to their relative connection to the "mainstream" of religious life in Mexico.

LOS ANGELES MENSAJEROS DE SALMO 100

THE MESSENGER ANGELS OF PSALM 100 CHURCH



Figure 1: "Messenger Angels" in front of mural

In Tierra Nueva, one of the most violent sectors of Ciudad Juarez, sits an unremarkable, barren lot. It is framed on three sides by cinderblock walls three meters high, topped with broken glass and razor wire. In the glare of a late-afternoon desert sun, one can make out densely packed rooftops beyond the walls in all directions and toward mountain peaks jutting up out of the Chihuahuan desert plain on the far western edge of the city.

Framing the lot on opposite sides are two murals. Both are striking against the

drab walls. One offers a portion of The Lord’s Prayer: “Padre nuestro...libranos del mal” (Our Father...deliver us from evil). The other is propaganda from Mexico’s current president Enrique Peña Nieto: “My commitment is to Juárez and all of Mexico.” The lot between those pietistic and political murals is a microcosm of Mexican poverty: neglected, dusty, haphazard, strewn with garbage. Despite the mountain view, standing in the empty lot evokes the feel of a prison recreation yard. But it has grown a crop of small-scale religious civil society that has drawn attention and resources to this neighborhood through the long-term, evangelistic-protest work of the Messenger Angels of Salmo 100 church.



Figure 2: The church building for Psalm 100 congregation

Salmo 100 Church Characteristics

Occupying the fourth side of the lot, across a potholed drive and parking area, is the unassuming Salmo 100 (Psalm 100) church building, set into a ramshackle row of houses and small shops. Like nearby structures, the church building looks to have been assembled out of scraps of cinder-block, plywood, and tin. It has plenty of openings where the summer heat or winter chill can penetrate. On this evening, though the doors are closed tight, thumping “worship music” and enthusiastic singing can be heard as we approach the church. The sound system, as is the case with even the most humble churches in the charismatic Christian tradition in Latin America, is ear-splittingly competent. Inside the dimly lit sanctuary, the din makes conversation impossible. Children come and go, and a group of ladies is preparing a meal for after the service when the young people will return from their Messenger Angel activities.

The church is situated in the heart of Tierra Nueva, where life has been economically precarious for generations, but it has been pushed further into hardship as a result of the crisis. Since the violence exploded in 2006, this zone of the city has been especially hard hit. Though possession of firearms is forbidden by law everywhere in Mexico, gunshots could be heard here almost nightly from 2006-2011, and they are still frequent. Subjects from Salmo 100 describe awaking to the aftermath of shootings and falling asleep to the sound of gunshots as the “normal” stuff of everyday life. Thousands of dead and dismembered bodies appeared in the streets of Tierra Nueva. Indeed, many of the dead bodies that turned up in other parts of the city were stripped of life and their physical integrity not far from this church lot. During the worst of the violence, bodies

appeared in the streets of Tierra Nueva every morning.

This church is embedded in a world inescapably shaped by narco-trafficking. Though the intensity of the violence is new, cartels have operated in Tierra Nueva for years, the congregants say. Subjects I interviewed all along the border report the same thing: cartels have been a fact of their lives for decades. The leader of the Messenger Angel protests, Carlos Mayorga, took me through the neighborhood to meet a subject for an interview a short distance from the church. As we drove, Mayorga casually pointed out a half-dozen houses where *sicarios* (hitmen) lived on that block alone. Several other *sicarios* no longer lived on the block because they had been murdered themselves. The church family we were meeting was surrounded by cartel-linked residences.

With that kind of cartel penetration in the neighborhood, it is inevitable that the human wreckage from narco-trafficking is going to make its way into the congregation. Indeed, ex-cartel hitmen, traffickers, and addicts have sat in the pews of Salmo 100. Some have chosen to change their lives and participate in the church. Others have begun reaching out to incarcerated *sicarios* in the prisons in Juarez and other violent cities. Some even assisted in the youth protests during the worst of the violence, painting signs that in effect called out former associates. Despite the church's higher profile due to the Messenger Angel protests and its location in this violence-prone sector of the city, no one had become a target at the time of this writing.

The People of Salmo 100

Despite Tierra Nueva's being riddled with cartel influences, the majority of Salmo

100's members do not have personal stories tied directly to cartels. The profile of the "typical" congregant closely tracks the demographic data about the poorest and most underserved populations in Juarez and Mexico. There is a tribal network of kinship ties that run through the church. Many of the congregants were born and raised in Tierra Nueva. Some are born into generational poverty, while others have fallen out of Mexico's middle class. But the church is not entirely insular. It is a recipient of human input due to economic migrants arriving from elsewhere in Mexico. Others newcomers have arrived at the doors of Salmo 100 to hide out, fleeing violence elsewhere in Mexico, including violence of their own making.

The congregants of Salmo 100 are people who have few good options or prospects of upward economic mobility. The most likely means of economic advancement is emigration to the U.S., usually illegally. Some of the congregants had experimented with illegal entrances to the U.S. These congregants are very poor in absolute terms, but they are not destitute. They are not starving or, in most cases, homeless. They have just enough excess in their resources to share meals on the church premises, and to offer hospitality to outsiders like this researcher and others that come to join in or document their protests. Health care is ad hoc and dependent on the public coffers.

The level of educational attainment for church members is varied but low overall. Attaining the minimum levels of compulsory education would be an achievement in this congregation. Carlos Mayorga, leader of the Messenger Angels, is one of the most highly educated members of the congregation. Carlos and several other leaders of the protests

are pursuing more education in the area of theological training. Most congregants are marginally employed in maquiladoras or sole proprietorships, such as home-based shops. Others work in highly contingent enterprises such as street vending. The youth, who comprise the heart of the church's protest, come from families that have been negatively affected by the violence and poverty. All attend school, however. Single-parent families are common, and among the youth active in the protest, it is also common that only the mother is attending the church. There are traditional families, as well, of course. It is noteworthy that the leaders of the protests are highly educated and economically secure, however.

Political Inclinations of Congregants of Salmo 100

Congregants in Salmo 100 are self-aware and cognizant of where they fit in Mexico's economic and social hierarchy. They acknowledge their poverty, and they are aware of the disadvantages they face. The congregants are likewise cognizant of the links between faulty public infrastructure, lack of government investment, weak institutions, and the general decline in the city and especially in their neighborhoods. Congregants frequently lamented the state of the schools in their neighborhoods, and the lack of policing. The topic of corruption and government incompetence is prominent in their comments and assessments of community life.

Even when prompted, however, their comments do not immediately turn to formal political processes. The people of this church are at the mercy of the political powers that be. They could not affect politics meaningfully by conventional methods,

such as voting or political-party formation, and express little desire to do. Despite the presence of Peña Nieto's mural and its vague "commitments," they are slow to assign blame to any party or official. These congregants do not place much faith in elections. They are more likely to talk about the current crisis of violence as a personal and moral catastrophe as much as a civic catastrophe. Still, they are acutely aware of failures of policing and governance, as evidenced by some of the protest signs the youth are painting on this day of protest. Some of those protest signs, written in large black, block letters refer to the failings of police and corrupt officials. They are not despondent nor radicalized with regard to the challenges they face. Their language in discussing the challenges of violence are heavily salted with pietistic and "biblical" references. They invoke God and the Holy Spirit as key sources of moral renovation. In terms of day-to-day politics, they are most concerned about violence in their neighborhood and city. Whether it is from self-preservation or ignorance of the fuller panorama of violence, the people of Salmo 100 do not identify the government as the main source of criminality or violence. Their attention is perhaps understandably on the traffickers who live among and surround them.

Leadership of the Messenger Angels

Out of this unlikely incubator and into a negative public space has stepped an arresting "dissenting" act of presence. These Messenger Angels, which is a public protest performance of the youth group at Salmo 100 church, comprised of roughly 40 teenagers, has gotten international attention for their dramatic, silent vigils against the violence. At

the time of this writing, there have been news stories mentioning the Angels in more than 20 countries. The Salmo 100 leaders keep count of those mentions. Journalists across Latin America and other parts of Mexico have shown interest in the protest as well.

The Messenger Angels were the brainchild of Carlos Mayorga (who agreed to be named in this report and who has been interviewed by name elsewhere), a youth pastor at Salmo 100 and a former prize-winning crime reporter and nightly anchor for Milenio TV. He got the idea for the angels from the street artists common in the world's big cities who dress like statues and change positions when passersby toss them a coin. Mayorga understands spectacle, and he understands Juarez's media appetites very well. Indeed he is quite critical of the consumer public's demand for coverage of the bloody displays that emerge from the drug wars. The Messenger Angel protest is tailor-made to be a media-friendly spectacle, however. Though the Psalm 100 protest has an aspect of public performance art, its aims are explicit and deeper. It is intended to shock and surprise observers into considering their condition of their souls and so the "soul" of Ciudad Juarez.

Over the course of my field work, Mayorga was transitioning from full-time journalism to pastoral work, but his roots in journalism remain strong. "I will probably die exposing crime and corruption, one way or another," Mayorga said. Senior media personalities in Juarez are paid well by Mexican standards - on the order of \$30,000 (US) - but Mayorga does not live a life that indicates he was ever a local media name. He usually dresses in a dark sport jacket and tie, no matter how hot the day. A tall, heavysset and charismatic man, Mayorga speaks with an earnest, almost paternal pride about the

young people, their bravery and commitment to these acts of protest. Though he is now out of media, he remains well connected to media houses around the city. This is both professionally prudent in Mexico where personal relationships are a kind of currency, but it is also very useful to the work of the Messenger Angels. While he is quick to deflect credit for the impact this protest has had on the city, he takes “success” personally. It matters very much to him and to the pastor of the church that the activities be connected to the Christian gospel and that the protests offer some route, however indirect, to conversion. Even Mayorga’s car - a sporty Mitsubishi almost the same silver color as the angels themselves - bore a license plate that reads “Angeles Mensajeros” (Messenger Angels).

The Messenger Angels



Figure 3: Messenger Angels in dress rehearsal before a protest

In the scorched lot between the murals, gangly teenagers arrange their protest materials: metal folding chairs, vats of paint and glitter, robes, cardboard. These they line up facing the church, as they begin to paint their extremities and faces in silver from head to toe, with an effect like the scene in my photo above. These youths pictured are in their final dress rehearsal before departing for an evening protest. These signs read, from right to left: “Zeta, repent and believe in Jesus Christ.” “Hitman, Christ loves you. Repent.” “Corrupt police...repent.” Every other Saturday for nearly seven years, and many Wednesday evenings as well, teams of youth have arrived at the Psalm 100 church to begin transforming themselves into 7ft-tall, silver angels. No adults participated in the protests in character until the Angels’ September 2016 protests in front of the CEFERESCO prison where, as of this writing, the Mexican federal authorities are holding Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman in advance of his extradition to the U.S. That was a special case. The traditional cast is only teens, ranging in age from 14-18 years. The protests have gone on so long that some have aged out of eligibility and have become minders for new integreees. The crew dons long, white robes that reach the ground even though they are elevated on chairs, creating the illusion of height. They chatter excitedly while their friends, still dressed in street clothes, clumsily affix huge sets of wings to their backs. The costuming and making up of the Angels, which takes place in the open air at tables in front of the church, takes well over two hours on this sun-baked, 106-degree afternoon in June. The activity raises clouds of dust around the sweating church members. Though, everyone’s demeanor is positive, this is not a pleasant physical

environment.

A group of youths touches up signs, spreads gowns, and arranges chairs. Others gather around a table smearing silver paint on themselves and their comrades. Mayorga leans over the table, applying makeup and occasionally calling out instructions to corral the teens. “When we get to the site, no one should be talking. It should be quiet when we get there,” he shouts, though at first no one is listening. As the afternoon wears on, however, the teenagers morph from rowdy kids in t-shirts and sneakers into their eerily mature, statuesque alter egos. They try on robes, wings and headbands, and the sober attitudes they will maintain throughout the evening.

Parents look on with pride while loading drinks and snacks into the church’s battered white vans that will carry the youth out across the city to strategic locations, including symbolic buildings and crossroads. They are anxious to talk to me and the other outside observers. The young people’s minders, a group consisting of parents and church leaders, discuss the heat and the possibility of dehydration and exhaustion, but they agree to proceed with the “act,” as they call it. At no point do the parents or minders verbalize fear for the safety of these children from assassins or reprisals against the church. The only threat they account for is the physical demand of the summer heat.

Mayorga takes the Angels’ appearance seriously. With practiced ease, he reels off the exact dimensions of the wings, the length of the gowns, the color of paint, and the materials they use. He shows pictures of Messenger Angel protests that have popped up in other violence-prone Mexican cities, like Veracruz. Other protestors have been in touch with Mayorga to get advice and encouragement. He is clearly pleased that others

have followed the lead of Salmo 100, but the first thing he points out is their creative license. “Look. They changed the wings. They’re shorter,” Mayorga notes with a smile. The Psalm 100 wings are so large, the angels have to be taken apart and reassembled on site in the target locations.



Figure 4: Protest signs carried by the Messenger Angels

Then the young people select their signs. The placards carry the sort of messages most parents could not imagine their children bearing even in jest, much less in this deadly city where the objects of these plainspoken rebukes kill and dismember their victims with near impunity. The sign-selection ritual takes on the air of choosing one's weapon because these signs are intended to assault and offend the city. The signs straightforwardly accuse and identify killers. They name social ills, and call for accountability and change. "Drug addict, Christ liberates," one sign declares in black letters painted on a white field. "Corrupt policeman, turn to God." "Chapo Guzman, time is running out. Repent." "Juarez Cartel, repent and seek God." Signs name other cartels, announcing their days are numbered. They call on capos and the infamous by name to turn to God, confess their sins and lead upright lives.

The effect is a poignant combination of the innocence of youth and the emotional power of art. In 2011, as the killings neared their peak, the Messenger Angels, who had been protesting for more than a year, began showing up not only at intersections and prominent buildings but also at the scenes of crimes. It is this change of approach that caused observers outside the city and country to begin taking notice. As a known crime reporter, Mayorga had unusual access to the city's police force and other crime reporters. He leveraged those connections such that he and the Angels' minders would be informed of crimes and would be allowed in close to the scene. It speaks to the level of daily violence in the city that Carlos could count on his Angels having bodies over which to hold vigil almost every time they would dress for a protest. They created a "go team" of Angels, in addition to the regular Angel troupe, that was prepared to go anywhere in the

city when a report of murder arrived.

