Legacies of Revolution: Popular Militias and the Rule of Law

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Abstract

I examine why emerging revolutionary regimes delegate control over the use of violence to popular militias despite associated agency risks, and the long-run legacies for the rule of law. Drawing on a new geocoded dataset of over 1,700 semi-official peasant militias in postrevolutionary Mexico, I first argue that militias help central elites establish local control during early phases of revolutionary state-building and show that militia mobilization maps onto the geography of mass counterrevolutionary contention. I next document that militia mobilization stunts the development of institutions that underpin the rule of law in the long run. Historical reliance on militias foreshadows more rudimentary local civilian police forces today, weaker formal institutional channels to adjudicate local disputes, and vigilantism in the context of the Mexican drug war. Findings are based on various quantitative identification strategies, while archival materials support pathways connecting historical experience to long-term outcomes. The article provides unusually fine-grained insight into the formation of states with lax control over violent means and brings attention to dynamic inconsistency during state-building as a source of territorial variation in the strength of the rule of law.

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1 Introduction

How do rulers create centralized order across a territory when the means of violence are overly dispersed, betrayal is rife, and social cleavages run deep? Force and territory are the essence of the modern state (Weber 1978), which makes of state-building an intrinsically spatial process of organizing the use of physical coercion (Bates, Greif, and Singh 2002; North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009; Tilly 1992). New rulers in postrevolutionary settings, where central state structures have collapsed, face such kind of fundamental challenge—transforming fragmentation into a coordinated system of violence administration within a delimited geographical area, with society fractured into rival camps and engaged in bitter feuds. As they proceed, they enter into multiple bargains and make decisions on the fly, under pressing circumstances and tight constraints. When successful, we speak of the rise of a state, whose structures progressively acquire historical momentum and often rule over generations. How do early state-building strategies regarding the distribution of violent means shape the long-run prospects for the rule of law across a national territory?

This paper focuses on the establishment of symbiotic relationships between central rulers and local popular militias in the aftermath of social revolution to inform these questions. The emergence of a system of coercion where semi-formal citizen militias play a salient role alongside the regular forces of a revolutionary state is one possible endpoint of a process of state-building, one instance of a broader puzzle. Yet, it is a substantive one, theoretically and historically. Nearly all revolutionary regimes, from Russia (Lenin 1972; Wade 1984) to China (Perry 2006), Cuba, Bolivia (Dunkerley 1984), Iran (Katzman 1993), Nicaragua (Gorman and Walker 1985), Vietnam (Truong 1981), and Mexico have collaborated with popular militias, despite intrinsic agency risks.

My argument is two-step. Adopting a long historical perspective, I investigate both sources and consequences of militia mobilization. I first argue that militia mobilization results from the combination in nascent revolutionary regimes of acute security dilemmas with intense polarization. In particular, waves of counterrevolutionary contention (Slater 2010; Tilly 1964)—a response to attempts at overturning power structures when the central governing apparatus is still precarious and fragmented (Foran 2005; Skocpol 1979)—lead ruling elites to mobilize local popular militias to assert social control and establish internal order. Intense domestic contention thus structures early ruling-elite decisions about *who* in society may wield means of violence, and *where* in the national territory to set up and retain grass-roots coercive structures.

As per this framework, the propensity to share the means of violence with local collaborators on the margins of the formal state apparatus is stronger in politically fractious areas of the territory, where opposing social interests clash and regime rivals contest the authority of the emerging revolutionary state. In such contexts, emerging central elites mobilize militias as a strategy to tie into local society and keep regime opponents in check. As a result, the geography of militia mobilization that emerges from early state-building periods maps onto lines of domestic revolutionary-counterrevolutionary conflict.

I then argue that state-popular militia bargains, although stabilizing and even order-creating for an emerging revolutionary state, spawn durable institutional trajectories that are unfavorable to the rule of law in the long run. Therefore, militia mobilization is a near-imperative state-making strategy in revolutionary settings, but interferes with processes of state development that are critical to a rule-based, civilian order down the road. The aggregate picture that emerges from the analysis is the following: militias help revolutionary regimes channel popular mobilization, subordinate regime enemies, and consolidate social control at the grassroots

during times of turmoil, thus contributing to their remarkable durability (Huntington 1968; Levitsky and Way 2012; 2013); however, they stunt the development of robust civilian security-and-justice institutions and foster extra-legal forms of supplying order. In historical perspective, the state-making strategies of today become state-undermining tomorrow.

I substantiate these two-step argument by exploiting unusually fine-grained data from a prominent historical instance of central state collapse and reconstruction, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). A new geocoded dataset, built manually from previously unexplored archival sources, allows me to map the distribution of mobilized peasant militias during the key period of revolutionary state-building, at the village level.

Pairing this original resource with an array of data from historical sources and censuses, I first demonstrate that central governing elites were more likely to rely on semi-official local armed collaborators where societal opposition to the revolutionary project was strong and persistent, particularly in municipalities that joined the counterrevolutionary Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929). The anticlerical-Catholic cleavage that spawned opposition party formation under Mexico's durable authoritarian regime (Loaeza 1999) thus also structured the development of the state's coercive apparatus.

I then examine how coercion-wielding patterns produced during the formative struggles of the state—concretely, the geography of delegation to collaborating popular militias—conditioned future governments' ability to (a) enforce legal order across territory and (b) deter the rise of private violent organizations down the road. I find that in the long run, delegation to militias undermined the state's ability to sanction legality locally. Three reinforcing mechanisms, documented using primary sources and survey data, link historical militia mobilization to localized feebleness in the rule of law.

First, once active, militias furnish central officials with first-hand intelligence (unmediated by subnational governments) and act as functional substitutes of civilian local law-enforcement and dispute-resolution institutions, thus lowering investments in such core state structures. Second, mobilized militia groups and their central-state sponsors resist the rise of formal local competitors to protect their power, a mechanism I term organizational turf protection. Third, the local introduction of militias as a community-based, arms-bearing institution fosters social norms of tolerance to self-provision in security and justice, norms that may be passed down across generations.

Consistent with the theorized mechanisms, quantitative municipality-level tests from across Mexico demonstrate a robust connection between historical militia activity and inchoate civilian police forces today, a low density of local justice mechanisms, and a high probability of extra-legal responses to crime, in the form of popular vigilantism. This high-risk form of collective action has added to the complexity of Mexico's current drug war but has parallels in conflict zones and other crime-plagued settings (Barnes 2017; Bateson 2013).

The theoretical contribution to our understanding of revolution and state formation is threefold. First, by adopting a long-term view, the article reveals that the unevenness of the rule of law may have deep roots in problems of dynamic inconsistency during state-building. Pressured by the challenge of consolidating power in a politically-polarized and precarious domestic security environment, state elites may enter paths that effectively address immediate problems of political survival, but later interfere with the development of local civilian institutions and thus undermine the possibility of generalized ruled-based public order after initial threats have passed.

Such lack of uniformity in the reach of the state, codified in the notion of "brown areas"

of informal and privatized rule, is an important source of violence, social inequalities, and low-intensity citizenship (O'Donnell 1993; 2010). I exploit a unique opportunity to investigate uneven subnational patterns of institutional development empirically and trace them to states' founding domestic struggles.[1]

The second contribution involves the role of domestic struggle in the formation of state institutions. By drawing on granular historical data on militia mobilization in a prominent case of revolution—the first social revolution of the twentieth century[2] (Knight 1986)—, the article shows that domestic contention along prominent lines of cleavage structures the primary state-building process—the spatial organization of coercive power across a territory.