Target Audiences

Mayorga says the Messengers reach several different audiences at the scene of a cartel killing while the Angels hold vigil over the body. A key audience is the ubiquitous media, of course. Mayorga has spoken critically of the Mexican media's obsession with crime and chaos, but he is unconflicted and shrewd about taking advantage of that tendency to spread the Angels' message. The spectacle of a crowd of enormous white angels near a pool of blood or a dead body sells papers and generates clicks. Mayorga says the Angels are also speaking to the crowds of civilians that hover around the crime scenes because Mexican authorities do not secure crime scenes nor attempt to screen onlookers' view of the carnage. The Angels also have the police officers who attend to the crime in mind. These are men (usually) who are afraid for their own lives or perhaps are already corrupted. The Angels are also speaking to the victims' families, who are grieving the loss already. Finally, Mayorga notes that his Angels are also communicating with the killers themselves in real time. "The hitmen will usually stay nearby for quite a while to make sure the person they were after is actually dead," Mayorga explains. "They always see our messages, too."

How did he convince parents to let their children chastise cartel hitmen more or less to their faces? "The parents were surprisingly open to the idea," Mayorga recalls. "They didn't take much convincing." Indeed, once parents discovered we could speak without a translator, they sought me out and spoke with pride about their children "doing

the work of God.” The parents say they trust God with their children’s safety. “We live in Juarez,” Mayorga says. “Most of these young people have been around death and violence already.” Subjects agreed with Mayorga, but note that the threats have lessened over time, which has put parents more at ease. Fourteen-year-old Hector (name has been changed), whose changing voice cracks as he talks, said he did not have to persuade his mother to permit him to participate. “(A few years ago) when things were really bad here, it might have been different. But now (in 2015) that things are calmer, my mother is not very worried,” he said.

There is no special psychological preparation for the young Messengers who hold vigil at murder scenes, even though they can be quite gruesome. One of the most well-known photos in Carlos’ database, taken by a photojournalist, shows an elderly woman washing copious amounts of fresh blood off a sidewalk just moments after a hitman had killed a target. Keeping vigil beside the washer woman as she does her work is a placid-faced Messenger Angel of 14 years of age. It is hard to believe someone so young could be so calm at that sight. Yet even if there was trauma to process as a result of the protests, the church has no human nor financial resources to counsel the youths in any event. Psychological preparation, such as it is, comes from having grown up under these harsh social and political conditions. Subjects spoke very matter of factly about their experiences with violence and death, just as Mayorga observed.

Anatomy of Protests



Figure 5: Messenger Angels on the Bridge of Americas at the U.S.-Mexico border

The Messenger Angel protests fall into three categories: crime-scene vigils, public and mass-audience events, and presence at symbolic civic locations. Even when at the scene of a crime, the vigils are designed to be benignly disruptive. The protests do carry a pointed political and social critique for all of their audiences. But the Messenger Angels are not preventing police work at the scenes of crimes, nor are they blocking roads, provoking confrontations with target audiences, or attempting to disrupt the rhythms of city life. These protests do not look like traditional protest politics in Latin America, which feature efforts to coerce attention or otherwise provoke their target audiences by shutting down commerce or traffic or creating violence or mayhem, such as the youth protests in Chile that took over local schools and shut them down for more than a year. This sort of radical protest is also common in Mexico, and could be observed in Oaxaca as the leftist teachers' union battled government forces over pay and instructional freedom. Rather, the Messenger Angels position themselves in locations that will attract significant attention but that will not generate unnecessary negative interactions with passersby.

The protest events are lengthy experiences that can last all day on a Saturday, or four or more hours on a Wednesday evening, beginning with the preparation and costuming of the young people, continuing with the first public speech acts that take place, which are the prayers prior to the event, the distribution of Angels at one or more sites, a closing sermon by church leaders on or near the protest site, and a shared meal among the Angels and their invited guests.

These pre-event prayers are ritualized and take place when the costuming is

complete. These prayers are usually led by a church elder, though the young people join in as well. Indeed, while the Messenger Angels do not process their experiences according to a recognizable therapeutic-counseling model, the lengthy and enthusiastic prayer does provide some spiritual support and an opportunity to speak out loud about the stresses of the experience. These prayers allow the protesters and their supporters to mentally and emotionally process the acts, since every detail of the protest is considered in the prayers. “We pray before every action,” Carlos notes. “One time a young Messenger fainted. That was a morning we did not pray.” On this day of observation, prayers invoked the names of all the audiences of their protest: the city, their neighbors, *sicarios*, the media, drug addicts, family of the victims, police, and mayors. The prayer is a map of their social and political environment. The prayers beg God for peace to come to the city, and plead for conversions of the “lost.”

Protest sites are staffed by costumed Angels, their minders, and depending on the location, a contingent of church members will arrive at the end bringing food and drinks. Politically activated prayers take place at the site of the protest, usually led by Mayorga who - site depending - will also contextualize the protest for onlookers. Most often, these locations are on the concrete medians between busy streams of traffic or on the corners of busy intersections in the early evening until dusk. The light from street lamps increases the visual effect of the angels. Even though the protests have been continuing for years now, the community does not yet appear saturated by these images. The Angels remain objects of great interest. Passersby would slow, read the signs and offer encouraging words to the young people. Some would stop their vehicles, get out and discuss the scene.

Only the minders would speak to the visitors in these instances. The Angel continued with their vigil.

On another occasion, the Messenger Angels set up on the physical road deck of the Bridge of the Americas. The Bridge of the Americas is one of the most traveled entry points from Mexico into the USA, and on the Mexico side of the border it is packed with vehicles nose to tail across four lanes of traffic at all hours of the day. They placed their chairs on the painted dividing lines between the lanes, each with a minder bringing water and tending to their costumes. The traffic was moving very slowly, and so the danger was not from being run over at speed, but being crushed by an inattentive driver. The low speeds also meant each driver had a lingering look at the Angels in their lane and at the message on their signs. There was a European documentary news team on site gathering footage of the protest on this day, and their extensive video equipment only added to the spectacle and to the disruption.

Once again, though I am an ostensibly neutral observer, the scene of a half-dozen angels protruding from a mass of vehicles with enormous American and Mexican flags flying overhead at a border crossing was another visually arresting scene. The Messenger Angels have become quite skilled in their ability to identify and take advantage of symbolic and visually impactful sites around the city. Hundreds of vehicles passed them on the bridge in the hours they spent there, and most of the vehicles carried more than one individuals. Thus, the audience for this protest alone would have reached into the thousands. Here too, the captive audience was receptive. There was no sign of harassment or threat in the two hours of demonstrations. Indeed, the responses I observed were

uniformly respectful and encouraging.

The protest day concludes once darkness has fallen when Mayorga begins preaching a sermon that revisits the protest themes of corruption, drug addiction, social decay, cartel violence, and grief. Mayorga address the onlookers directly, challenging them to “turn to God” and leave these social and political ills behind. The sermon portion of the protest are sometimes presented at city parks, where the Messenger Angels are set up on the perimeter of the park, like sentinels. This is frequently accompanied by highly amplified music, and the sermon can also be lengthy sometimes not concluding until 10pm.

Some Impacts and Conclusions

Despite the earnestness and beauty of the Messenger Angel protest, it is important not to overstate the impact it has had. It is not possible, for example, to identify a causal connection between the activities of the Messenger Angels and changes in the legal framework or policing behaviors or decreased incidence of violence in Juarez. That is, the Messenger Angels have not affected identifiable, material changes in the city. They are, rather, part of a matrix of actors from civil society that have led the way on matters of transparency and accountability. The fact that there is no “Messenger Angel” law now on the books takes nothing away from the political dimensions of their work. This protest offers its city and publics a powerful demonstration-effect, as it reclaims, even if temporarily, public spaces from violence and corruption. The Messenger’s attentiveness to symbolic impact of their sites means they place their dented, metal folding chairs on

some of the city's most contested ground. An example is a protest I observed that took place just outside the entry area of the emergency room of the city's main hospital. This hospital is where most of the city's dead and wounded due to high trauma are brought. During the worst years, the dead and dying were forced to wait outside because the doctors were overwhelmed with victims. The Messenger Angels also chose the site because it had experienced an infamous assassination. Cartel sicarios (it is not known to which cartel they belonged) had shot their victim elsewhere in the city but had not killed him. The sicarios pursued the ambulance to hospital, followed the medics into the building where they finished their target off in a hail of bullets. In that sense, the Messenger Angels were holding vigil in front of the city's largest point of convergence of crime scenes. They do understand their role as religious people on that site as being a kind of purifying presence. They pray and present their bodies as a religious act of evangelism. They desire to save their city's soul, but they also hope to diminish the memory of evil (sin) that took place on these sites through their words and acts.

This willingness to be visually arresting after sundown and to be led by vulnerable though brave children is significant because of the literal fear of the dark that gripped Ciudad Juarez through its worst years of violence. To use this venue to decry social ills in a city park at 9pm becomes an act of dissent against a regime of violence and against the psychological prison that the violence creates. The willingness to denounce social decay and potential aggressors from both organized crime and the government adds a powerful political dimension.

Though the objective of the Angels is not to enhance their political presence or even their own political understanding, that is in fact taking place. A critically important impact is the political learning that takes place among the Messenger Angels themselves. A youth who has participated as a Messenger Angel through her four years of eligibility will have presented as Angel as many as 200 times, giving over 1000 hours of her teen years to publicly denouncing life-and-death crisis in her city. That is an irreplaceable, extended tutorial on the strengths and weaknesses of the political community in Juarez and the role of religious civil society there. These youths will, at a minimum, will have been exposed to agents of local and international media. It is likely that by the time they age out of the protest, most will have been interviewed and their images and names made public in their city, even as minors. Thus, they will be required to become articulate about their work and what they believe is happening as a result of it. By sustaining this protest effort, and expanding its reach into other cities and even into the U.S. state of Utah in 2016 (though the U.S. excursions were primarily evangelistic), the Messenger Angels are learning about what is required to make a sustained argument in Mexico's public square. The church and its young people learn how media and international audiences can be moved and persuaded to their cause by skillful demonstration effects.

Resource Capacity: LOW. As community, the Messenger Angels rank low on any metric of brute resourcing, since Psalm 100 church congregants are drawn from Mexico's poorest and least educated classes. The protest work is understood as a ministry or companion to the church's main work of serving its congregants. The protests are funded primarily by excess from the local church's meager weekly offerings, additional

donations of time and materials from church congregants, along with occasional donations from outside sources. The Messenger Angels have no financial model other than donations requested of foreign observers to offset the cost of gasoline if observers are driven separately to protests.

The church is also isolated. It is not part of a formal denominational structure that might otherwise offer resources or strategic input to grow such a successful project. Psalm 100 is instead a component of the very loose fraternity of Pentecostal evangelical churches in Mexico and Latin America. These Pentecostal evangelicals are marked by their emphasis on the local-congregational model of leadership and a lack of centralized authority.

In terms of formal knowledge resources, as a community Psalm 100 ranks low as well. This is mitigated somewhat by the strengths of their leader, Carlos Mayorga, whose skill in organizing and promoting the Messenger Angels is linked to his unique training and professional contacts as a journalist. Furthermore, he functions as an in-house consultant and trainer within the church, preparing the protesters to deal with public scrutiny. The few other educated members of the church do not have knowledge resources that bear on formal politics, like law or social sciences, nor does it link them to the professional classes or business elites.

Psalm 100, unlike the other actors, is ultimately a neighborhood church. As such, it is gifted with the credibility of tribal relationships and local legitimacy gained from being in and of the neighborhood. So too, the church's experience of being embedded in a world of narco-trafficking and the corresponding violence has endowed its people with

unique capacities to deal psychologically with risks to their physical integrity - and to that of their children - and to act shrewdly to survive as a dissenting community embedded among violent actors.

Visibility and Reach: HIGH. The Messenger Angels' lack of resourcing has strategic value that has boosted their reach, making them an attractive "underdog" story upon which domestic and international media have seized. With media coverage of their protests having been published in at least 32 countries, according to Carlos Mayorga, they have raised visibility and awareness of Juarez's challenges and enhanced their reputations beyond even the work of the Movement for Peace and Thrive Without Bribes, despite the Angels' material disadvantages.

The other aspect of this question of visibility is the reputation of the charismatic evangelical churches, which are not held in high regard in the country (Pomerleau, 1984). Evangelical communities still occupy an "alternative" religious space to the "normal" Catholic one. This reputational disadvantage grows as a given church is perceived to be more charismatic and more evangelical.

Systemic Impact: LOW. For the Messenger Angels, there is a direct, causal link between the personal and the public. Therefore, while the Messenger Angels do understand themselves as members of civil society and even as political actors, they do not trade on any political or ideological agenda nor do they have a list of tangible policy objectives. Rather, the foremost objective of their public acts is evangelism, accountability and transparency. Secondary aims of fighting corruption and violence

follow on from evangelism, but they are thinking first of the souls of the individuals and second of the soul of the city.



Figure 6: Messenger Angels in front of Juarez City Hospital

CHAPTER SIX: STAND UP FOR JUAREZ / THRIVE WITHOUT BRIBES

Emblazoned on the dry eastern slope of Cerro Bola, which looms over the northwest corner of Ciudad Juárez and a zone of city that is home to some of its poorest residents, enormous, white, block letters form a message visible for miles: “CIUDAD JUAREZ, LA BIBLIA ES LA VERDAD. LEELA” (Ciudad Juárez, the Bible is the truth. Read it.)



Figure 7: Sign painted on mountain's face: "The Bible is God's Word"

“I remember helping paint those letters as a teenager,” says Gustavo Arango, the 44-year-old pastor of JOPE Christian Center, lifelong resident of Juarez and one of the founders of Defendamos Juárez (Stand Up for Juarez) and its offshoot Avanza Sin Tranza (Thrive Without Bribes). “That was somewhere around 1985. That is the last thing the evangelicals of this city did together.”

Crafting a static, mountain-sized message to chide fellow citizens about their bad habits could not more perfectly capture the “politics” of Mexican evangelicals of previous generations. It is from a desire to move on from the provincial politics of previous eras together with the awareness of what is possible from a more civically active evangelical community amid Juarez’s crisis of violence that led to the founding of Defendamos Juarez and Avanza Sin Tranza. Arango’s observation and his disappointment are echoed in the words of other evangelical subjects I interviewed, leaders and grassroots actors alike, including those not affiliated with Defendamos Juarez or JOPE. The awareness of the dis-integration of their religious fellows in recent years motivates leaders of similar groups¹¹ who have acted in resistance to the decline of Juarez because they realize the potential impact of a more unified and widespread mobilization of evangelicals in the city. Thus as drug-related violence plunged Juarez into a “social tragedy of enormous proportions” (Ainslie, 2014), the worst in the city’s history, two leaders of JOPE church decided to act through the means of civil society to help the evangelical community overcome the individualistic and congregational culture that is

¹¹ As part of this fieldwork, I also met with activists leading the evangelical political party “PES” founded in 2014 in response to the Juarez violence and the pastor-led, anti-corruption Massive Movement for Evangelism. Their perspectives are consistent with those of Avanza Sin Tranza.

prevalent in evangelical churches born of 19th and 20th century, U.S.- sponsored missionary work.