Third, the article extends ongoing research agendas on armed politics and the relationship between states and irregular armed groups in conflict and post-conflict settings (Eck 2015; Jentzsch, Kalyvas, and Schubiger 2015; Staniland 2017). Existing studies provide important insight into why national states rely on pro-government militias to deploy armed force (Ahram 2011; Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2013; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015; 2016; Staniland 2015). Yet given the paucity of reliable data on what are at best semi-official institutions, studies typically rely on informative but restricted local case studies; macro-level (national or provintial) samples that limit the possibility of both investigating the intrinsically territorial component of state-building (Soifer 2008) or deriving conclusions about "the state" at the micro and meso levels; and relatively short time periods that impede assessing long-run institutional consequences.[3] Further, conflict studies devote greater attention to irregular armed groups in contemporary fragile states (Stanton 2015) than in revolutionary regimes, where popular

[1] On the importance of founding struggles for institutional development see (Huntington 1968; Levitsky and Way 2012; Slater and Smith 2016). Here I extend this line of argument to the formation of state coercive structures across territory.
[2] And the last non-Marxist, until the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Foran 2005, 232).
[3] Carey et al. notice the "lack of quantitative research in this area" (2015, 851).

militias historically played a distinctive role in the recreation of order and citizenship (Perry 2006). I build on these works but take advantage of the historical and micro-level nature of my militia-mobilization data to address broader questions about revolution, state-building, and institutional legacies.

Finally, the article revisits the question of order and violence in the world's most durable dominant-party authoritarian regime (Greene 2007) and its aftermath. The deficiencies of civilian law enforcement and justice institutions are a root cause of Mexico's current problems of criminal violence and heavy dependence on the military for routine policing (Shirk and Wallman 2015), with grave consequences for human rights and state-society relations. My analysis establishes explicit connections between historical patterns of revolutionary state formation at the micro-level and the contemporary failures of the Mexican state in its foremost tasks.

2 Counterrevolution and Militia Mobilization

Nascent revolutionary regimes typically breed an internal counterrevolutionary backlash, as remnants of the old regime, threatened social groups, and defecting sectors of the revolutionary coalition challenge new elites' still-uncertain hold on power. Such countermovements, most often giving rise to violent forms of contentious politics, induce consolidation of strong coercive structures (Levitsky and Way 2013, 7; Skocpol 1985). A focus on conflict, the structure of social polarization, and elite efforts to maintain state power in the immediate *post*-revolutionary period is therefore key for understanding the shape of emerging state institutions (Foran and Goodwin 1993).

Arming supportive segments of the citizenry and striking deals with remaining armed groups are part of the repertoire of measures that revolutionaries can implement to confront opponents.

Delegating the capacity to exercise violence to irregular groups, including local citizen militias, carries substantial agency risks (Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2013). As unprofessional forces, militias tend to be poor and undisciplined combatants; are prone to taking advantage of their control over violent means for private score-settling; may breed opposition to the regime by predating on local populations; and ultimately, may turn against their principals in the state, thus becoming a potential liability in and of themselves. The intrinsic risk of backfiring implies that state elites who promote or acquiesce to the collaboration of citizen militias ought to devise mechanisms to minimize agency problems.[4]

Yet militia mobilization may be the best available strategy for elites in a typical postrevolutionary state-building situation, even if suboptimal given agency risks. Several features of this environment make militia mobilization appealing. Revolutionary elites confront a challenging domestic security scenario compounded by potential fragmentation and indiscipline within the very armed forces they command. Military factionalism is common in emerging revolutionary states and has been shown to foster militia formation in other contexts (Eck 2015). Further, revolutionaries must navigate these challenges with a state apparatus still in shatters, a mobilized society, and serious financial constraints.

Put shortly, the exigencies of consolidating power and surviving to threats in a post-revolutionary situation might push elites to share the means of violence with informal collaborators. Revolutions thus rehabilitate the republican institution of the locally-recruited citizen militia (Machiavelli [1521]2003) as a medium to stitch together supporting popular coalitions at the local level, contain opposition, and impose the reorganization of local life along revolutionary lines.

More precise predictions can be derived from this general claim. In particular, we can

[4]I discuss safety valves implemented by central elites in the Mexican case later.

expect militia mobilization to correspond with the geography of support and opposition to the revolutionary coalition. Although revolutionary regimes construct narratives of widespread social acceptance, on the ground they are met with various responses as they descend on local communities (Tilly 1989). Mexico was no exception (Knight 1994), as not only landlords but also devout Catholics and semi-autonomous corporate communities ferociously resisted, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the incursions of an anticlerical revolutionary state (Bailey 1974; Fallaw 2013).

In fractured or outright antagonistic areas, where revolution either polarizes local society into identifiable blocs or encounters deep counterrevolutionary sentiments capable of escalating into threats, the payoffs to militia mobilization increase. It is here where bargaining out agreements with potential allies and arming supporting members of the population affords necessary intelligence, prevention, and surveillance capabilities to establish social control. As locally-embedded and grass-roots coercive structures, militias can constitute effective complements to centralized military structures, performing functions of coup-proofing (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2016), logistical support, and information-gathering (Kalyvas 2006; Lyall 2010). In this sense, the willingness of ruling elites to tolerate and mobilize irregular collaborating armed groups should increase where enemies of the revolution exert greater influence and (the potential for) counterrevolutionary collective action is more prevalent.

Complementing these practical considerations are ideological motivations (Staniland 2015), of essence in any revolutionary movement.[5] In revolutionary regimes, militia mobilization is part of a broader projects of mass incorporation, designed to redefine the terms of national belonging and citizen service to the state. The institution of the militia in these cases follows

[5]Though this is especially true of Marxist-Leninist revolutions animated by a coherent ideological corpus, normative considerations play a decisive role in militia mobilization even in ideologically less cohesive revolutions like the Mexican (Rath 2012).

ambitious objectives of consciousness-raising and citizen-building. The fact that militias are tasked with activating patriotic sentiment and converting the populace to the "right" cause is yet another important reason to expect mobilization in areas where the population needs to be won over; or, to the very least, infiltrated and controlled.

On the aggregate, the struggles of postrevolutionary politics, as they play out across local communities, become an important determinant of the territorial organization of armed force. Contention and the state constitute each other (Tarrow 2015). Concretely, the map of delegation to militias matches that of counterrevolutionary mobilization, thus reflecting on a large geographic scale the fault lines dividing the revolutionary coalition from regime rivals. In the conformation of the coercive apparatus, its links to local militias, and its institutional development across territory more broadly, we can expect revolutionary states to bear the marks of their founding struggles. Drawing on other work (Sánchez-Talanquer 2017), I argue that deep domestic cleavages separating state-building coalitions from political opponents structure the geography of state power, that is, the way the state asserts itself over the territory it governs and the specific capacities it develops across localities.

3 Popular Militias and Long-Run Institutional Development

Does militia mobilization hold implications for institutions and state-building beyond the unstable period of regime consolidation? Some revolutionary regimes (France), finding militias hard to control, pressured by interstate wars, and bent on developing uniform centralized systems of direct control reaching down to every locality, end up disbanding or fully swallowing popular militias into bureaucratic structures (Tilly 1989, 80-81).

Many revolutionary regimes, however, continue to rely extensively on militias as auxiliary

forces occupying an ambiguous space between state and society. Perry notes that in China, worker militias mutated into vehicles of government repression, tightly controlled from above by the party-state (2006, 9-11, 304). Recent research has revealed the important role of rural militias in counterinsurgency in Mexico in the 1960s and 1970s (Comisión de la Verdad del Estado de Guerrero 2014; Larreguy, Riaño, and Sánchez-Talanquer 2018).

Evidence of continued militia involvement across regimes after founding periods, along with existing theoretical insights about processes of layering and path-dependence in institutional development warrant an investigation into the potentially durable effects of militia mobilization on state-building outcomes. I single out three pathways through which mobilization of local militias during early state-building, out of political expediency, may spawn important and unforeseen institutional trajectories that alter the prospects for the rule of law down the road.[6]

First, the ability of subsequent governments to draw on existing local militias to enforce order and monitor local populations is susceptible to institutional inertia (Pierson 2004). Where militias survived as remnants of past struggles, they constitute readily-available coercive agencies with local presence and established relationships to the central state. Under these conditions, there is a tendency for militias to survive. As long as a given militia remains minimally reliable and agency losses from delegation do not reach a critical threshold (in which case specific militia units may be selectively disbanded), governments are likely to continue relying on militias for law and order tasks, instead allocating scarce resources to other regions and areas of governance.[7] I refer to this source of under-investment in local civilian law-enforcement and conflict-solving agencies as *institutional substitution*.

[6]By rule of law, for the purposes of this article I mean a condition where civilian and accountable state authorities routinely and alone enforce publicly-known rules and deliver justice, in order to maintain public order and protect citizens from theft and violence.

[7]Other external shocks demanding full concentration of coercive capacity into formal apparatuses, like interstate war, might eventually force the abolition of militias as parallel sructures.

Second, militias are likely to enter into competition with other local state structures that may counter their local power or turn them accessory. Embedded interests frequently produce institutional layering and redundancy, rather than dismantling and replacement (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 16). Such logic of competition is reinforced when ultimate responsibility over militias and over routine law enforcement tasks resides with different apparatuses or levels of government over the state. In Mexico as in other regimes, local militias eventually acquired semi-official status under the structure of the central army (though remaining outside the formal security forces proper). Yet responsibility over public safety and routine law enforcement is seldom formally attributed to the military. In the Mexican federal system, this remained a constitutional function of local governments.

Such jurisdictional considerations have implication in regimes coming out of revolutionary or civil-war contexts. Militias and their principals in the armed forces are likely to be part of conflicts within the state apparatus over the control of physical force, with the overall objective of retaining influence. These conflicts play out along two intra-state dimensions: the civil-military, on the one hand, and the central-local, on the other. Concretely, central authorities may leverage militias to subordinate lower levels of government by making them dependent on the center for enforcement, while militias and the army might seek to preserve opportunities to exercise local power at the expense of police forces and other civilian rule-of-law institutions. I label this second mechanism connecting historical militia mobilization to long-run institutional development *organizational turf protection*.

Third, militia mobilization can set in motion norms and practices of consequence to the rule of law at the level of civil society, beyond state-institutional dynamics (the previous two mechanisms). Militia mobilization for security, surveillance, and justice places eminent state-like

functions in the hands of local citizens. Where such precedent exists, citizens are likely to have been socialized into distinct norms and beliefs about community and individual involvement in law and order tasks which, in a modern legal order, are reserved to the state.

These kind of mass-socialization legacies have been documented where civilian irregular armed groups were mobilized for security during armed conflict (Bateson 2017). More generally, there is growing empirical evidence of complementarities between particular institutional forms (like local militias or centralized states, for example) and prevailing social norms that are transmitted across generations (e.g. Lowes et al. 2017; Nunn and Wantchekon 2011). These studies echo macro-sociological and cultural perspectives for which a redefinition of social norms and the internalization of specific rules of behavior, including a generalized acceptance of the use violence as an exclusive right of publicly-constituted authorities, are essential components of state formation (Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Tilly 1992).

Revolutionary reliance on local citizen militias is an important historical precedent that potentially cultivates lasting social attitudes favorable to extra-legal mobilization for security. As Lowes et al. write, "if institutions incentivize people to engage in a pattern of behavior, this may, in turn, cause individuals to view this pattern of behavior as natural or normal" (2017, 1066). We may therefore expect local continuities in militia mobilization and succeeding social phenomena like vigilantism or lynching. Compounding this potential linkage are attitudes of mistrust toward civilian state institutions, which being under-developed and ineffective, are also more likely to elicit distrust among local populations where a tradition of militia mobilization exists. I refer to this mechanism, spanning a bundle of attitudes unfavorable to the rule of law, as *social propensity to wield violent means*.

4 The Mexican Rural Defense Forces: Background

Multiple small armed groups of various political leanings remained active throughout Mexico after armed phase of the Revolution (1910-1917).[8] Deep rural grievances had spawned widespread local popular rebellions and left thousands of peasant militias, known as *agraristas*, occupying lands and pressuring for agrarian reform. Landlords organized paramilitary groups known as *guardias blancas* to resist. Further, communities had also mounted self-defense organizations to confront pervasive banditry and civil war violence.[9] Finally, state governors and local bosses drew on armed groups to maintain regional protection rackets and reproduce their power.[10]

What followed was a process of centralization of violence typical of state-making, under the victorious faction of the Revolution. However, the new revolutionary state would stop short of monopolizing violence into regular coercive structures. Facing multiple existential threats, a mobilized society, and weak institutions in the wake of civil war, central state-builders drew extensively on informal militias to establish territorial control and maintain their grip on power.

The collaboration of these local armed groups, known as *defensas rurales*, was critical to regime survival in the unstable postrevolutionary landscape. At various points, factionalism within the army and counterrevolutionary contention put the new revolutionary regime on the brink of collapse. The militias, operating as a semi-official appendix to the regular army, tipped the scales in favor of sitting governments.

[8] Local armed groups from this period received different names across time and space, but they are most commonly referred to as defensas sociales, defensas civiles, acordadas, cuerpos auxiliares, and defensas rurales in archival materials and the historical literature. The sheer variety of terms is a testament to the dispersed control over coercion in this period. Formal designations emerge once local armed groups were incorporated into the army, as explained below.

[9] A tradition of local organizing for security and justice existed at least since the 19th century, due to the constant breakdown of order before Diaz's dictatorship and the influence of republican ideals of local self-government and an arms-bearing citizenry.

[10] Under the new Constitution of 1917, the federal Congress could authorize state governors to organize troops in their states. Several governors formed security forces to combat remaining rebel groups and consolidate power, often in violation of the numbers authorized by Congress.

First, competing warlords within the revolutionary coalition, commanding segments of the new and undisciplined army, violently vied for power. In 1923, a defecting member of the victorious revolutionary coalition rebelled with two-thirds of the troops (Lieuwen 1968; Lozoya 1976).[11] The governing elite managed to put down the rebellion only by arming the peasantry and enlisting the support of an indeterminate number of informal militias, typically with the promise of land in return. Second, landlords and displaced local elites sponsored paramilitary groups (*guardias blancas*) to counter agrarian reform and challenged the control of the emerging regime in the countryside.