Characteristics of JOPE Christian Center



Figure 8: Project founders, Daniel Valles (left) and Gustavo Arango (right),

Tucked away in a working-class zone of the city not quite within sight of the U.S. border, the church building that is home to Defendamos Juarez and Avanza Sin Tranza is wedged into a commercial area that looks more like an industrial park than a home for a faith community. The church itself is closed in behind heavy doors that could have been an access to a loading dock at one time. On the early summer day that I am spending with JOPE's leaders, the desert heat is already radiating up from the pavement. In the small strip of shadow the building offers on this hot morning, about a dozen church members dressed in white are assembling buckets, brooms, paint and brushes, towels, stockpiles of fresh water, and distributing white hats and t-shirts to late arrivals, along with various tools for the work project Defendamos Juárez has scheduled. We seek relief in the cool, dark interior of the church, which could not be more unlike its surroundings outside. The sanctuary is softened by curtains that line the wall and dampen the sound. Metal, padded folding chairs are set up in rows. Like many of the evangelical churches drawn from this economic strata, the church stage is stark and simple, unadorned except for an array of musical instruments: keyboards, guitars, a drum set, microphones and entirely outsized set of speakers wired to a sound board at the back of the sanctuary.

The church is typical of independent (not denominationally affiliated) evangelical churches across the globe in that it was founded two decades ago by theologically self-taught lay pastor and co-founder of Defendamos Juarez, Daniel Valles Vargas. He was dissatisfied with the outcomes of the church he was attending at the time, and as Protestants often do, Valles resolved his objections by “planting” a new church. He sums up his thinking in founding the church: “Twenty years ago in Ciudad Juárez, I had a

vision to penetrate the culture with the message of the gospel, which is in my opinion the only message that can truly transform the heart and mind of the human being.”

Valles is also an established journalist and the son of a politically minded journalist and newspaper editor. His life overlooking Mexico’s public square is something of a birthright in his mind. Valles says, “I was born in a newspaper. I grew up around the ink and around the typewriters. I know how the system in Mexico works. I know what has to be done.” As a result, as JOPE grew, Valles steadily moved toward the world of cultural commentary and political activism, and so he hand-picked and trained his pastoral successor, Gustavo Arango, who later became instrumental in the formation of and execution of Defendamos Juarez. Valles now focuses on the organization’s new iteration of Avanza Sin Tranza with support from Arango whose primary role remains pastoral.

Congregants are a cross section of “normal” Juarez citizens. The congregation numbers about 100, but attendance varies. They are drawn from a web of tribe - family relationships, children, cousins, siblings of the leaders - personal and professional friendships and community outreach. JOPE’s attendees range in age, not heavily skewed toward any particular demographic. It is best described as a middle-class church in its context, with few members that are on the extremes of poverty or wealth. Its most prosperous members are more likely to have friendly connections to politics and business than they are to be economically or politically successful themselves. Some, however, have business interests in the USA and other parts of Latin America.

Ciudad Juárez, like all of Mexico, is overwhelmingly Catholic, but evangelicals are present here in unusual numbers, perhaps as high as 10% of this city of 1.5 million, according to demographic data¹². Valles had become aware of the growing numbers of evangelicals in his city, and likewise of their potential. This led him to use his platform as a journalist to voice his criticisms during the violence of the “extremely feeble” efforts to bring these evangelical thousands together as the violence began to peak. “The religious community has organized protests, but in these marches for peace, fewer than 3,000 church-going persons have shown up. This is especially poor when we consider that is not even 10% of those identifying themselves as regular churchgoing evangelicals, to say nothing of the nominal Christians,” Valles wrote in 2010, reacting to a two-day killing spree that took 56 lives (Valles, 2010). An exasperated pessimism about their fellow evangelicals is prominent in the musings of these actors connected to JOPE. Their reflections, while resigned to the immediate reality, are replete with that characteristically optimistic evangelical faith in “God’s plan.” Congregants and supporters alike speak freely of the “providence of God,” or that “God will deliver an increase” on their small local investments of action and resources.

¹² The border regions of Mexico and the Distrito Federal (DF) are where evangelicals cluster. This is a legacy of marginalization. The same is true of yet more marginal Christian groups, such as Latter Day Saints, for whom Mexico is their largest mission field. They grew in the hinterlands, where they might be left alone. The southern state of Chiapas and the border with Guatemala feature higher numbers of non-Catholic Christians per capita, and also high levels of violence, both from cartel and government forces. It is beyond the resources of this study to delve into experiences of religious civil society there, but Catholicism in the south is quite conservative and resistant to interlopers, and non-Catholics report more overt acts of discrimination. That is not the case in the northern border region, where inputs from the U.S. are high. Non-Catholics in this region enjoy the legitimacy and resourcing that comes from being associated with U.S. religious movements that are relatively more powerful and legitimate in the cultural context of the USA.

While Defendamos Juárez is noteworthy for its conspicuous actions and emphasis on physical presence out in the city, the security situation is an obvious factor thwarting greater citywide organization. The powerful stimulus for action becomes an even more powerful depressant. Valles had been monitoring data on Juárez's social ills for years, even prior to the explosion of violence. He quotes statistics on the drug violence knowledgeably, explaining that more than 10,000 people were killed annually in the city from 2008-2012, making it statistically the world's most dangerous city. He is also skeptical of official tallies of deaths and disappearances. As a professional journalist, his role within several local media outlets has given him access to privileged information. He is a competent speaker of English, and so can access international media reports, as well. Due to his evangelical, theological formation, Valles describes that access to information as a gift from God and as a divine "call" to act on it. It has motivated him to think much like an entrepreneur in his efforts to establish a civil society beachhead in his city that has carried Defendamos Juárez forward into its new iteration as Avanza Sin Tranza. That theological formation was instrumental in his desire to move forward with anti-corruption efforts and to move beyond narrower acts of social service.

The real distress of those in Juárez is accompanied by a kind of exasperation at the curiosity of outsiders, evidenced in the presence of this researcher. Like a person who has lived for a time with a disability, research subjects seemed tired of being asked about the violence. The subjects emphasized their perception that the violence was leveling off in Juárez for now, and some normalcy had begun to return to the city's daily rhythms. They were insistent that this perception of open warfare on the streets be dispelled. They

decried the recent bad days, but each was quick to point out the ways their lives are not entirely handicapped by violence. Except during the worst of the crisis in 2010, daytime offered some hours of respite, even genuine calm. "Juarez is not Baghdad," Valles emphasizes. "People aren't dodging bullets in the streets. You don't see police around like before. You can see life here is not bad (now)."

Yet as the sun moved closer to the horizon each day, fewer and fewer people would be found conducting the normal business of life. Nationally, the number of murders had been dropping slowly since October of 2011, though analysis indicates that at the present rate of decline, Mexico would not be back to pre-2006 levels of violence until 2018, even if the hopeful trends continued (Dudley, 2014). In a worrisome turn, killings spiked in April and approaching record levels of violence in July of 2016, moving to their highest levels since October of 2011. In the summer of 2016, Valles had begun collecting news stories again on the rising violence and distributing them on social media, accompanied by wry and resigned comments. Even as close as these actors are to the situation, their immediate perceptions of the situation lag the statistical realities slightly. The city had backed off the worst of the violence before average citizens had fully apprehended the change, and the city has once again in 2016 edged back into a very dangerous trend before most average citizens have truly recognized how precarious their position has become.

Defendamos Juarez

In early 2011, when the numbers of deaths in the city were unprecedented and Juarez was nearing what would turn out to be the peak of the violence so far, Valles and Arango had enough. In March of that year, Valles and Arango launched Defendamos Juárez (Stand Up for Juarez, also rendered Let's Protect Juarez, or DJ), based out of JOPE church. The effort was as much an act of defiance as an opportunity for them and their churchmates to act concretely. They were convinced something had to be done, and they asserted that it was evangelicals' moment to act. DJ's financing has always been minimal. Especially at the start, it was subsistence-level and donation based, mixed in with church monies. Most of Defendamos Juarez resources were invested in supplies for works of municipal renovation. Participants also handmade banners and painted small murals that offer words of hope and encouragement. In its second year, Defendamos Juárez mobilized some 1200 citizens of Juarez in teams cleaning up derelict properties in violent neighborhoods and in public demonstrations including street preaching, all aimed at "making hope tangible" in the city. DJ actions were courageous but also cautious. They did not conduct any projects after dark nor did they take provocative public stances at that time, for example. But in the extremes of violence in 2011 and 2012, they believed that merely being out and physically present sent an important signal to the city and to their fellow citizens. This was at a time when cartel hitmen were operating with near impunity. Many had homes in the same neighborhoods and even lived not far from JOPE's congregants.



Figure 9: Stand Up for Juarez teams out in the city

It is not just the context of violence that Valles, Arango and their supporters were resisting in the launch of DJ. They were aware they were resisting Mexican history and culture also. Valles and Arango were quick to point out that the sort of voluntaristic action their church was modeling was not part of Mexico's cultural tradition. JOPE Christian Center congregants and their community associates, however, have rallied around Valles and Arango's vision. The simple acts of service had a rather obvious appeal: "Juarez is in crisis, and the city needs the work that we are doing," Alicia (not her real name) tells me in Spanish, as she works at the site of a Defendamos Juárez project, pausing from stretching on her tiptoes to paint the top of a windowsill. "People wonder what we are doing. They want to know why we would do this, if we are not getting paid. They sometimes ask if we are from the government, or if we are campaigning," Alicia says. At the time they began working, Valles insisted that no one was doing anything like this. "In Mexico, this sort of thing is unheard of," he says. Investment in communities on a large and visible scale usually only takes place in the context of political patronage.

On this day of observation, Defendamos Juárez was conducting one of its prime activities: sprucing up a decrepit funeral home, and painting it their signature color of white. The volunteers are clothed in white, as well. This color choice enhanced the visibility of their bodies. It enhanced the visibility of their work. White is the color of political neutrality and a symbol of peace. However, it is also a color that has connotations of a preservative, as evidenced by Latin America's ubiquitous parks and their trees whose lower trunks are painted white. "White is a color you see a lot in Juarez,

on trees to prevent infestation of bugs, for example,” Reymundo (not his real name) explains. “It is pure and clean. And we are helping purify the city.”

As invested as they were in the work of Defendamos Juárez, the supporters recognize that the debilitating systemic problems in the city make the vicious circle very difficult to escape. The city provided near constant reminders that even the small advances they made can be swallowed by the ugliness of the crisis. Valles took me to a bridge that Defendamos Juárez had decorated with posters reading “La paz comienza creyendo” (Peace begins with belief) and that was later fouled by cartel hitmen who hung a tortured body from the overpass, its feet dangling just a few meters away from that plaintive appeal.

Valles and Arango pepper their many stories of the gangland deaths with lamentations about the condition of the legal system where the vast majority of murders in the city will never be solved, or even investigated, due to incompetence or corruption in the law-enforcement institutions. Arango, in particular, is no stranger to the violence. While Valles’ home is in an area less likely to be affected by violence, Arango’s home was in a neighborhood frequently afflicted by cartel clashes. One of the city’s notorious bloodbaths occurred just a few doors down from his in 2011 when 14 people were slaughtered in a single home. Arango and his family laid in the dark on the floor of their bedroom, praying together and listening to the gunshots.

The penetration of criminality across all sectors of society made it difficult for these humble law-abiding church people to know whom to trust. Subjects interviewed expressed fears about extortion schemes that had systematically targeted pastors and

churches in the city. Some stories could be corroborated, and indeed I interviewed evangelical victims from other churches whose unfortunate personal experiences were stories repeated among JOPE church's congregants. Subject interviews with sympathetic evangelical activists connected to Valles and Arango alleged that members of their families had been targets of "express" kidnappers working in coordination with police officers. While I could not independently substantiate these sensitive claims, the broader allegation has been substantiated by external observers, including work done for the Inter-American Office on Human Rights, as well as observers of the Mexican crisis inside and outside the country. Furthermore, in an interview with the chief of police in Juárez, the city's highest law-enforcement official admitted that during the worst of the violence there had been significant penetrations of criminal elements into the public security forces. He had personally come to head up those forces as a result of purges to eliminate willfully criminal officers and other unfortunate security personnel trapped by threats of violence or extortion.

Outcomes of Defendamos Juarez

Assessing the outcomes of Defendamos Juarez is fairly straightforward. Defendamos Juarez operated from 2011-2014. One measure of impact is the dozens of properties that the actors whitewashed and dozens of bridges and walls covered with messages of hope and encouragement. Another measure is its growth. From a humble neighborhood church of just over 100 members, this small movement grew nearly 1000%

at its peak in 2013, mobilizing an estimated 1200 people in “whitewashing” projects and “tangible hope making” projects around the city.

Defendamos Juarez did not bring about large-scale, long-term cooperation among evangelicals. However, in the face of faulty public institutions, it demonstrated convincingly that smaller-scale efforts generate a critical base of opportunity for trust-based cooperation. Most of Defendamos Juarez’s 1200 volunteers had no direct connection to JOPE church, though nearly all of the volunteers had connections to other evangelical churches. As Defendamos Juarez had begun to morph into Avanza Sin Tranza in 2014, other churches followed the lead of Defendamos Juarez, using its methods and sharing objectives of “tangible hope-making.” Perhaps its greatest gift is that this model of city engagement is achievable and “safe” enough for almost any church of any resource level to carry out. Defendamos Juarez, in this iteration, was an example of informal civil society, really hanging together on the power of its humble statement of mission from a humble missional community. It also modeled acts of presence that, though they were not permanent, they did linger. White buildings do become stained, but it takes some time to erase evidence of that act of presence. Likewise, the posters Defendamos Juarez placed on the abutments of the infamous cartel hanging bridge admonishing readers that “Hope begins with belief” were still visible long after the bodies had been removed from the bridge and the intersection had recovered its normal rhythms.

Avanza Sin Tranza / Thrive Without Bribes



Figure 10: Thrive Without Bribes training in Jojutla, Mexico

Defendamos Juarez had another more important, tangible, and lingering effect. The impact Valles and Arango saw with Defendamos Juarez led them to experiment with civil-society efforts in a different form. Valles traces a direct link from Defendamos Juárez to Avanza Sin Tranza: The second would never have existed without the first. Valles named his project “Avanza Sin Tranza” as a subversion of another wry Mexican declaration of the inevitability of corruption: “*El que no tranza no avanza.*” It loses some poetic effect in English, but the phrase means, “He who does not bribe does not thrive.”