Third, political Catholics staunchly resisted revolutionary anticlericalism and led the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929), a massive counterrevolutionary Catholic rebellion reminiscent of the French Vendée (Tilly 1964). The conflict, backed by the powerful Catholic Church, turned into a bloody and deadlocked civil war in which the new regime lost control of much of Western Mexico. The collaboration of irregular militias, providing local intelligence and manpower, was again decisive. The classic work on the conflict reports pervasive use of peasant militias as auxiliary troops for "purposes of political control, for rural policing, for military action...because they were the best placed to exercise surveillance," given superior knowledge of "the country and its inhabitants" (Meyer 1976, 106-7).

Due to its grass-roots support, strong ideological motivations, and the losses inflicted upon the new army, the Cristero War represented the single most important challenge to the emerging revolutionary state (Butler 2004; Meyer 1976). The war only ended with a compromise between state elites and the Church hierarchy, but antagonism persisted (Bailey 1974; Meyer 1994; 1995). Militant Catholicism continued to be a major source of anti-regime contention (Fallaw 2013), spawning a second (weaker) insurgency in the 1930s, coordinated resistance through lay

[11] Another barracks uprising in 1929 was supported by a third of the army.

Catholic associations and Church-based networks, and opposition-party formation.[12]

Archival documents indicate that the military leadership was well aware of the risks of sharing coercive capacity with irregular armed groups. An internal memo from the Ministry of War informed the president that the militias sometimes provided unreliable intelligence, made for poor combatants, and were responsible for everyday "attacks, abuses, and disorders" that alienated the population. Also concerning was the risk of backfiring. The report warned that "the country could find itself with two armies, one within right...the other, a numerous mass of armed men, lacking precise or defined powers, coordination, or direct control from responsible authorities."[13] Throughout the state-building period in the 1920s and 1930s, the domestic emergencies that made militias essential for regime survival coexisted with a push toward military professionalization and eradication of irregulars.

Yet, the combination of institutional limitations and systemic internal threat placed strict limits on state-builders' choices. Pressured by mass counterrevolutionary resistance and recognizing that their support was inescapable to maintain control, revolutionary elites would embrace militia mobilization as a strategy to consolidate state power in the countryside. In the wake of the Cristero War (1926-1929), new regulations granted militias semi-official status as *defensas rurales*. Defined as "the vanguard of the legion that will defend revolutionary postulates" (Secretaría de Guerra y Marina 1929), the militias were put under the command of military authorities and tasked with policing their communities and collaborating with regular troops in the reestablishment internal order. However, they remained unsalaried, part-time, staffed by ordinary peasants, and strictly locally-based. In this sense, they were at best a hybrid institution, social actors turned into informal extensions of the central state in the countryside.

[12] The right-wing National Action Party (PAN) was founded in 1939.

[13] "Oficio de la Secretaría de Guerra y Marina para el C. Presidente de la República." Archivo General de la Nación, Obregón-Calles, 104/D/9. 1922.

Voluntary in nature and embedded in rural communities, the rural defense forces straddled the boundary between state and society.

Militia mobilization reached its peak during Lázaro Cárdenas's leftist presidency (1934-1940). Two main factors explain the drive to arm the peasantry during his administration. First, an apparatus of loyal peasant militias was instrumental in power struggles within the revolutionary coalition. Cárdenas challenged the authority of the "Maximum Chief" of the Revolution, Plutarco Elías Calles, who had founded the official party and remained highly influential within the army. Cárdenas also restructured the party to undercut the power of regional elites and subordinate them to the presidency. Having fought personally to put down the barracks uprisings of the 1920s and aware of the existential risk posed by factionalism within the revolutionary coalition, Cárdenas used the rural defense forces as a coup-proofing device against disgruntled revolutionary elites and segments of the army aligned with more conservative interests.

Second and more important, the peasant militias were conceived as a prime instrument to subordinate the enemies of the revolution and consolidate the central state's control over the territory. Cárdenas's administration adopted pro-labor policies, nationalized the oil industry, and greatly intensified agrarian reform, eliciting strong opposition from conservative interests. Further, grassroots Catholic resistance to state policy, including a program of "socialist" education, continued to fuel contentious collective action. Cardenismo resorted to the armed mobilization of the peasantry to achieve supremacy over traditional (counterrevolutionary) powers.

As a popular institution wielding coercive power and hitched to the federal government, the militia would secure the regime and emancipate the peasant from the authority of priest and

landlord (Cárdenas 1978, 128-129). Militia mobilization, agrarian redistribution in the form of *ejidos* (a territorial community of land reform beneficiaries), and corporatist incorporation of the peasantry into the party-state went hand in hand during this peak period of revolutionary state-building.[14] In short, providing peasants with "the Mauser to defend the Revolution, the *ejido* and the school" would strangle opposition down to the local level and help build revolutionary citizenship (Rath 2013).

Central governing elites implemented several measures to moderate the inherent risks of delegating coercive power. In addition to integration into the military chain of command (without assimilation as regular troops), regulations limited the mobility of militia units, as well as recruitment and jurisdiction to the local community. The army also claimed authority for discretionary disbanding (Secretaría de Guerra y Marina 1929), which it selectively exerted. Over time, the military also strengthened its control over militias through the production and distribution of weapons.

Most importantly, however, membership into the rural defense forces was formally restricted in the 1930s to land reform beneficiaries, which automatically created a link of dependency on the central state. Because the agrarian reform program granted incomplete and insecure property rights and restricted access to inputs, credits, and agricultural markets via the party-state corporatist organizations, central elites exerted considerable vertical control over land reform beneficiaries (Albertus et al. 2016; de Janvry, Gonzalez-Navarro, and Sadoulet 2014)—and by implication, over militia members.

Further, agrarian regulations limited inheritance of *ejido* rights to a single family member (de Janvry, Gordillo, and Sadoulet 1997). A little-known implication is that this turned the rural

[14] Cárdenas stimulated the vertical integration of the peasant masses into a single corporatist organization—the National Peasant Confederation (CNC). The CNC assumed peasant militia organization in the *ejidos* as one of its official functions and anchored the peasant sector of the ruling party, which Cárdenas reorganized in 1938 along sectoral lines of peasants, workers, military, and the middle class.

defense forces into an intergenerational institution. Like rights over land, militia membership ran in families firmly attached to the authoritarian party-state.