In the course of developing and promoting the work of Defendamos Juárez, it became apparent to Valles that the activities they carried out under that banner were addressing surface-level issues. Beautifying derelict properties and distributing hopeful artwork have value. However, something more substantive and linked to deeper causal attitudes and behaviors had to be done if the sources of the crisis of violence were to be adequately addressed. Thus, Valles and Arango moved on from Defendamos Juarez to launch Avanza Sin Tranza to attack corruption in all its forms.

While Avanza Sin Tranza is not a traditional “academic” effort, Valles is a skilled journalist, consumer and dispenser of information. Valles is also well acquainted with the academic world, and so was cognizant of the multifaceted nature of the crisis even in the earliest days with Defendamos Juarez. It had just not yet become clear what the next step should be. Arango is an experienced community organizer and now works as a professional civil servant in the municipal government, as well, and has access to municipal elites. Thus, the most important legacy of Defendamos Juarez is not only its literal acts and model for informal, local cooperation among evangelical churches but the argument Defendamos Juarez itself made to the project leaders to expand into higher-stakes and higher-reward activities. This is evidence of the political learning that occurs in the small-scale experimentation that occurred with Defendamos Juárez, whose comparatively small successes permitted the leaders to gain insight into the role and real potential of civil society. Its development offered a view beyond the horizon of their current activism, and also revealed the limitations of their current project. These were not, and still are not, seasoned political actors. They are incidental *políticos*, and resist

being labeled as political animals. There is some cultural baggage attached to political terminology, but they have learned from their experience so far that systemic change requires engaging systemic politics in some form.

Practically speaking, accomplishing this objective meant applying additional targeted investment in structural change via formal anti-corruption efforts. In its second full year Avanza Sin Tranza is beginning to bear fruit outside of the evangelical community. The second generation of the organization represents an advance over its parent in several ways:

1) The work of Defendamos Juarez and Avanza Sin Tranza are pioneering the infill of longstanding vacuums in evangelical political mobilization in Latin America and Mexico. The work of Defendamos Juarez aspired to make a citywide impact, though its actual reach was smaller and more local. DJ's impact was also episodic, gaining some local media attention during sacrificial works in the destitute neighborhoods, but largely receding from view and from the life of JOPE itself in the periods in between actions. The work took place not so much according to schedule as according to resources. It is best understood as a ministry of the local church. That is, the church's duties to the spiritual care of congregants came before the work of marking the city with DJ's symbols of hope. But where the work of DJ was closer to the hyper-local due to its limitations and authority, the work of Avanza Sin Tranza aims for the in-between space in Mexican politics where evangelicals have not historically been present. Its objective is not the neighborhood, but rather the entire city of Juarez, along with similar cities across the country. Avanza Sin Tranza has now held trainings in seven other metropolitan areas in

Mexico, including Mexicali, Cuernavaca, and Monterrey, with Valles being the lead trainer. These trainings have worked with over 10,000 participants as of this writing.

2) Where DJ was a ministry of the local church, Avanza Sin Tranza has a formal and separate identity. It is a registered civil-society entity, with formal objectives, branding, social-media marketing, and measurable outcomes. DJ focused on “rescues” of derelict properties and makes donations of food and clothing, as well as valuable gifts of their presence. Its model of activism was easily replicable, but its impact was not permanent nor did DJ supporters expect it would be. They wished to be “lights,” however temporary, in neighborhoods darkened by violence and social evils. They wished to be “salt” in the sense of preserving their neighborhoods from additional decay. There is an obvious pietistic element to that external purification process. It is city-oriented, but it also a highly personal act and reflects traditional evangelical postures toward fallen social structures. That is, there the locus of evil is inside of persons, not systems.

3) The work of Defendamos Juarez was exceedingly practical, emphasizing tangible signs of hope, a regeneration of small localities of the city, work evidenced by the physical marks of white paint, banners of hope, and fuller bellies. Its illusory impact was not by design, but due to the natural limitations of their working means and resources. White paint becomes sullied. Banners are torn. Bellies soon empty. The work of Avanza Sin Tranza, meanwhile, is best described as educational. It is knowledge based, rooted in a set of ideas about what constitutes honest and forthright behavior in the context of business and government. It is oriented towards long-term and enduring

alteration of the cultural and political norms that currently reinforce the problem of corruption. Charter documents state:

“Somos un grupo de mexicanos que buscamos concientizar y provocar las acciones anticorrupción en las familias, instituciones educativas, entidades de gobierno, comercios, empresas, medios de comunicación, comunidades de fe, asociaciones de profesionales y técnicos, así como la sociedad civil.” [*Author translation: We are a group of Mexicans that aims to raise awareness and provoke acts resisting corruption in families, educational institutions, government entities, commerce, businesses, media, communities of faith, professional and technical associations, along with civil society.*] (Avanza Sin Tranza charter).

4) Avanza Sin Tranza has a funding model and a plan for sustainability and replication. The trainings are paid for by the organizations that bring Avanza trainers in, highlighting a point of enlightened self-interest that less corrupt employees will save the entity money. Thus, Avanza has as its target organizations that have excess funds for this training, which also happen to be strategic members of elite sectors of Mexican society. These are local branches of businesses, including transnational business, municipal organizations, political parties and activist groups, and other members of civil society - whether religious or secular, policing units, bureaucratic entities, schools, etc. These targeted organizations wield financial resources, but they are especially powerful conduits for and shapers of cultural and political norms. Thus, they are key socializer and transmitters of corruption. They are also the sectors of the public square where of the greatest instances of corruption have been discovered. Thus, the program is preoccupied with *systemic change in sites of systemic power*. This strategic shift represents a tremendous leap in ambition and sophistication over the Defendamos Juarez.

5) Though Avanza leaders freely admit and are indeed proud that Avanza Sin Tranza is heavily shaped by evangelical theology, that it has roots in a local church, and that it works from evangelical understandings of the human condition, Avanza Sin Tranza is not an evangelistic effort. Despite Valles' statement that "the message of the (Christian) gospel is the only message that can truly transform the human being," there is no discussion of Christianity nor expectation of a commitment to evangelical religiosity for those who go through an Avanza training.

Instead, the project requires that its participants - employees and leaders of large business, government and university entities - "convert" to a lifestyle and professional ethic that rejects habits that are themselves corrupt or that permit corruption to take root. This is so because "corruption," in Valles' view, is a political euphemism for "sin." Sin is an ancient Christian idea of evil - the fallen human condition - that has personal and also systemic effects. He is aware and articulate about the reality that pietistic, evangelical jargon is not welcome nor persuasive in Mexico's public square. Still, Avanza Sin Tranza is not willing to abandon its ethical language. Indeed, corruption, in the Avanza assessment of it, is understood as the *political experience of sin*. Avanza deals with "corruption/sin" not as a theological problem, but strictly as a deficiency experienced in the public square and in elite and influential sectors. Corruption, like "sin," is a perversion, a twisting, of an otherwise good thing for selfish ends. That rhetorical move fits quite well with historic Christian and evangelical understandings of the soul, and it addresses directly the root of structural weaknesses in Mexican governance. There is tremendous consonance of Avanza's anti-corruption agenda and the state of public

opinion in the country across all sectors. The elimination of corruption is of highest importance to voters in all categories.

And as an evangelical, he believes vehemently in the essential importance of a “moment of conversion” in the strict Christian sense of turning away from one’s “sinful” past. To the degree that Latin American evangelicals have an identifiable theory of politics, its cornerstone is the subjective condition of the soul of the individual citizen. The language employed by subjects was pious and individualistic when talking about solutions to the violence. Individual citizens must convert to the Christian (evangelical) gospel in order for real change to take place. Subjects were in agreement that conversions and personal rehabilitation did not preclude other kinds of intervention like policing and educational investment, in the vein of Calderón’s Todos Somos Juárez effort to recruit civil society. But for permanent peace to come to their city, the actors connected to Defendamos Juárez considered formal politics and state action to be important but contingent factors, whose contribution was only as functional and “moral” as the souls of the governed.

Evidence of this posture and the evolution of Avanza’s leaders in the area of their purpose and strategic aims is a recent essay Valles published critiquing legal developments in Mexico with regard to corruption. He described the “Three for Three” legislation, which is a largely citizen-driven innovation, the most celebrated legal achievement of Mexico’s anti-corruption groundswell, as a “toy.” The crux of his argument, therefore, is that laws cannot save Mexico from corruption. Fear of the state only goes so far, especially in Mexico where the connections between justice and

punishment have been severed. Valles was not arguing that laws are worthless, but rather pressing Avanza's position that "sin" in its political form of corruption lives in people as much as systems.

Concluding Comments & Discussion of Impacts

Resource Capacity: MODERATE. The monthly ingress for the parent-church JOPE is modest by U.S. standards, but the finances are significantly more robust than Psalm 100. Even so, JOPE church does not bring in enough in offerings each month to pay a full-time pastor. JOPE's revenues are stable enough to support small-scale ministries, like purchasing materials for Stand Up for Juarez projects. The leaders of the organization (Daniel Valles and Gustavo Arango) are also financially stable from their own outside employment to fund their inter-city movement without assistance from the church now that Thrive Without Bribes has become an inter-city effort. In an effort to move away from church funding toward independent sustainability, Thrive Without Bribes has developed a funding model that charges a modest per-participant fee to provide anti-corruption trainings.

Stand Up / Thrive benefited from an educated congregation and highly educated leadership. Engaging the leaders and supporters it is immediately clear there is greater awareness of bigger-picture trends within Mexico and internationally. Congregants consume news daily, and of course Valles is professionally connected to the information industry. He and Arango have also cultivated connections with the nascent PES (Social

Encounter Party) evangelical political party, which has former mayors and city council members among its present leadership.

Reach and Visibility: MODERATE. Here, too, is a case of a communications specialist (Valles) who leads the outreach, putting his skill to work increasing the visibility of the projects. Valles called in personal favors among journalists he knew to come and cover the neighborhood-beautification projects of Stand Up for Juarez. On the days I observed projects, there were two local newspapers covering the work. Daniel hosted a talk show on a local-television start up in Juarez during the worst of the violence, and would occasionally invite experts who spoke on topics related to the project. Stand Up for Juarez was not conceived with a mass audience in mind, however. It was intended as means of mobilizing other, previously dormant evangelical congregations to engage the crisis of violence in tangible ways.

Thrive Without Bribes is now primarily a knowledge-based endeavor, not tied to any one municipality. Visibility and reach have also grown as Valles has worked to professionalize Thrive Without Bribes, which is now his main occupation along with journalism. He has enhanced his personal reputation as a commentator on culture and corruption as a result of these projects. Valles has been invited to academic conferences and served as a panelist in a televised debate on corruption in northern Mexico. As of this writing, Thrive Without Bribes has trained more than 10,000 citizens and has established a presence in six of Mexico's metropolitan areas, including the country's most violent.

Potential for Systemic Impact: HIGH. Beyond the mere growing visibility of the project, Thrive Without Bribes is predicated on systemic change. It seeks to alter the

modes in which citizens engage one another and the public square. The project works with norm-transmitting institutions to spur changes in thinking and lower tolerance of quotidian corruption among its target publics. Though as an evangelical organization, Thrive Without Bribes leaders do desire to convert its target publics, this is objective is not part of its curriculum nor any of its public promotion. Though the behaviors of honesty and transparency that Thrive Without Bribes seeks to instill are prized by evangelicals as signs of inner renovation, there is no trace of the pietistic language in which evangelicals typically trade. To persuade its target publics, Thrive Without Bribes uses appeals to enlightened self-interest and makes normative claims about the obligations of citizenship.

Though Defendamos Juarez was conceived without a thought to what form it might take as it grew, it has since developed into a potentially nationally impactful presence under the banner Avanza Sin Tranza. The organization evolved from a source of citywide mobilization, primarily as a connecting force among churches in the metropolitan and cross-border area, into a regional and inter-city effort that is showing signs of political learning, sophistication and a facilitating factor for networking of civil-society actors around the problem of entrenched corruption. This instance of home-grown, Mexican religious civil society is a prime example of the (minor) evangelical awakening that is taking place in key locations in violence-afflicted zones along the border and elsewhere in Mexico. The experience of the humble, earnest individuals that collected under this umbrella are the true grassroots of a flourishing of religious mobilization in the country. This phenomenon shares characteristics with the historical

predictions of 50 years of political-science research and analysis of the region and its religious elements.

Despite my role as an ostensibly impartial observer, I found this a hopeful indicator of behaviors that could lead to greater religious pluralism in the public square, and offer a model for non-sectarian political activism. This case of Thrive Without Bribes is an example of how non-Catholic Christians in Mexico contend with their position on the political margins. Evangelical populations are indeed prone to isolating themselves from one another and from the larger political fray. The same tendency was evident in the congregation supporting Defendamos Juarez / Avanza Sin Tranza. Though the church has existed for 20 years, it was not a place of political foment until the crisis of violence. The emphasis was on theologies of pietism, derived from charismatic-renewal understandings of the place of politics as belonging to the world of fallen and sinful social structures. The people of JOPE church overcame some of those inertial forces by experimenting in small ways with civil society that have expanded into the current and growing anti-corruption training work of Avanza Sin Tranza.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MOVEMENT FOR PEACE WITH JUSTICE AND DIGNITY

On April 2, 2013, the prolific Mexican author Javier Sicilia published his final work of poetry: *Rastros*. That Spanish word *rastros* means “scraps” or “traces.” Sicilia’s “scrap” of poetry - just 49 words in all - was a meditation on the murder of his son. His poem lamented the “shredding” of his son’s lungs and his life and the “suffocating within us” of any language with which to speak about his death or any of the deaths the country had suffered. Mexico’s violence had claimed the life of one of Sicilia’s own, scarring him and his family in a way that he said left him speechless. Thus his poem declares: “This world is not worthy of my words...Poetry no longer exists for me” (*Expansión*, 2013).

As a public figure, Sicilia could never be truly alone with his grief, and so his tragedy was shared with millions of Mexicans and countless others around the world (Prakash, 2012). Many of those consuming news of his tragedy in his home country had been devastated by the crisis themselves, and these victims began reaching out to him directly. With that final poetic missive, *Rastros*, Sicilia abandoned his 30 years of poetry and turned to a new venue of expression in Mexico’s civil society. In Sicilia’s Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, his personal loss led him to mobilize the nameless and invisible thousands who were grieving their own losses.

Origins of the Movement for Peace



Figure 11: Javier Sicilia, founder of the Movement for Peace

The impetus for the Movement for Peace came on March 28, 2011, when the body of Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega, the 24-year-old son of Javier Sicilia, was found in the trunk of a car, along with the bodies of six other victims, beside a highway between the cities of Acapulco and Cuernavaca. The victims' bodies showed signs of torture. They had been suffocated, bound and gagged, and dumped in the car. Authorities determined that Juan Francisco and several friends, all university students at the time, had

fallen into an altercation with some men at a bar in Cuernavaca. Juan Francisco and his companions filed a complaint with the local police, which provoked the men once again. What Juan Francisco and his comrades did not realize was that the men with whom they were quarrelling belonged to the Cartel del Pacifico Sur (South-Pacific Cartel), connected to the Beltran-Leyva cartel network. The *sicarios* followed Juan Francisco and his associates later that night, kidnapped, tortured, and killed them in retaliation for the confrontation and for going to the police.

The Movement for Peace was born almost by accident within days of the tragedy. The press was waiting for Sicilia when he arrived at the crematorium in Cuernavaca to give final disposal of his son's remains. Sicilia asked the reporters for space to grieve and agreed to offer a press conference the next day, an event that turned out to be much larger than he had expected (Padgett, 2011). While he had not prepared for such a stage, the potential of the moment was not lost on him:

I had never thought of starting a movement or being a spokesman for anything. I'm a poet, and poets are better known for working with more obscure intuitions. But in those moments I was reminded that the life of the soul can be powerful too. My chief intuition then was that we had to give name and form to this tragedy and somehow put that into action with real citizens as a way to tell the government, 'We need something new, especially new institutions to fight our lawlessness and corruption and impunity, not just that of the drug cartels but the state'" (quoted in Padgett, 2011).

The following Sunday, Sicilia published his now famous and scathing open letter to Mexican government's handling of the drug war, declaring "We've had it up to here!" The public found a champion in Sicilia's pain and in his elite status. The horror of losing one's child in this manner would be sufficient to move almost any citizen to action, but

authorities compounded the tragedy and polarized Sicilia further with their woeful handling of the high-profile investigation. Six weeks passed with no proper investigation being carried out. When the investigation did progress, authorities - Sicilia alleged - scapegoated suspects who showed signs of torture and disorientation in their depositions (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2011). As the failures mounted, Sicilia began to more forcefully denounce the government's ineptitude and indolence in the investigation. A bevy of left-leaning movements and public figures threw their support behind Sicilia, including the journalist Carmen Arestegui, a vocal critic of the government, Sub-Comandante Marcos, who leads the Zapatistas (EZLN group), and Alejandro Martí who founded Mexico SOS, a civil-society effort with a model similar to the Movement for Peace.

Writing in the journal of the University of Mexico, Francisco Prieto (2011) described the emergence of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (hereafter "the Movement for Peace" or "the Movement") as "a new phenomenon" on the Mexican political landscape. Prieto exaggerates in one respect: Mass movements are not new. Latin American and Mexican history is full of them. The tactic of mass marches, however, have often been sites of violence by marchers and by the state, due to radical tactics of blockading highways, forcefully possessing civic institutions, or purposeful destruction of property. The Mexican state has reacted with extreme violence against popular uprisings and protests. The most notorious in recent years was the anti-government, student protests in October 1968 in Mexico City's Three Cultures Plaza. The Mexican government continues to obfuscate the truth about the events, though

independent sources believe as many as 300 hundred protesters were killed and hundreds more carried away by government troops (Doyle, 1998; Rodda, 2015). Despite the dubious history, Sicilia does place the Movement within Mexico's mass-protest tradition:

Mexico has a long history of mobilizing, from the revolution to the demonstrations of 1968 to the Zapatista uprising [of 1994]. Confronting our security crisis, the murders and the kidnappings and the extortion, was more difficult. But like any mobilization, we had to reach the middle class and place the deaths and disappearances in the national consciousness — make visible the face of our national pain. The drug-war statistics were hiding those faces; the powers that be were trying to tell us that all those who were dying were just criminals, just cockroaches. We had to change that mindset and put names to the victims for a change. And that meant the criminal dead as well as the innocent dead like Juan Francisco. We also have to focus on the poverty and the lack of economic opportunity that helps breed the criminality (quoted in Padgett, 2011).

The Movement for Peace, however, makes a clean break with that restive tradition of mass movements, and has committed to being a peaceful presence in the civil-society space. Sicilia recalled his emotions on the first day of marching as they passed the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), which had been the site of some of the country's greatest civil unrest and retaliations by the state in previous generations:

“The most memorable day, then, turned out to be the first march from Cuernavaca to Mexico City in May. It seemed we started out with about 200 people and by the time we got to the Zócalo here in the capital we had more than 100,000. I remember coming into Mexico City, near the UNAM and hearing them performing Mozart's ‘Requiem’ in one of the university's buildings. But then in the Zócalo you could feel the promise of life again. It felt like the civic miracle we needed” (quoted in Padgett, 2011).

Indeed, Prieto (2011) highlights the Movement for Peace as offering something of a “civic miracle” in its identity as a “movement of movements” that works for peace not imposed by the state, but one that emerges from an intentional return to smaller, more

local community-based mobilizations. In a country known for generations of rigid, clientelistic relationships with citizens, which minimized the checks and balances of a federal system and de-emphasized the local, the Movement for Peace aims to cultivate local-level (municipal and regional) participation by citizens, outside the purview of formal politics.

The Role of Javier Sicilia

To accomplish its goals, the Movement trades liberally on the national reputation of its founder Javier Sicilia and his story of tragedy and personal ethics rooted in the progressive Christian, Catholic tradition. Despite Sicilia's refusal to be called the Movement's official leader, it is through his story, words and reputation that target audiences and policy makers interpret the Movement. Thus, the two inputs of personal tragedy and Catholic formation are essential to understanding this project and its prospects.

Javier Sicilia is an elite. He is an award-winning poet, political commentator and journalist, author, and intellectual, with many published works to his name. He has won the Ariel Award for his work in film, the José Fuentes Mares Award for his novel *The Baptist*, and the 2009 Aguascalientes Prize for his last book of poetry, *Desert Triptych* (Shook, 2012). English-speaking audiences are unlikely to have encountered his work, but he might be compared to Maya Angelou in stature in literary circles in Mexico and the Spanish-speaking world of the Americas.

This facility with mystical concepts and language is a product of his upbringing in a family of intellectual Catholic Christians in Mexico City, a family and upbringing he describes as “very, very Catholic.” His father was also a published poet, and his family had been a presence in the public square long before the Movement for Peace was born. He was exposed to literature, poetry and to the church from his very first days. A key element in his political and religious formation was the influence of his mother whom he admired greatly and describes as “the most Catholic member of his family.” Sicilia recalls she had been heavily influenced by the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his model of non-violent, civil-disobedience in the United States. MLK’s life and leadership in the U.S. civil-rights uprising overlapped with Mexico’s dirty war and the bloody, anti-government, student uprisings in the 1960s, making MLK’s alternative even more appealing. She was also a keen follower of other 20th Century non-violent revolutionaries like Ghandi. These principles of non-violence were core values his mother passed on to him and that Sicilia has supported in his writing and has worked to infuse into the Movement for Peace.

Sicilia left home as a young man with deep attractions to the church, steeped in Liberation Theology, and with a budding awareness of his “poetic and literary vocation” (Felker, 2012). He spent a year in a Jesuit community working with the poor in a “belt of misery” on the outskirts of Mexico City, an experience that soured him on ivory-tower intellectuals, whose solutions he believed were irrelevant to the real lives of the poor (Ibid). That year also motivated him to enter the priesthood in a Jesuit community (Ibid). He left the priesthood training after falling in love, and entered university where he

studied politics and literature. He then started a family with two children, daughter Stephanie and the son who would die tragically, Juan Francisco.

In the mid-1980s moved his family to Cuernavaca, a city about 50 miles south of Mexico City, because at that time it was “a very pleasant city that offered a better life for his family and two children.” Cuernavaca remained a pleasant home for Sicilia until the decade of the 1990s and the last of the PRI presidencies of Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Ernesto Zedillo. In these years, Sicilia began to take notice of the rising levels of violence in the city that coincided with a new head of security there. In these years, Sicilia began to engage in more political activism. He was present in Chiapas in 1994 to support the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and the San Andres Accords. He also protested the destruction of archeological remains in Casino de la Selva to build a commercial center in 2000 (Folkner, 2012).

As the years passed in Cuernavaca, however, Sicilia recalled that the city began to experience things it had never experienced before: kidnappings and killings. At this same time, revelations were coming to light that high-ranking, Mexican military officials - Brig. Gen. Alfredo Navarro Lara and division General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, then national drug czar - were closely tied to cartel leader Amado Carrillo (Preston, 1997; Wilkinson, 2013). Surveillance captured generals serving as cartel messengers, passing along threats against the lives of their colleagues and their colleagues’ families on behalf of the Beltran-Leyva organization.

This era was a harbinger of what was to come, a time that Sicilia says reminded him of the conditions today in Mexico: unpredictably violent amid revelations that

eviscerated the public's and his own confidence in the state. In Cuernavaca, Sicilia says it came to light that the corruption was not only national but local, with the chief of metropolitan police discovered to be behind the kidnappings. Sicilia says the corrupt chief of police was thrown out of office by a mass movement of the people of Cuernavaca. The city, and indeed the country, never recovered from those blows, in his view. "From there the country faced a great decomposition. Mexico has fallen into a deep hole, and indeed it continues to fall. It has continued to worsen, taking lives, including that of my son Juan Francisco," Sicilia told me. He was dismissive of the PRI leadership who failed to halt the decline before the opposition came to power in 2000. He was likewise dismissive of the PAN opposition that controlled the presidency from 2000-2012, overseeing the worst of the crisis and the death of his son.

Religious Content of The Movement for Peace

Sicilia does not currently attend mass regularly, but he is dedicated to the church and remains immersed in Catholic thought and theology, which heavily informs the Movement for Peace. He has said in published interviews that, were it not for his Catholic faith, he would not be leading the Movement (Farooq and Guy, 2012). In his interview with me, he was articulate and well versed in what might be called "elite" Catholic theology. He spoke about the Christian tradition and its relationship to Mexican politics, and about Christian claims about justice, citing key thinkers and theologians, including Liberation theologians, such as Boff and Gutierrez. Some of the very arguments and critiques of Christian tradition's effect on politics in Mexico I have

highlighted in these pages were also points Sicilia brought up in our discussion. These theological currents he brings to bear on the leadership of the Movement.

The role for religion in the Movement was evident in Sicilia's first open letter to the government, titled *¡Estamos hasta la madre!* (We've had it up to here!). The "madre" he refers to is the Virgin Mary:

"On the one hand, yes, *hasta la madre* is Mexican slang, but it has a very religious component as well. The mother, like the Virgin of Guadalupe [Mexico's Roman Catholic patroness], is sacred. To say you're *hasta la madre* means they've insulted our mother protector; they've committed a sacrilege. It's very strong, very Mexican, but very poetic, too, in its own way. Anyway, it resonated in ways that exceeded my expectations" (quoted in Padgett, 2011).

Prieto (2011) describes the religious underpinning of the Movement for Peace as follows:

"Un movimiento de movimientos que se construye desde la poesía, que proclama la necesidad de consolarnos los unos a los otros, para emprender así el viaje hacia la instauración de la justicia pero una justicia fincada e inspirada en la caridad. La caridad que se fundamenta en los misterios de la Encarnación y de la Redención" (Prieto, 2011, p. 42).

Author translation: [It is a] movement of movements built on poetry, which proclaims the need to console one another, to begin the journey toward justice, but a justice rooted in and inspired by charity. The charity founded on the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption.

Wrapping this movement in terms like "Incarnation" and "Redemption" is to freight it heavily with Christian imagery. Those terms are inextricably linked to the life and death of Jesus Christ. The "incarnational" aspects of the movement supporters understand as an "enfleshing" of the Christian ethic to be present with the suffering. "Redemption" here hearkens to the Christian notion of reclaiming something that has been lost or has fallen into decay, and making it over again anew. I asked Sicilia whether Prieto's description

overstates the religious commitments of the Movement for Peace. Sicilia endorsed Prieto's language and was emphatic that such pietistic descriptions do not exaggerate the faith elements. This is a Christian (Catholic) project, in his words, and it relies on the essential Christian ethic of solidarity with the suffering.

Sicilia has spoken about the religious elements of the Movement for Peace often and frankly in virtually every published interview I have analyzed. This is not merely a tactic to broaden the Movement's appeal nor to ingratiate the Movement with its poor, Catholic supporters. Rather, it is a statement of purpose. Religious identity as it takes shape in the Movement becomes a personal palliative for Sicilia and the Movement's supporters, while also offering a path toward real social change and a conception of justice:

[The] movement's success surprised me quite a bit. My intention at the beginning was just to signal the horror of the crimes being committed as well as the government's faulty reaction to it. I did only what my heart was telling me to do. It was a great surprise to me to see the national response. As a Catholic I think a lot about grace, and this was as surprising as the arrival of God's grace. You don't expect it, but it was like the answer to my pain. It eased the pain of my son's death (quoted in Padgett, 2011).

Indeed, Sicilia's insistence on keeping a religious voice in the Movement has cost him allies on all sides of Mexican politics. In his first meeting with Felipe Calderon (of the PAN party), Sicilia challenged the the-president by recounting the Old Testament story of the Prophet Nathaniel who denounced King David to his face for having sent an innocent young soldier to die so that the king might take his wife for himself. Calderon bristled, saying he had never killed anyone for a woman. Implying that the woman, in the present case, was the fruits of power, Sicilia replied, "You killed my son" (quoted in Shook,

2012). In 2012, after initially seeking Sicilia out to take advantage of his popularity, the leading candidates for president began to distance themselves from him because he was too religious (Felker, 2012).

The Movement for Peace pushes back against the Mexican violence in several ways, but one of the most prominent is through public acts of grieving together. It takes the shame of victimization out of the private realm and moves rituals of grief into full view of citizens and the state. This act is also picked up in religious thought and experience. An acute awareness of grief is rooted deeply in Catholic theology - in its Thomistic and Liberationist forms - and grief is featured heavily in Catholic art and symbolism, especially in depictions of the gruesome death of Jesus. This public grieving is an effort to make concrete the abstract experience of suffering. Abstracting human experience is dangerous and serves the interests of the unjust, violent status quo, Sicilia argued in another 2011 interview:

“Albert Camus spoke a terrible truth. ‘I know something worse than hate: abstract love.’ In the name of abstract love, in the name of God and Country, in the name of saving the youth from the drug, in the name of the proletariat, in the name of abstractions, our politicians and war policy makers have committed the most atrocious crimes on human beings, who are not abstractions, who are bones and flesh. That is what our country is living and suffering today: in the name of an abstract goodness, we are suffering the opposite: the horror of war and violence, of innocents dead, disappeared, and mutilated” (quoted in Prakash, 2011; and Shook, 2012).