By the end of the Cárdenas presidency, a network comprising thousands of part-time peasant-based militia groups stretched out throughout the vast Mexican countryside, as the coercive face of the party-state in local communities. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the regular army focused more explicitly on potential external threats and relied heavily on *defensas rurales* for rural policing. A 1944 report to the Secretary of Defense and the president described the militias, an institution "initially lacking serious organization and tied together only by camaraderie and mutual sympathies," as "crucial for maintaining public order across the republic."[15]

Detailed studies are lacking—a testament to the militias' quasi-informal character and elusive documentary footprint, but by all available evidence they were indeed critical to the regime's functioning and survival throughout the twentieth century. This amphibious apparatus, at once part of society and the state, was in fact the most numerous coercive institution in Mexico's exceptionally-durable authoritarian regime—yet one not counted in official statistics, loosely attached to the state, and perhaps because of that, vastly under-studied. Records of the US Military Intelligence Division report some 70,000 militia members by 1940, outnumbering regular troops at 58,000.[16] Estimates of the number of registered militia members in the early 1970s oscillate from 80,000 (Basáñez 1981, 78) to 120,000 (Lozoya 1976, 112), above the reported size of the army (65,000 in 1975). More recent publications have the total number of militia members outnumbering regular troops until the late 1980s (International Institute for Strategic

[15] Comandancia del 8° Cuerpo de Infantería al C. Secretario de la Defensa Nacional, AGN, Ávila Camacho, 550/24.

[16] Report No. 8679, October 7, 1938, "Quasi-Military Organizations. Reserves in various Military Zones." Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs (RG 165), Military Intelligence Division, Security Classified Correspondence and Reports, 1917-1941 (Entry A1-65), box 686, file number 2025-259/671.

Studies 1987; 1990).

As these numbers make clear, governing elites maintained the corps of rural militias as an appendage to the central state machinery, serving as its eyes and ears in peripheral areas. As the regime veered rightward starting in the 1940s, militias' revolutionary social and ideological functions were abandoned (Rath 2013). The institution itself, however, was not. Their lax discipline and abuses notwithstanding, the *defensas rurales* had emerged from the deep conflicts of the postrevolutionary period as a low-cost system of intelligence and local policing that a fiscally weak authoritarian state was unwilling to do away with.

When a wave of social mobilization from below struck the authoritarian regime in the 1960s and early 1970s, the army resorted to the militias to aid in counterinsurgency. As an auxiliary structure, they received a renewed mandate to act as "guides, explorers, and couriers in the persecution, capture, and detention of disturbers of order and public safety" and serve as "organs of information at the disposal of [Army] Territorial Commanders" (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional 1964). In other work, I show that in this period, the PRI distributed relatively less land in municipalities with a higher presence of rural militias, which indicates that militias inherited from the revolutionary state-building era allowed the authoritarian regime to substitute redistribution with repression in response to dissent (Larreguy, Riaño, and Sánchez-Talanquer 2018).

Mexico's rural defense forces continue to exist today as institutional holdovers of the struggles of postrevolutionary state-building, with some 12,000 to 15,000 members since the mid-2000s.[17] Although they play a secondary role as local guides and informants for the army in some locations, the buffering role built into their institutional design has again proven useful. When

[17]Based on freedom of information acts filed by the author. Other sources report 17,400 members in 2018 (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2018, 414). For reference, this figure corresponds to about 40% the size of the much newer Federal Police.

a wave of vigilantism hit Michoacán state in 2013 in the context of the drug war (Phillips 2016) (an outcome I also analyze below), federal forces colluded with the self-defense groups against organized crime. Mimicking the strategy of semi-formal incorporation of the postrevolutionary period, the military then struck a deal to incorporate them into the *defensas rurales*.

5 Data

5.1 Militias

Rural militias make appearances in local histories and overviews of the Mexican military (Plasencia 2010), but no systematic source or comprehensive study is available. Access to military archives covering the authoritarian era remains limited to this date. Further, quasi-informal institutions like the Mexican peasant militias do not produce the consistent paper records of regular state apparatuses. The case of the Mexican rural militias thus holds important methological lessons for social scientists. On the one hand, it illustrates the potential problems of relying exclusively on available secondary historical literature. Even canonical studies of Mexico's authoritarian regime overlook the existence of the *defensas rurales* and the fact that they constituted the largest coercive apparatus employed by autocrats for internal order. On the other, the case illustrates that the very availability of archival materials may induce selection bias in descriptive and causal inference, leading the researcher astray. More fundamentally, the militias remind us of the potential gulf that separates formal institutions (and the information they produce) from the real operation of political power.

To build a comprehensive national picture of militia mobilization during state-building, I manually put together a new, village-level spatial database on the location of these units for 1932-1946, using all existing records for the period in the presidential archives of the *Archivo*

General de la Nación (AGN). The 1932-1946 period covers the decisive period of state-building and institutionalization of the Mexican postrevolutionary state. For reference, the dominant authoritarian party was founded in 1929, reorganized in 1938, and finally transformed into the modern PRI in 1946. Covering this relatively long period allows me to generate an accurate map of the distribution of militias as founding internal struggles ran their course.

The essential piece of information I draw upon is the existence (or not) of a rural militia unit in a given village, at some point between 1932 and 1946. I determine so using all existing archival records on the militias within this time period.[18] To illustrate, the following is an example of the type of data I recorded:

10/16/1933. Hidalgo [*state*]. *Gandhó* [*locality*]. *Complaint against the Defensa. Residents complain that the Chiefs of the Defensa Social are the supreme authorities, since they are the ones who decide who is to be punished and how. They cite concrete cases and ask for the Defensa's replacement.*

The records address a great variety of issues, including complaints from citizens and local government officials about abuses, petitions to disband the militias, petitions and reports of armament and uniforms, notifications about the formation of a militia in a given village, reports about their role in agrarian conflicts or police operations, changes in membership, etc.

Regardless of the specific content, however, each record points to the existence of a rural defense unit in a given locality. This is the basis of the empirical analysis. In total, I coded information corresponding to 2,151 archival documents. Of these, 49 dealt with issues related to the militias but without making reference to any specific location. The remaining 2,102 concern a rural defense unit in a specific town or locality.

[18] Specifically, I first hand-coded the information provided in all index cards under *defensas sociales* or *defensas rurales*, the two terms used by archivists to classify documents concerning irregular forces in these decades. I then surveyed a quasi-random sample of the universe of files in the National Archive related to militias and military affairs between 1932-1946. Other steps to validate the dataset are described below.

I then geo-located each militia-village using the historical geostatistical database of Mexico's statistical agency (INEGI). Ultimately, I was able to match 1,711 entries in the militias sample to INEGI's directory of Mexican localities (81.4%). In the remaining cases, two or more homonymous villages existed in the same state at the time, and no other available information allowed discriminating between them (these observations are thus excluded).

Based on the available information, however, this loss is not a major concern. No evidence suggests that unmatched localities differ from those in the final sample in any respect, other than the fact that they happen to have repeated names. The distribution of militia units across Mexican states is almost identical for observations in and out of the sample. In short, observation loss is relatively minor (391 out of 2,102 cases) and in all likelihood random.

Generating data from archival sources confronts the challenge of possible non-random processes in archival production and record-keeping. For our purposes, militias could have been active in some localities but failed to leave a paper trace, thus escaping the sample. Were these untraceable militias to be different from those in the dataset in relevant ways, inferences may not generalize. However, I remain confident that this is not the case for three main reasons. First, the wide range of matters covered in the sources, ranging from routine operation memos or personnel lists to serious reports about extrajudicial killings, suggests records of all types were produced and preserved, thus yielding an accurate picture of militia activity. Second, covering a long period of fifteen years increases the likelihood that an active militia group in a given village would appear in archival materials at least once.

Third and most importantly, I validated my dataset against another set of records obtained from the American Military Intelligence Division in the National Archives of the United States. The records consist of a complete list of the 141 towns and cities that served as seats for militia

battalions and regiments in Mexico in 1938.[19] By this time, every village militia had been formally placed under the military structure and was affiliated with one of these 141 bases. Though considerably more aggregated than my locality-level data, these records unequivocally span the universe of cases. They can thus be used as a benchmark to test for potential selection, rooted either in observation loss during coding or in biases in the production and preservation of archival records. Reassuringly, the geographic distribution of the 141 battalions and regiments is nearly identical to the distribution of militias in my own village-level map.

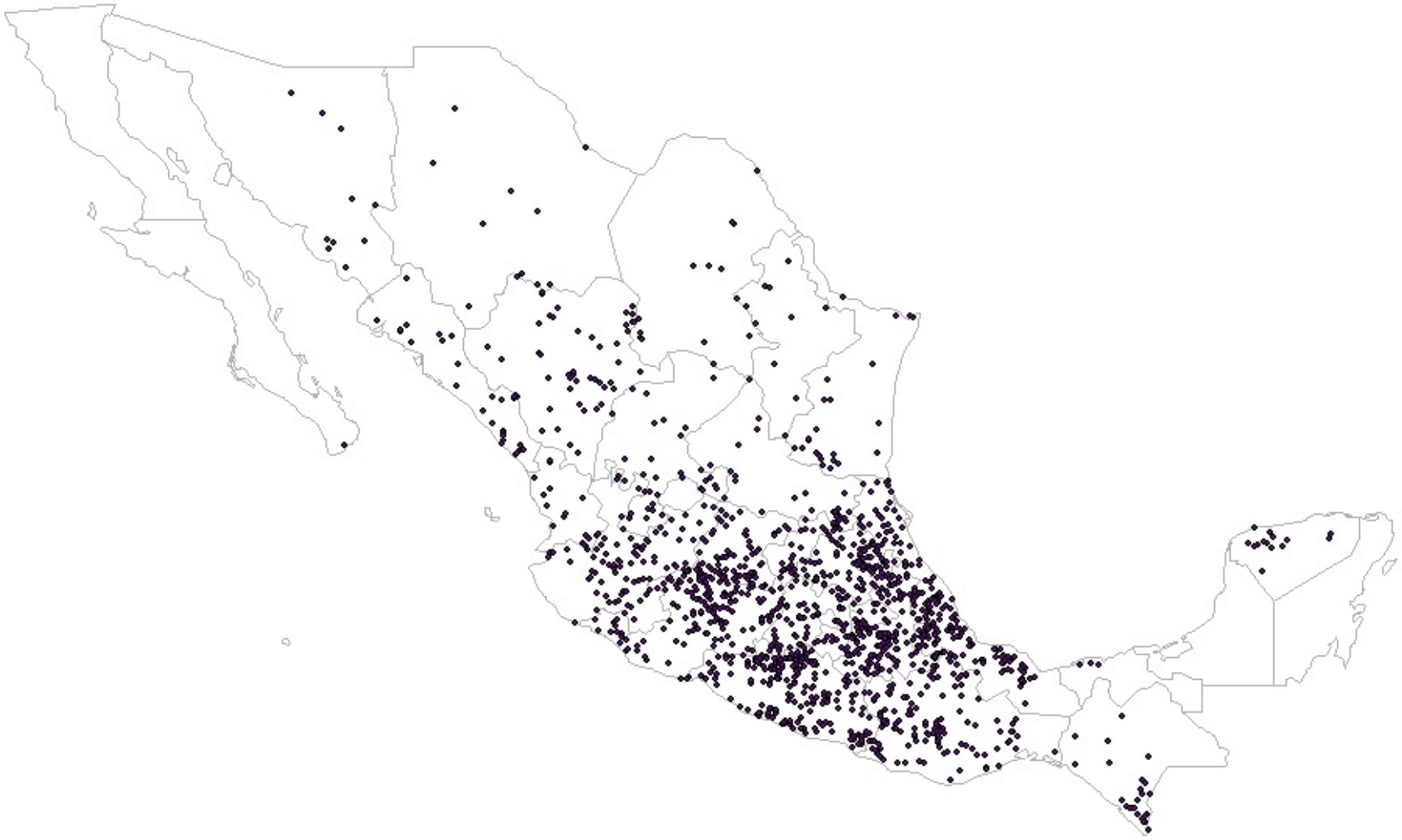
The constructed dataset thus presents, to the best of my knowledge, an accurate picture of the geography of militia mobilization in postrevolutionary Mexico. It is also the most comprehensive and disaggregated source on irregular armed forces in Mexico collected to date. Overall, the more than 1,700 entries indicate that 843 municipalities (36% of the total at the time) had a rural defense unit operating in at least one of its localities between 1932 and 1946. In comparison, in 1952 the army had 650 squads stationed in about every fifth municipality (Rath 2013, 117), of an average of 14 troops, "to perform functions proper of the police and cooperate with civilian authorities."[20]

A map depicting the exact location of rural militia units appears below as Figure 1. Given that all other data used in this article is available at the municipality level, I aggregate the militia data and calculate the total number of localities within a given municipality with a militia.

[19] Report No. 8679, October 7, 1938, "Quasi-Military Organizations. Reserves in various Military Zones." Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs (RG 165), Military Intelligence Division, Security Classified Correspondence and Reports, 1917-1941 (Entry A1-65), box 686, file number 2025-259/671.

[20] "Estadística de prestaciones sociales que el Ejército ha dado a otras dependencias oficiales y a elementos civiles del país, durante el año de 1952." February 28, 1953. AGN, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 550/24.

Figure 1: Rural defense militias in postrevolutionary Mexico, 1932-1946



Note: Each dot represents a locality (population settlement) with a rural militia unit, according to archival records. See section 5 above for details.

5.2 Counterrevolutionary contention

The first part of the empirical analysis is devoted to the connection between anti-regime contention during state-building and the distribution of armed collaboration that emerged from the period. To capture the revolutionary-counterrevolutionary struggle, I use a new municipal-level data on the geography of the religious Cristero War. Strategies of contention among disaffected groups, most prominently political Catholics, spanned the entire period of state-building and ranged from clandestine evasion to open protest and rebellion. Though best conceived as part of this larger cycle of protest, the Cristero War provides the most accurate picture of counterrevolutionary religious activity.

I capture the spatial distribution of rebellion during the Cristero War using an indicator variable. The variable codes whether local residents took up arms against the government during the duration of the conflict, were targets of military operations, or provided sustained support and harbor to the rebels, according to secondary sources. The data were hand-coded for each municipality based on a comprehensive review of the historical literature.[21]

Overall, insurgent activity was registered in approximately a quarter of all municipalities existing at the time. A map depicting the geographic distribution of insurgency at the municipality level appears as Figure A1 in the Appendix.

5.3 Rule of law outcomes

The second part of the empirical analysis examines the long-run effects of militia mobilization. I use several outcome variables to capture legacies, including direct measures of human and physical resources available to local governments to enforce the rule of law as well as output-based

[21] I start with Meyer's detailed classic history (1976; 1994; 1995) but complement it with over a dozen newer regional and local studies uncovering information not originally available to Meyer. For each rebel municipality, a specific reference and page number supporting the coding is available from the author.

indicators.[22].