The Movement is broadly and deeply Catholic, but it is also saturated with Liberation Theology. It has attracted strong support from sectors of Mexican religion that are working to keep the legacy of Liberation Theology alive. These include the expatriate agitator and former priest Ivan Illich, the leaders of the Zapatista movement, which was

founded as an expression of radical politics based on Liberation Theology and was one of the first radical group to publicly support Sicilia. Sicilia has also argued that many of ordinary citizens who have marched and experienced harm are themselves Catholics who have been shaped by Liberation Theology (Farooq and Guy, 2012). These left-intellectual partners make Sicilia's movement suspect in the eyes of conservative Catholics and evangelicals. However, the shared concern of ending corruption and violence is a strong enough point of commonality to keep this broad-spectrum religious coalition together.

Public-Square Activities & Objectives



Figure 12: Movement for Peace protest event

Mass deployment of human bodies in the public square has been the Movement's main source of activism through its five years. The initial wave of support for Sicilia's case against the investigating authorities and the decay of the state coalesced in a massive first Movement, which became a model for its activism over the next five years: a silent, 80-kilometer march from the city of Cuernavaca to the Zócalo, the great central plaza in Mexico City. That first march was unusual in its size. As many as 200,000 people were estimated to have participated (Shook, 2012; Felter, 2012). It was unusual in its silence: Only the names of the dead were spoken. And it was unusual in its composition: The bulk of the first marchers were victims or family of victims. When the strength of the mass response became clear, the Movement began planning Caravans for Peace, which have been staged annually and have mobilized tens of thousands of marchers. In 2012, the Caravan for Peace came to the United States, visiting 20 cities, including many population centers along the southern tier of the country, and ending in Washington, D.C.

The Movement aims to shame the state by a ritualized pointing to the human detritus the policies of the drug war have left behind. The practical objective following on from this is to create an umbrella under which smaller civil-society actors can take refuge and flourish in their contest with the Mexican state, an entity Sicilia believes is debased and violent because it has sold out to the global neoliberal project. Sicilia's critique is a broadside against the Mexican state and the entire political class (Potts interview, 2016; Ordaz, 2011).

The Movement's enormous popularity immediately made it a political gem over which the dominant parties began to squabble. The Movement for Peace and Javier

Sicilia refuse participation in formal exercises of power, however. The leadership has remained apolitical and refuses to endorse any faction or ally itself with state power. No leader of the Movement seeks formal office, and they speak out against any government entity's efforts to co-opt their actions. In some of his first public statements on the regime of violence, Sicilia explained the distance he wished to maintain from the state:

“Corruption has overrun us, and our institutions are rotten - from parties to the Federal Government. That is why crime is entrenched and why it has debased us. This is not the Mexico we want. This is not our war. But these are our deaths” (Ordaz, 2011). The PRI party attempted to leverage this wave of emotion against then-president Calderon's PAN administration. Though Sicilia did vehemently oppose Calderon's policies, Sicilia rebuked PRI Senator Manlio Fabio Beltrones for his frank effort to coopt the movement: "No, Senator Beltrones, not only are we asking that Calderon come out to hear us and receive us, we are also calling on parties and party presidents. They, too have been remiss. Calderon has 40,000 (at that time) deaths, and a bad war strategy, but all of you created this shit. The destruction of institutions began with you, and you continue to fail us, to behave like delinquents. Make no mistake. This applies to all parties” (Author translation; quoted in Ordaz, 2011).

The Movement rejects power politics and all “*caudillismos*” or strongman-isms. *Caudillos* are typically dictatorial individuals, and *caudillismo* is a persistent feature of Latin American politics, even in the democratic era, and it is a political disease that the Movement has identified as a corrupting influence. In Mexico, the strongman phenomenon is inseparable from the country's history. Caudillismo took on a collectivist

form in the legacy of the PRI's unchallenged dominance in the country for most of the 20th century. Returning autonomy to the "local" in rejection of caudillismo is one of the objectives of the Movement for Peace.



Figure 13: Javier Sicilia at Fort Benning (USA) protest

Concluding Comments & Statement of Impacts

The Movement for Peace holds some promise of a new era for Mexican civil society. While Prieto's claim that the Movement is something unprecedented is rather too effusive, the Movement does present some innovations in the Mexican context. In particular, this "new phenomenon" is its knitting together of a coalition of like-minded organisms from Mexico's Third Sector and its aim to strengthen civil society as the proper place for legitimate dissenting political behavior. With Mexico's Third Sector still in a period of development, the country does not have the professional-technocratic class populating that sector like it does in the United States, for example. Therefore, Mexican citizens who migrate into civil society do not typically do so for professional reasons alone but for necessity. The integreees move into civil society as a response to harm - whether personal or observed - in other sectors of society. Thus, the value of organizations that serve as facilitators and incubators of civil society, especially one with the reputation and reach of Javier Sicilia are irreplaceable.

Even with substantial investment and recent innovation, including the cases under discussion in this dissertation, Mexico's Third Sector remains underdeveloped compared to peers in Latin America. One of the markers of the sector's weakness is the lack of a supra-civil-society linkages such as that which The Movement for Peace wishes to foment. Structured linkages among small-scale civil-society actors - movements of movements - are a marker of maturity in the Third Sector for nations with more institutionalized democracies. This development is cause only for cautious optimism, however. Movement leaders are expressing frustration with their lack of concrete

advances due to the same forces that have thwarted progress in Mexico for generations, as well.

Potential for Systemic Impact: HIGH. The Movement for Peace is aimed at restructuring the deep and unjust patterns of relations between citizens and the government and is, therefore, primarily seeking systemic change. Sicilia's critique is of course aimed at sources of private violence, but The Movement for Peace places the greatest share of blame on the Mexican state. Though Sicilia enjoys unusual access to policy makers and cultural elites due to his status, he has repeatedly expressed frustration over the lack of substantive action that has come from the rhetoric of those leaders, despite their promises. Speaking with him this summer, I detected some resignation in his assessment of what reforms are politically possible. Nevertheless, of the three actors investigated in this dissertation, the Movement for Peace has far and away the most capacity to influence Mexico's most influential people.

Visibility and Reach: HIGH. With Sicilia's high profile as a public figure, the Movement for Peace enjoys high levels of name recognition and free media coverage in papers of record. The Movement for Peace has tallied hundreds of media mentions in Mexico, the U.S., and Europe over the last five years. Sicilia's reputation as a left intellectual is strong among his target publics, as is his reputation as a consistent critic of the government. The Movement for Peace has the support of academia and popular culture, as well as formerly radical groups such as the Zapatistas, though the Movement for Peace has rejected violence and aggressive tactics from the moment of its inception.

Resource Capacities: HIGH. The Movement for Peace is positioned at the “high” end of the scale in all metrics. In the area of funding and resources, the Movement enjoys ingress from various sources, including private donations and public funding. Its financial resources and knowledge bases are elite. After five years of operation, the Movement has established a professional research and advocacy presence at an urban university. It is headed by intellectuals and academics with terminal degrees.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF CASES, CONCLUSIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Mexico's juxtaposition of religious communities and extreme levels of violence presents a rich problematic for students of democracy, civil society, religion, and cross-border politics. Working within this jarring scenario, this dissertation contextualizes and analyzes certain cases of religiously motivated "dissenting" behavior within the entrenched regime of violence around Ciudad Juarez. The preceding chapters have worked from an ethnographic-case-study model to specify the forces of history and Christian thought that shape these selected, modern, religious actors in Latin America and Mexico. This includes addressing the troubled reputation that religion has developed in Mexico, the scope and nature of Mexico's regime of violence - carried out by both state and private actors - that makes these structured regional actions significant.

Of special interest to this dissertation is the reality that, despite the crisis of violence that has harmed these actors and their communities and despite Mexico's persistent illiberal democracy that marginalizes - even punishes - faith-based acts in the public square, the religious-civil-society actors investigated here behave according to norms of citizenship that would be expected in a consolidated, liberal democracy. That is, as agents of civil society, these actors behave *as if* essential democratic norms do - and should - exist, though in Mexico they manifestly do not. Indeed the violence that has

erupted as a result of severe democratic deficiencies is the prime motivation for their acting at all. In so doing, they advance a normative claim about the public square in Mexico, about state and citizen obligations, and about religious actors' rightful place among them.

CASE FINDINGS

Sin & The System

Of considerable theoretical importance to this discussion is the question of how Christian theology becomes politically "activated" in Mexico within its comparatively restrictive environment for overt religious expression. It is also theoretically important to determine what is especially appealing about the forms of political engagement these religious actors prefer and consider the most legitimate under these conditions. It is not accurate to say that religion is now somehow - several decades into the "truce" period (see Chapter Three) - more welcome in Mexican public life. It is not. It is the case, however, that the unique stresses of life in Juarez are forcing religious actors to be more creative about how they bring their critiques and their identity to bear on public life. Each of these cases was born of the political conviction that the state has failed in its obligations to protect vulnerable citizens. Subjects from all cases expressed a profound lack of faith in the Mexican state's capacities to intervene in the crisis. Theirs is a rational and empirically supported position. All three case leaders are well aware of the indices of impunity, which are optimistically in 95% range. On separate occasions when my travels around the city brought us near the offices of the provincial prosecutor, where the

highest-profile cases were processed, contacts pointed the building out as one of the most failed institutions in the city. Thus, a powerful causal factor these religious-civil-society actors share is expressed in that cry from Javier Sicilia that became the motto for the Movement for Peace: ¡*Estamos hasta a la madre!* (We are fed up!). These actors mobilized because the perceived costs of inaction became greater than the perceived costs of action. This was not a quantitative calculation, but an emotional and - for religious actors - a theological and ethical calculation.

That ethical and theological calculation is linked to their the belief that Mexican citizens have failed in their obligations to care for and protect one another in light of the unchecked violence. In particular, this critique about lack of care for fellow citizens (though they would not use that word) is aimed at other Christians. In this sense, the actors I observed are acting on the state's behalf and in its stead by resisting violent, non-state actors that erode the state's monopoly of violence. These actors also work on behalf of and in the stead of fellow citizens in their vigorous critiques of the state, which aim to ferret out corruption, incompetence and complicity with violent actors.

Though the "activation" of these religious people to become civil-society actors is not a mandate of their theology, the crisis of narco-violence in particular, as opposed to macroeconomic crises for example, is *particularly suited* to criticisms of a moral and theological nature. Thus, the problem is ripe for attention from religious actors. Furthermore, it is a problem to which religious actors believe they have a uniquely powerful solution. The solution is one part terrestrial in that it demands behavioral change, and it is an equal part heavenly, in that their hope is that God will mystically

expand their individual efforts. While drug addiction and criminal violence clearly have economic and social dimensions, those afflictions have yet more prominent personal and moral dimensions. Corruption has prominent economic aspects, but resisting that temptation to illicit profit is also linked to personal moral asceticism. For parochial and pietistic religious traditions, the definitive point is that violence and a culture of corruption is inherently an expression of personal failing and internal moral decay caused by personal evil or “sin,” and it is ultimately evidence of a lack of the reforming presence of God or the church.

Whether these actors privilege a citizen’s internalities or externalities in their evaluation of the problem and solution depends on the actors’ level of “systemic” thinking. This corresponds to varying understandings and claims among Christians about “sin” (whether sin is understood as corruption or as poverty) and its root “location,” whether in people or systems or some combination of those. Psalm 100 is the most “conservative” or least systemic in this regard. The Psalm 100 actors engage sin within individual hearts. Thus, while Psalm 100 is committed to peace as an objective state of affairs for Ciudad Juarez and Mexico as a whole, the ultimate aim of its prayers, protests and sermons is conversion to the Christian faith, which Psalm 100 understands as a true “systemic” solution to the violence. The community is not necessarily advocating a political policy or agenda, but rather is calling its targets to *personal* engagement in the problem of violence in one’s *personal* sphere. This could be understood as a version of the “scolding” behavior of previous generations of evangelicals (an example of which is the giant sign painted on Cerro Bola). To the degree it is a “scolding” or shaming tactic,

however, it is a more politically aware iteration of it. It is certainly a more civically aware and more media-savvy and more sophisticated in its use of strategic communications.

Thrive Without Bribes understands sin / corruption as having internal and external dimensions. There is a clear understanding of sin as residing in the heart of the individual as a source of corruption that can only be purged through the mystical act of surrendering one's life to Jesus and the Christian gospel. This is thoroughly evangelical. However, Thrive Without Bribes is also keenly aware and persuaded of the fact that corruption (sin) infects institutions in ways that go beyond personal "holiness." Thus, Thrive Without Bribes is working to change the way affairs of all types are conducted in government, education and finance.

The Movement for Peace, drawing as it does on motifs from Liberation Theology, privileges systems thinking on this point, at least at the level of the Movement's leadership. Liberation Theology postulates in its hierarchies of poverty (see Chapter Three) that the greatest sins / corruptions are the material and experiential poverties with which the poor and marginalized must contend. In the current crisis of violence, this "sin" is construed to mean poverties of justice and poverties of invisibility for the victims. Corruption / poverty / sin then is more consequential and threatening to the system's failures "out there" in the intersections of power and self-interest than it is in the relative condition of one's inner person. Thus, the chain of custody for sin / corruption under this motif leads directly to the state, which thus becomes the focus of the Movement for Peace's critique.

Interreligious Cooperation

Despite numerous gains, evangelicals are still exotic creatures in Mexico. They are held in low regard overall, and their religious forms of expression are likewise disparaged by the Christian-Catholic mainstream. The enmity is mutual, however. Most evangelicals refuse to use the word “Christian” when speaking of Catholics. Thus, in approaching the public square, evangelicals are quick to point out the deficit in moral and political authority and sense of “otherness” they feel. This reality is less prominent on the northern border, however, where evangelical influences have been the strongest for the longest period of time dating to the Mexican-American War (1828). The result in Ciudad Juarez is both a greater visibility for evangelical churches, relatively higher esteem for their leaders, and greater distribution of evangelicals in influential industries such as media.

Thus, one would expect Juarez to be a site where inter-religious cooperation would be more likely, and I saw evidence of this. However, cleavages are evident. Evangelicals criticized the lack of action against the violence on the part of Catholics in Juarez, even as they criticized their own evangelical fellows. These tensions are further mitigated in civil-society, since as a sector it is predisposed to cooperation and the need for partners and diverse resourcing is so urgent and great.

The Movement for Peace, though expressly Catholic, has a core ethic of inclusiveness. Javier Sicilia is self-consciously pluralistic and prizes intellectual and religious tolerance. The Movement for Peace has attracted Protestant partners, especially

“mainline” churches (Episcopalian, Presbyterian), which have historically been more sympathetic to left-intellectual thought and which are distinct from evangelical churches. Evangelicals are welcome in the Movement for Peace, too, though Sicilia was not familiar with these evangelical cases I have described here.

The evangelicals I interviewed know of Sicilia and his story and are sympathetic to his grief and to his criticism of government ineptitude and corruption. Where evangelicals part ways with Sicilia is not on his Catholicism but rather on his anti-capitalist stance and his advocacy of progressive causes beyond the issue of corruption. Indeed, when asked about The Movement for Peace, Daniel Valles pointedly criticized Sicilia for pushing his agenda farther to the left over the course of his anti-violence activism. For Valles, Sicilia’s progression to the left put his “seriousness” as a political voice in jeopardy.

The so called “culture wars” that have fractured the U.S. political arena and have polarized religious communities over matters of sexual politics here are beginning to appear in Mexico, as well. There is tremendous consonance among religious communities of all kinds on the issue of resolving the crisis of violence and the fight against corruption. This area of present strong cooperation could suffer or even break down as Mexican politics further realigns around advancing progressive political agendas on the question of abortion and gay rights. The evangelicals I interviewed are already expressing concerns about these progressive agendas and because of their negative view of liberalized rights for abortion and gay marriage, which are preferences directly linked to evangelicals’ privileging of behavioral asceticism related to conservative sexual ethics

and heteronormative understandings of marriage and their understandings of viable human life in the womb. Evangelicals therefore see progressive gains on those fronts as evidence of entrenchment of the same social and spiritual (moral and personal) weaknesses that have driven Mexico into a crisis of corruption and violence.

Testing the Predictions

A key aim of this study was to test whether and how evangelicals conform to scholars' predictions about evangelical abstention from politics in Latin America. Theories about their abstention range from fears of attracting unwanted attention from unfriendly, pro-Catholic states to the dominance of theologies that are inhospitable to political mobilization due to Thomistic paralysis or to an emphasis on "storing up treasures in heaven" over fixing human systems that are perceived to be immune to improvement. This last posture is termed an error of "otherworldliness."

The evangelical cases I observed can be divided once more into two key constituencies. Thrive Without Bribes is best categorized as a neo-pentecostal offshoot, while the Messenger Angels are charismatic-Pentecostal. That distinction is economic. Neo-pentecostals tend to be more urban and wealthier than charismatic-Pentecostals, which in turn implies distinctions in education and class. It is also a measure of theological conservatism (D'Epina, 1968b; Palacios, 2008). Both constituencies are prone to this otherworldly error, according to the consensus, but charismatic-Pentecostals are the most vulnerable.

My work confirms, however, that these evangelical actors are not in fact subject to the “otherworldly” error that divorces pietism from systemic ills. Both sets of evangelical actors demonstrate a keen awareness of the connection between an inner life and a shared public square. They furthermore understand that religious communities in Juarez function as irreplaceable buffer zones, insulating their congregants from the worst of the cartel violence. This is so in the literal sense that there is some safety to be found in community among trusted partners. It is also the case that they offer psychological and spiritual support amidst difficult conditions. Where these groups innovate by moving beyond those “refuge” benefits, and engaging a dangerous public square on this critical issue of violence and corruption. It is my conclusion, however, that if the threat to life and property were not so grave and immediate, these communities would not engage with civil society with such energy and commitment. Therefore, my conclusion is that the “abstention” claim is subject to a threshold of personal stakes. It would require additional research to measure how these actors understand and respond to this “threshold” for action. Interviews with other religious communities near Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros (farther to the east) indicate that the dangers are so grave and the trust in public authorities’ protection is so compromised that religious communities have opted for self-censorship and only discuss the problem of violence in an oblique manner. The material point, however, is that the effects of the crisis are inescapable. The responses vary. An adaptation of Leon Trotsky’s famous line is apropos in this case: the actors might not be interested in the drug war, but the drug war is interested in them. Whereas, during the era of ideological conflicts of rightist dictators, leftist insurgencies and dirty wars, there were

sides one could choose. There behaviors one could practice or avoid in order to abstain from politics with a reasonable security that disaster would not come as a result. The crisis of criminality Mexico does not offer that option. It is not possible to alter one's behavior sufficiently to avoid being caught up in the crisis. There is nothing one can do or not do. It is not an exaggeration to say that for, most of churches that I encountered, everyone in the church had a story of violence or victimization. Indeed, the more "moral" one is, and the more successful one is, the more likely one is to be a target of this violence.

To this personal threshold, I would add the aspect of "issue safety." While the physical world these actors inhabit is not safe, the issues they are focused on are rather more "safe" in the sense that attacking corruption and sources of violence is popular with the Mexican public. This presents opportunities for previously marginalized religious actors. The "truce" I described between political religion and the state has been stable since the 1990s, when the state began to disavow many of the most egregious provisions of the 1917 constitution. But though the legal environment no longer assertively punishes politicized religion, it remains legally excluded from formal politics and subject to powerful taboos, both in formal channels and in social channels.

Religious people will be therefore be attracted to issues that offer chances for them to enhance their standing with fellow citizens while still acting on religious identity. The strength of the national consensus around the disaster of violence - and even moreso around the issue of corruption - is such that space and freedom has opened around those issues to speak from a place of religious identity. That is, religious actors might still be

attracted to safety (as suggested by Willems and D'Epina) but it is not the depoliticized safety of abstention. Rather, it is the safety offered by publicly exercising their Christian conscience on issues that align with national consensus. Therefore, in the presence of “safe” policy concerns and in possession of political tools they can control themselves and can therefore trust (i.e. civil society actions), we may expect “political activation” of religious communities. To be clear, this is not a reference to bodily safety. These actors all run the risks of death or violent reprisal in some form. Mexico has proven thousands of times that it will quickly destroy individuals, or even entire communities, that are bad for business.

Another effect I observed is the success evangelicals have had in engaging imprisoned *sicarios* in Juarez detention centers seeking to convince them to abandon their lives of violence, a tactic that Psalm 100 utilizes. I interviewed former members of organized crime who had fled other parts of Mexico out of fear for their lives and had joined the community at Psalm 100. They had taken on new identities, converted to evangelical Christianity, and had developed programs to reach prisoners. They claimed to have converted the highest-ranking *sicario* currently detained in Juarez (excluding Chapo Guzman). These reformed cartel operatives of Psalm 100 have now begun taking their work to other states in Mexico and claim to have dined with the highest-ranking capo in this state (which I will not name for reasons of personal safety of all subjects) after the gang member heard their preaching.

On the one hand, this is just what convert-oriented religious actors do: attempt to convert others. However, in this circumstance and as an outgrowth of a politically

activated religious community, this behavior is of greater academic interest. In the words of these former cartel operatives, there are only three ways out of the life of organized crime: God, prison, or death. Other researchers have documented Latin American gangs' willingness to allow members to leave if they profess a Christian conversion (Offut, 2014; Allen, 2015). Remarkably, evidence exists that gangs monitor their expatriates to see if their conversions were authentic, and hitmen have killed former colleagues for lying about conversion (Allen, 2015).

Thus, Psalm 100's prison work and outcomes is more evidence that evangelical prison work in El Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Mexico is showing numerical gains in conversions among imprisoned populations disenchanted with the violence of the drug business, but who still long for the camaraderie forged by resisting a common enemy (Offut, 2014; Allen, 2015). Their new churches offer them purpose and an appealing "narrative of resistance" against evil and moral decay. At best, these are instances of an informal rehabilitative process. Psalm 100 offers no organized program of reintegration into society. Converts are matriculated into the evangelical theological tradition and church community through "discipling" (church-based mentoring) and Bible study. Assessing the effectiveness and rate of recidivism for this case was beyond my resources.

Alternative Politics vs. Abstention

Furthermore, while it is true that the religious actors I observed are not "buying in" to the illiberal and corrupt system of formal democracy they are offered in Mexico,

they are committed to reforming it. They are advocating alternative politics, a back door, if you will. That is, these are not revolutionary actors but reformers. There is a direct connection between their religiosity and external political issues. The noose of violence, corruption and impunity gets tighter if they do not act. This reality demands their presence in the public square. The actors in my cases are cynical about and disillusioned with the state and equally earnest about the content and truth claims of their religious systems. These are cases of true believers. They are working from an understanding of citizenship that begins in religious identity and has obligations that reach beyond the state. The state is debased. Citizenship as articulated by the state, therefore, is not trustworthy for these actors because it means accepting that tightening noose of corruption. This alternative politics rooted in religious sensibilities implies a different incentive system, one whose gains are very difficult to measure. These efforts are not aimed at acquiring and wielding political power, nor are they aimed at gaining influence for the individuals or communities they represent. The action is political, but tangible outcomes or reforms are at best a distant possibility. The rewards are best understood as personal and spiritual. Yes, “otherworldly” elements are there in that incentive system, but those otherworldly rewards are linked to real-world behaviors of political engagement here and now rather than conscientious abstention from them.

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is late in coming to Latin America, and its emergence in Mexico was further delayed by the particulars of public life in Mexico, which was placed last (36 out of 36) in a 2012 global comparison of third-sector among key regional powers (Salamon, et. al, 2012). Gustavo Verduzco, et. al (1999) assessed the country as follows in a watershed regional study of civil society:

For most of the 20th century, the nonprofit sector in Mexico has played only a minor role in human service delivery and development work, areas which have been the domain of the state at least since the Mexican Revolution (1911–1921) and the 1926 creation of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI-Institutional Revolution Party). Furthermore, the single party state has not provided encouragement, much less room, for independent nonprofit organizations to flourish. This is not to say that the ideals and practice of ‘solidarity,’ mutual help, and the public good are not in evidence. Rather, they tend to be expressed or mobilized in either ad hoc efforts or groups that are not self-governed” (Verduzco, et al, 1999, p 429).

Thus, the “single-sourcing” of social intervention by the Catholic Church in Mexico prior to the 1910 Revolution and by the PRI thereafter are principal structural reasons the sector did not develop in concert with peer nations (Verduzco, et al., 1999, p 433). As a result, in 1999, Mexico was evaluated as being “significantly below the international average” and “considerably below the Latin American average” for Third-Sector activity (Verduzco, et al., 1999, p 431). The Mexican Center for Philanthropy (CEMEFI) currently maintains the most comprehensive index of nonprofits in the country and has record of 23,000 such active groups as of 2015, up from just over 10,000 such groups in 2006, which shows remarkable growth. The increase over last decade during the period of extreme crisis of narco-violence (Salamon, et al., 2012). Some of that recorded growth

is due to better scholarly apprehension of the true number of domestic groups as identification, measurement and legal requirements have improved, but this work shows that the material growth of the sector is real and significant. Despite the more than 100% increase in the number of registered voluntary organizations in the country since 2000, Mexico still today ranks near the bottom of 15 countries assessed for various measures of social impact by the Third Sector, including share of total workforce, share of national employee compensation, and contribution to GDP. It likewise ranks below peer Latin American countries like Argentina and Brazil in those measures (Salamon, et al., 2012, p 9). India, though far poorer than Mexico in per-capita GDP [\$1581 vs \$9009 (US) in 2015], boasts over one million organisms of social action (Salamon, et al., 2012; World Bank 2015 global GDP data). Meanwhile, in the U.S., with just over double the population of Mexico, there are over 1.4 million nonprofits registered with the IRS (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2015). The U.S., then, has 60 times more active nonprofits than does Mexico, though there are obvious differences in wealth and cultures of philanthropy that account for some of the difference. Nevertheless, the indices of Mexican civil society are startling in their relative weakness.

The sector is also prejudiced because nearly 60% of the funds that support nonprofit organs are sourced to government entities and the value derived is also allocated to the public sector (Salamon, et al., 2012, p 19). A cynical reading might conclude that the Mexican state is attempting to keep some control of the Third Sector by sourcing funds this way. High levels of federal funding imply a lack of independence from the state, but this state of affairs is more likely evidence of investment by a Mexican

state that recognizes the value of civil society and is working to develop it within its traditionally statist model of governance. The Mexican state's high share of investment compared to private-sector contributions in fact mirrors the European norm, although Mexico's gross investment is insufficient to generate a European level of impact (Salamon, et al, 2012, p 19). This public-private development model leaves open the possibility - or at least the perception - that the corruption and cooptation that exists elsewhere in the federal system could infect civil-society entities. Indeed this (rational) perception of corruption underwrites Mexicans' general distrust of all public institutions, and is one cultural factor depressing small-scale donations to civil-society groups by average citizens. Meanwhile, the state has worked to modernize and streamline its legal and regulatory system. Mexico has simplified the process of registration and regulation of nonprofit groups and passed new legislation to encourage the growth of civil society actors. But the legal framework remains murky and unpredictable (Ibid).

The minor bursts of civil society life in Mexico in the last 30 years are in keeping with global trends in the explosion of NGOs and the international nonprofit sector in the wake of the collapse of Soviet-sponsored communism. Twenty-thousand international NGOs appeared between 1990 and 2000, and over 100,000 voluntaristic organizations were launched inside former communist-bloc countries of Eastern Europe in that same time period (Ferris, 2008, p 312). All told, at the turn of the millennium, this sector was now delivering more aid worldwide than the entire United Nations (The Economist, December 1999).

The global “civil society moment” was not lost on Mexican leaders nor the Third-Sector social architects of the time, but it was a hard-won realization and born of violence and contestation. Civil-society scholars date Mexico’s modern turn to the private sector to the crackdown on the student-led movement to open the state and the subsequent 1968 massacre of students:

“The social movement of 1968 proved to be a break-out moment for the civil society sector when students, workers and members of the urban middle-class demanded freedom for political prisoners as well as the repeal of the ‘social dissolution felony,’ which had been used to arrest activists and dissidents. This movement was brutally repressed on October 2, 1968, a few months before the opening of the Olympic Games in Mexico City; these actions deeply hurt the legitimacy of the State and contributed to the gradual gestation of a critical attitude towards the government in most of the social sectors” (Salamon, et al., 2012, p 18).

The key change at this point was the critical stance toward the state that emerged. This distrust provoked a wave of self-help activity in the following decade. This was coupled with the Catholic Church’s turn to the poor in Vatican II (1963), and the energetic critique of state power invoked in Liberation Theology (see Chapter Two of this dissertation). Over one million local (informal) cooperatives were founded in this period, and along with NGOs focused on poverty reduction (Salamon, et. al, 2012, p 19). These currents fused in the 1970s and 1980s during the heyday of the international human-rights movement, and gave urgency to the nascent civil-society sector:

In different ways, the repression of campesino and worker movements in the 1940s and 50s, the massacre of 1968, and that of 1971, the murders of campesinos during the land invasions of the 1970s, the dirty war against the guerillas, the expropriation of land in Sinaloa and Sonora in 1976 and the bank nationalization in 1982 demonstrated dramatically to different sectors their lack of protection against the arbitrary power of the president and his collaborators who may make

unilateral decisions, without obligation to consult with or give account to anyone....” (Cadena Roa, 2015, p 178; this author’s translation).