Civilian police strength

As a first indicator of local institutional capacity to uphold the rule of law, I calculate the average number of municipal civilian police per capita between 2008 (the first available year) and 2014. I also use the number of municipal police stations, posts, booths, or similar infrastructures per thousand square kilometers in 2014. This captures the physical reach of the local civilian police *within* the municipality, along with its ability to perform functions beyond the municipal seat. Both variables were calculated using data from INEGI.

These measures are of relevance in the Mexican context because municipal police forces are responsible for public security under the federal system. Their structural weakness is considered an underlying cause of the current militarization of security, beyond counterdrug operations to basic policing. According to a 2014 bill proposed by the executive to reform the country's police system, some 24% of municipalities in the country lacked an organized police force due to "political or budgetary reasons," and only 14 of 31 states had one in all of their municipalities. Among existing local police bodies, 86% were composed of less than 100 officers, and the bottom 45% averaged only 12.

Municipal justice institutions

In addition to the development of the local police, I investigate if the presence of rural militias in the past is systematically related to the strength of formal dispute-resolution institutions at the local level. Civil and criminal cases in Mexico are handled by public ministries (prosecutors) and judicial systems at the second level of government (states). However, the power to administer justice concerning basic public order regulations, settle minor controversies, and intervene in

[22]On advantages and drawbacks of each of these operationalization strategies, see (Soifer 2016; Fukuyama 2013)

local incidents to prevent crime lies with *jueces cívicos* (civic judges) in the municipality.

These local authorities handle petty offenses, mediate in disputes between residents, and serve as links with legally competent authorities when a crime is committed. They can impose fines and authorize short-term arrests. In this sense, civic judges can play an important role in maintaining local order and preventing the escalation of private conflicts or minor infractions.

I coded the number of *jueces cívicos* per hundred thousand citizens in each municipality in 2014, available from INEGI.

Interpersonal violence

As a first output-based measure, I use the average homicide rate in each municipality from 2000 to 2015. This variable also comes from INEGI and reflects underlying levels of lethal interpersonal violence beyond short-term fluctuations.

Vigilantism

As a final test of the effects of historical militia mobilization on the strength of the rule of law locally, I examine whether municipal militia density as coded in my dataset is systematically associated with the emergence of vigilante organizations recently. A history of existence of rural defense groups may be associated with modern vigilantism through at least two paths: first, its weakening effects on formal state institutions may itself encourage extra-institutional solutions to insecurity. Second, the attitudinal mechanism discussed above may also play an important role.

This part of the analysis draws on recent work by Osorio, Schubiger, and Weintraub (2016) that draws a direct connection between Cristero War mobilization and contemporary vigilantism, as well as on Phillips (2016), who examines the Mexican case and argues that inequality favors

the rise of vigilante groups.[23] Phillips used media sources to identify municipalities where these groups operated in 2013. Following the same approach and official reports from the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos 2013; 2015), I extended his database to cover subsequent years. In total, the new dataset indicates that self-defense and community policing groups have operated in some 160 municipalities since 2013.[24]

5.4 Controls

The primary relationships of interest are first, between counterrevolutionary insurgency in the Cristero War and the incidence of militia mobilization; second, between militia mobilization and the rule-of-law outcomes down the road. At each step, I introduce a series of covariates to address potential selection or confounding. Other quantitative identification tests are discussed below, as robustness checks.

First, I use official data on land allocations to measure the extent of agrarian reform across municipalities.[25] The protection of agrarian rights was the regime's official justification for the spread of militias (Arellano Cruz 1950), and land regulations were used to deal with agency risks in state-militia relations. The relevant indicator is the total number of citizens who benefited from land grants between 1916 (first year of reform) and 1946 (the last year in the sample of militia units), as a percentage of the 1946 municipal population.[26]

A key identification concern is that preexisting levels of state capacity explain both the

[23] Vigilante organizations are defined as "sustained associations of private citizens voluntarily seeking to illegally control crime or other social infractions in a planned, premeditated way, involving force or the threat of force" (Phillips 2016).

[24] Running the analysis on the data originally compiled by Phillips produces similar results, statistically and substantively.

[25] From the *Registro Agrario Nacional*.

[26] I linearly interpolate data from the 1940 and 1950 censuses to obtain yearly population estimates. Results are robust to using surface area subjected to redistribution in the period as an alternative measure of land reform.

geography of counterrevolution and the incidence of militias, making any observed relationship spurious. Notice, however, that counterrevolutionary Cristero mobilization tended to align with clerical strongholds where also the state developed presence since the colonial era. Yet to control for pre-revolutionary patterns of state presence, I obtained the total number of state officials per 1,000 people in the municipality from the 1900 census. Results are also robust to using the total number of police per capita in 1900, as an alternative measure specific to the coercive apparatus.[27]

To further account for antecedent factors potentially driving the relationships of interest, I include a binary indicator of whether the municipality experienced insurgency during the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). This is a potentially important variable because agrarian reform in part responded to patterns of revolutionary insurgency and was tightly linked to militia mobilization. I coded this variable to extend Dell's data set of 217 municipalities to the entire country 2012, following her coding approach and relying on the vast historiography of the Revolution.[28]

I also include a host of exogeneous geographic variables, given arguments that relate them to insurgency and state-building patterns (e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2003). First, I measure terrain roughness *within* each municipality using the standard deviation of the altitude of all of its localities. This measure likely also correlates with other relevant characteristics like suitability for agriculture (mm). In addition, I include average annual rainfall and two measures of remoteness—distance between the municipal seat of government and the state capital, and to Mexico City (km), along the geodesic ("as the crow flies").

Further, I account for historical socioeconomic differences across municipalities using the

[27] This variable has more missing values in the 1900 census, which leads me to opt for the total number of state officials.

[28] For each insurgent municipality, a specific reference and page number supporting the coding is available from the author.

percentage of the population living in rural areas, the percentage employed in industry or commerce, the literacy rate, total population (log), and population density. All these variables were calculated using the 1930 census and capture socioeconomic conditions *before* the period covered by the dependent variable (1932-1946), to minimize any potential endogeneity.

Finally, some model specifications include a full set of state-fixed effects to neutralize all constant factors affecting all municipalities within a state. In addition to the historical controls, some specifications examining long-run legacies include more recent covariates. Adding these variables temporally in-between the key historical predictor (Cristero War insurgency in the first part of the analysis; militia incidence in the second) and the outcomes risks introducing post-treatment bias. I intend their inclusion simply as a demanding robustness check and to indirectly assess the presence of specific mechanisms by "blocking" a path between historical predictor and contemporary outcome. Descriptive statistics for all variables used throughout the paper appear in Table A1 in the Appendix.

6 Results

6.1 Counterrevoution and Militia Mobilization

Table 1 presents results for a series of cross-sectional ordinary-least-squares (OLS) regressions where the number of localities with a mobilized militia unit is the dependent variable. The baseline specification in column 1 includes only measures for counterrevolutionary mobilization during the Cristero War and the extent of agrarian reform. The extended specification in column 2 adds controls for insurgency during the Revolution, preexisting state capacity, and the range of geographic and socioeconomic factors. Column 3 adds a full set of state fixed effects. Standard errors in all regressions throughout the paper are robust to arbitrary heteroskedasticity.