The great Mexico City earthquake of 1985 broke civil society away from the state decisively. What it revealed was a pre-existing but untapped “thick network” of social actors (Cadena Roa, 2015, p 181) who had laid the groundwork for action in the workers and campesino movements of the previous decade. It was these actors who organized to offer sanctuary for the affected and offered to rebuild the homes destroyed in the earthquake when the government reacted slowly or not at all (Cadena Roa, 2015, p 181).

A vigorous domestic civil society movement began to gain ground in Mexico during the 1990s rooted in the desire of those same groups to modernize the law in their favor (Labra, 2011, p 16). Vicente Fox, whose historic win in 2000 overturned 80 years of PRI’s one-party rule, moved to harness the power of civil society, such as it was, in the Ley Federal de Fomento a las Actividades Realizadas por Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil (Federal Law for the Encouragement of Activities Carried Out by Civil Society Organizations) (Labra, 2011, p 16; Salamon, et al., 2012, p 18). This uptick in Mexican voluntaristic activity correlates with global trends, but it is also illustrative of the country’s own failures in regard to non-governmental activism. It is less in times of sudden liberation and democratic exuberance (as in the case of Eastern Europe) than in times of national and systemic crisis that Mexican nonprofits and civil society blooms. It is therefore to be expected that the present crisis is also spurring the emergence of new actors and civil society.

Government Efforts to Foment Civil Society in Juárez

Coming to power in 2006 and facing a precipitous increase in violence, Felipe Calderón was convinced of the weakness of an underdeveloped civil society and the potential rewards for nurturing a sturdier non-governmental sector. This is evidenced by Calderon's most important policy initiative: the Todos Somos Juárez, Reconstruyamos la Ciudad [We Are Juárez, Let's Rebuild the City (TSJ)] initiative established in 2010 at the height of the bloodshed.

The project was unprecedented in its scope within Mexico. Especially unique was the proposed cooperative implementation model of federal, state and local governments working together with a wide cross section of citizens. At its launch, the project was at once a confession of the abject failure of public policy to date and an appeal to chart a pathway out of this thicket, to be carved by the efforts of citizens. Initially conceived as a one-year effort that was extended thereafter, the program aimed to mitigate the main factors that Calderón blamed for the rise of the crisis: unchecked growth of criminal enterprise, weakness in local law enforcement, and a collapse of social fabric due to rapid internal migration into the city. The objective was to “reconstruct the social fabric of the city in order to be able to successfully confront the problem of criminality and violence” (Calderon, 2012 Feb 17; also Calderon, 2011).

Calderon significantly increased numbers of federal police in Juárez, offering 5000 federal troops to support local law enforcement capacities, and then showered federal money into the city. Calderon committed \$263 million (US) in 2010 and an additional \$138 million (US) in 2011 (Calderon, 2013; Ainslie, 2014). But the lynchpin

of Todos Somos Juarez was the input of the citizens themselves, who developed a list of 160 initial commitments in areas of security, education, health, culture, economy, and social development.

Todos Somos Juarez is essential to this discussion because it is by far the single largest effort to date by the Mexican government to incubate and harness a native civil-society movement. TSJ's categorical and almost idealistic endorsement of the necessity of citizen / civil society action is remarkable even at the level of rhetoric given Mexico's recent history, and more so for its considerable trust and support from the state evidenced by resource application.

While resources and symbols of state power did pour into Ciudad Juárez, the outcomes of that action is mixed. Public spaces, such as parks, got facelifts. Some sports facilities were improved. Schools were renovated. Youth symphonies were supported. Beyond dollars spent, measuring the social and economic outcomes of TSJ is challenging, but the consensus among scholars and media is that impact was modest. Raúl Plascencia, Mexico's then National Ombudsman asserted that the strategy had failed to accomplish its objectives (Magallanos, 2011). Other critics allege that TSJ actually cost Juarez one job per 73,000 pesos invested (Coronado, 2012). Calderón defend the effort by identifying outcomes such as extended school hours and development of curriculum focused on the rule law, 14,225 scholarships offered to high school and college students, four hospitals built in Juarez, expanded anti-poverty welfare benefits, and investment in small businesses (Calderón, 2013).

While millions of pesos were invested overall, the hoped-for marquis structural effects were not manifestly evident. Ainslie (2014) observed that the correlation between the timing of TSJ and the drop in criminality and murder from 2008-2014 indicates that TSJ had a real, if unquantifiable, impact. Other factors in the drop in violence and improvement of Ciudad Juarez's prospects were the victory of the Sinaloan Cartel over the Juarez Cartel, thus ending the need for violence, improvement in the U.S. economy in 2012, which has major consequences for Mexican border economies, and the increased police presence, even accounting for latent criminality and corruption among the police ranks (Ainslie, 2014). The public in Juarez was not convinced of the effectiveness of TSJ, either. Polls conducted by the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez indicated that public opinion was split, with 40% saying TSJ had no effect, and 31% saying it had positive effects (Ainslie, 2014).

At the grassroots level among my subjects, the most noticeable impacts of TSJ was the presence of thousands of new federal police on the streets of Juarez, above and beyond the thousands who had been sent already. This was a mixed blessing, according to my research subjects, some of whom reported being as frightened of the federal police as they were of cartel agents (Anonymous subject interview, October 2015). Several interview subjects alleged that federal police were themselves architects of extortion schemes or murders that had victimized their own families or their friends. One subject detailed the kidnapping and ransom of the subject's young-adult child. Upon being ransomed, the victim reported that one of the kidnapers was wearing the uniform of the

municipal police and overheard him communicating with counterparts in managing the exchange of funds (Potts, subject interview, July 2016).

The activity around TSJ, however dubious its impacts, was a signal of the foment among civil-society actors. And the resources TSJ mobilized and the working groups (“mesas de trabajo”) that were organized were means of bringing together key actors across the city. While TSJ has rightly been criticized for not having a greater tangible impact, TSJ marks something a coming of age of Mexican civil society as legitimate partner in public-policy implementation in the country. TSJ lowered the barriers to entry into the Juarez “marketplace” for the organizations I studied, only one of which had been formally organized prior to the launch TSJ. Data on total citizen participation and distribution within civil society in TSJ are not available. Neither the charter nor subsequent assessments of the TSJ identify religious civil society directly; however, 54% of the signatory groups were religious institutions or religiously affiliated actors. These groups were Protestant and Catholic. Non-Christian and minority-Christian sects (LDS and Jehovah’s Witnesses) and had no presence. TSJ offered activist-minded churches and leaders state-endorsed “scripts” they could follow, including modes of organization, structural problems with which to connect, and types of activities in which to engage, and access to experts. It also increased “peer pressure” by providing examples of other religious civil society groups that had begun to engage the crisis, albeit under the protective umbrella of the state and its patronage.

Religious Civil Society & the Mexican Cases

In the Western world, the largest share of non-governmental and non-profit activity is driven by organizations that are, or once were, connected to communities of faith. With the secularization that the industrialized, Western world has undergone, religious actors have begun to recede from civil society, though the impulse toward charitable activities inherited from religious conscience remains ingrained in those cultures. Recent scholarly work has established the unique and essential position that communities of faith occupy in Latin America, and the compelling case for action that their identity and faith traditions make. In the region, Christian communities are seeing anti-violence activities as the concrete “significance of another dimension of their life as faith communities: their self-understanding in taking violence into account through pastoral action. Those ministries and projects based in local faith communities represent more than the incorporation of the secular idea of human rights. They are the “direct interface of lived faith in a violent world” (Levine, 2015). Ferris’ research on international faith-based humanitarian work concludes that religion is a particularly important force in shaping society with the ends of justice and protection of the weak in mind:

For believers, to be a Jew or a Muslim or a Christian implies a duty to respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalized. The expression of this faith takes different forms in different religious traditions but is a powerful motivation for humanitarian action. The long Christian missionary tradition, although often faulted today for its complicity in colonialism, left a legacy of church involvement in social services in all regions, particularly in the areas of education and health (Ferris, 2005, p 316).

Dating to the post-war period, religious civil society was instrumental in the construction of the international humanitarian and human rights agendas around the world, such that faith based civil society has become the single largest provider of humanitarian relief globally (Ferris, 2005).

In the Mexican context, we would expect see a lesser impact on the domestic level given its comparatively small footprint and religion's poor reputation as a source of legitimate political action. However, we do see playing out in the cases I have investigated some of the critical agenda-setting and social-benchmarking effects that Ferris and other scholars of global civil society have identified. These include "early warning effects." As a result of being first-line victims themselves or by drawing from the social groups most affected by the ongoing violence, the subjects have become effective, grounded sources exposing the nature and impact of the violence. They also challenge the purveyors of violence with their purposeful bodily and speech acts of resistance that occupy contested public squares at least for a time.

They also contribute to national and international policy agendas. Most notable is the Movement for Peace, whose influence is magnified due to Sicilia's literary and media status. However, the work of the Messenger Angels has also activated the international and domestic political agenda through its emotive protests. Thrive Without Bribes is working along and across the northern border, though less visibly in terms of media exposure, developing partnerships in civil society and government to fight corruption.

Additional Comparative Theoretical Intersections with Mexican Cases

Violence cannot be understood outside of a context of power relationships and the manipulation of power (Barlas, 2003), which is the fundamental preoccupation of politics. Hannah Arendt (1970) argued that it is essential to keep the categories of “violence” and “power” separate. The ideological character of the violence Arendt was critiquing is absent in Mexico’s criminality. Keane’s (1996) meditation on violence captures much more of the asymmetry of violence in developing societies and the necessity and promise of civil society actors like those I have investigated. Keane warns that unconsolidated democracies can drift toward authoritarian excesses “unless cultures of civility are cultivated at the level of civil society” (quoted in D’Souza, 1997). Though the sources are different, the regime of violence in Mexico is comparable to other prolonged regimes of violence the region has experienced. However, unlike the Pinochet (Chile) or Ríos Montt (Guatemala) anti-leftist purges, the state is not orchestrating civilian deaths as an *ideological* tool of governance. The retreat of the Cold War has changed state motivations for domestic applications of violence. The applications of state violence are now directed at the more mundane goal of pacifying the population and protecting the status quo.

While the Mexican state is not in imminent danger of collapse, the rule of law has largely broken down in the border region, which endows the work of civil society with greater import and complexity. The power of narco-gangs *vis-à-vis* state power is best portrayed in O’Donnell’s (1993) influential notion of “brown areas,” which he characterized as zones where the physical state (buildings, bureaucrats and even troops)

might be present, but the legal state is not. Of theoretical interest is the question of what takes place when the state retreats in this manner. The “brown zones” do not become entirely dead. In Mexico, as the discussion of civil society intimated, crisis can provoke flourishing in the civil society sector. Furthermore, though the legal state might be shriveled in brown zones, the state is not excluded entirely. The state can become a competitor within this contested space, pursuing its interests even in its diminished capacities by, for example, encouraging and investing in civil society as in the case of Felipe Calderon’s Todos Somos Juarez (We Are Juarez) effort. For its trouble, the state expects civil society to “pick sides” among the competitors and opt for the state as part of the exchange. Similar dynamics were witnessed in Villa El Salvador (Peru) and illustrated this “brown zone” social innovation and civil-society flourishing during the Shining Path era. The state was rendered impotent or had abandoned its citizens (Burt, 2007), but remained a competitive presence among non-state actors in part by trying to cultivate civil society as a means of “outsourcing” state-making in an area controlled by Shining Path guerrillas. The citizen call in this brown zone became “because we have nothing, we shall do everything.” Despite the Peruvian state’s intentions, the organizations that sprung up did not set out to defend democracy or the regime. Rather, they sought to provide a measure of livability for citizens at the grassroots level. In the Mexican cases, these actors are not aiming merely to mitigate difficult living environs. Their aim is in fact to deepen democratic consolidation. These actors appeal to, work for and model virtues of democratic co-existence and civic trust. That this appeal for democracy must be made from religious civil society is indicative of the weakness of

Mexico's democratic transition. Mexico's tragedy of violence is also emblematic of Latin America's democratic fourth wave. The fear that accompanies persistent levels of violence has become as big a threat to democracy as the violence itself (Howard, et al, 2007).

Concluding Comments

Though the organizations I have studied do not upend the larger story of civil society frustrations in Mexico, they do offer a window into the objectives and strategies of a class of emerging religious actor in Mexican politics. This research supports the conclusions of recent work by scholars in the Religious Responses to Violence Project at American University and research underway at the time of this writing by Dr. Sandra Ley on community responses to violence in Mexico. It is instructive that these projects, considered to be on the cutting edge of research in the field of religion and politics, point consistently to the work of religious actors as providing essential leadership and support for healthier public squares in violence-prone parts of Latin America and Mexico.

Important questions remain about whether these modest political innovations are “sticky,” whether the actors and their movements will be co-opted, and if the crisis relents or deepens, whether the patterns of engagement analyzed here will fizzle in the face of indifference, failures, or unrelenting danger. Mexico's border regions, both north and south, have long been hotbeds of intrigue, instability and insurgency. This has made those regions ripe for experimentation, including varieties of social organization and responses to persistent problems not typical of the Mexican experience. Mexico is also

well accustomed to radical popular movements, including restive student populations, indigenous groups, and teachers' unions. These popular movements have become targets of excessive state violence, and they are harassed by cartel elements. But these actors have typically been class warriors and tribal warriors (in the strict sense). They are not motivated into the public square *primarily* by their religious sensibilities, nor are they gaining access to the public square *primarily* through their religious communities. Instead, the cases under examination in this study are motivated into the public square by virtue of a politically activated religious identity.

Given Mexico's illiberal conditions and religion's sometimes illiberal tendencies, religious actors lack good models for political action. Global civil society's development over the last 30 years demonstrates civil society is a welcoming place for religious actors, but this sector, too, has been impeded by illiberalism in Mexico particularly. Thus, religious actors have opted for radical politics in the past, including hot wars in Mexico's early years and through the Mexican Revolution, while non-Catholic Christians have been relegated to the margins in key political questions. However, these modern cases in Juarez demonstrate that religion, despite its bloody history in Mexico, can be a safe partner offering innovative models for democratic behavior in the civil society space. While encouraging things are happening in Mexico's civil society, the changes are incremental when compared to the Third Sector globally and even regionally. Nevertheless, Mexican government officials desiring to build a durable civil society and democratic political culture must abandon their historical aversion to religious actors and seek out partners in religious communities. In each of these cases I have investigated in

Ciudad Juarez, this research demonstrates that religious communities acting on their Christian traditions and identity in the civil-society arena are some of Mexico's most effective and essential allies resisting violence and corruption via legitimate, democratic means.

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