In all specifications, the relationships of interest are in the expected direction and statistically significant at conventional levels. With all controls and fixed effects (column 3), the coefficient on the Cristero War dummy indicates that, on average, municipalities that participated in the religious rebellion had 0.5 more state-sanctioned militia units within their borders in the following decades.

This systematic association indicates that the central state was more likely to rely on militias in areas of deep Catholic opposition, where regime legitimacy was contested and anticlericalism had fed into local enmities to spur counterrevolutionary resistance. The evidence is thus consistent with the first part of the theoretical argument, according to which domestic societal contention early during state-building pushes revolutionary elites to rely on local alliances with civil militias to secure control, with militia mobilization mirroring the fault lines between state-building coalitions and rivals. As would also be expected given landlord resistance to the Revolution and the use of agrarian reform to bind militias to the central state, the results confirm a positive and significant association between the extent of reform and the intensity of militia mobilization.

6.2 Militia Mobilization and the Rule of Law

Table 2 presents results for OLS regressions with municipal police strength and judicial capacity as dependent variables. Results for homicide rates and vigilantism appear in Table 3. In models for vigilantism I use logistic regression, given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable.

Overall, a strong negative association exists between the reliance on state-sanctioned rural militias during the state's formative period, and the strength of the rule of law in the long run. Results are statistically significant at conventional levels and in the expected direction for the various outcome variables, whether direct measures of state institutional resources or

Table 1: Linear models of rural militia presence between 1932 and 1946

	Total militia units in municipality		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Cristero War insurgency	0.695***	0.453***	0.470***
	(0.072)	(0.068)	(0.080)
% land reform beneficiaries (1916-46)	0.004*	0.008***	0.010***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Revolution insurgency		0.181**	0.108
		(0.059)	(0.058)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		0.048	0.013
		(0.032)	(0.033)
% rural pop (1930)		0.005***	0.005***
		(0.001)	(0.001)
% in industry and commerce (1930)		-0.006	-0.008
		(0.007)	(0.007)
% literate (1930)		-0.003	0.009**
		(0.002)	(0.003)
Log population (1930)		0.487***	0.543***
		(0.035)	(0.041)
Log pop density (1930)		-0.071**	-0.102***
		(0.023)	(0.024)
Constant	0.402***	-3.835***	-5.301***
	(0.029)	(0.334)	(0.539)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	NO	NO	YES
N	2,217	1,880	1,880
R^2	0.068	0.26	0.38

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Geographic controls include the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), and average annual rainfall (mm).

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

output-based indicators. Importantly, these associations do not appear to be driven by levels of state capacity prior to the Revolution or other potential confounders.

Columns 1-3 in indicate that the more rural militia units operated in a municipality historically, the fewer police officers per capita exist today. Columns 4 and 5 show that this historical factor is also negatively related to the density of local police stations in the municipal territory. These results are consistent with militias carrying out local social control functions under the military's purview, thereby inhibiting local police development in the long run. Based on columns 2 and 4, for every additional locality with an organized militia unit, the municipality has, on average, 28 less law enforcement agents per hundred thousand citizens today, and 2 police stations less per thousand square kilometers.

To further validate the claim that militia mobilization limited police development and the territorial reach of police forces in the long run, I matched my historical dataset with survey-based measures of police performance from the Latin American Public Opinion Poject. I pool LAPOP data from all six surveys conducted in Mexico between 2006 and 2016.[29]

[29] Mexico City was historically not subdivided into municipalities. Respondents from Mexico City are thus excluded from the analysis.

Table 2: Linear models of state capacity for law and order, 2008-2014

	Local police per capita, average 2008-2014			Police stations per 1,000 km^2, 2014		Civic judges per capita, 2014		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
# of localities with rural militia (1932-46)	-38.526***	-26.041***	-18.408***	-2.560***	-3.327***	-6.211***	-4.601***	-2.753**
	(5.243)	(5.353)	(5.303)	(0.636)	(0.712)	(0.967)	(0.907)	(0.980)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		46.272***	47.298***	2.884	2.955		5.658**	4.979**
		(11.166)	(11.238)	(1.486)	(1.516)		(1.867)	(1.900)
% rural pop (1930)		3.374***	2.943***	0.307***	0.366***		0.473***	0.328***
		(0.490)	(0.513)	(0.072)	(0.083)		(0.062)	(0.065)
% in industry and commerce (1930)		6.552	7.947	0.422	0.240		0.072	0.510
		(9.596)	(9.711)	(0.408)	(0.378)		(1.019)	(1.010)
% literate (1930)		3.468	2.968	0.831***	0.413		0.814*	0.943*
		(2.071)	(2.022)	(0.212)	(0.263)		(0.356)	(0.375)
Log pop density (1930)		24.034	25.416	25.713***	24.454***		0.036	1.518
		(18.885)	(18.415)	(2.949)	(2.780)		(2.143)	(2.094)
Homicide rate (avg 2000-07)			-2.566		0.066			0.198
			(1.436)		(0.065)			(0.428)
Municipal taxes per capita (avg 2000-07)			0.016		-0.028			0.044*
			(0.081)		(0.027)			(0.021)
Inequality (2010 Gini)			-16.544***		-0.048			-4.256***
			(4.184)		(0.349)			(0.854)
Log GDP per capita (2010)			-17.869		27.143**			-15.000
			(56.875)		(9.038)			(8.380)
Constant	184.583***	-120.274	726.746	-140.172***	-378.088***	6.210***	33.909	337.217***
	(18.912)	(124.916)	(554.397)	(18.980)	(94.657)	(1.332)	(17.606)	(78.028)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	2,331	1,912	1,899	1,784	1,771	2,241	1,836	1,823
R^2	0.3	0.32	0.33	0.32	0.33	0.21	0.27	0.29

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Geographic controls include distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, and average annual rainfall (mm).

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3: Models of strength of the rule of law, 2000-2016

	Homicide rate, average 2000-2015			Presence of vigilante group, 2013-2016		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
# of localities with rural militia (1932-46)	0.990***	0.786***	0.891***	0.532***	0.466***	0.322***
	(0.247)	(0.238)	(0.248)	(0.051)	(0.057)	(0.060)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		0.847*	0.848*		0.164	0.260*
		(0.336)	(0.331)		(0.118)	(0.121)
% rural pop (1930)		0.020	0.011		-0.013**	-0.009
		(0.011)	(0.011)		(0.004)	(0.005)
% in industry and commerce (1930)		-0.121	-0.085		0.032	0.035
		(0.073)	(0.073)		(0.028)	(0.036)
% literate (1930)		-0.081	0.012		-0.046***	-0.062***
		(0.044)	(0.046)		(0.014)	(0.018)
Log pop density (1930)		-0.418	-0.177		-0.231	-0.227
		(0.362)	(0.374)		(0.123)	(0.130)
Inequality (2010 Gini)			0.140			0.147***
			(0.099)			(0.027)
Log GDP per capita (2010)			-5.074***			0.410
			(1.246)			(0.399)
Police per capita (avg 2008-12)						-0.002*
						(0.001)
Homicide rate (avg 2010-12)						0.007*
						(0.003)
Constant	2.938***	-6.437	32.759**	-3.243***	-1.366	-10.575**
	(0.341)	(3.969)	(10.769)	(0.112)	(0.770)	(3.568)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
N	2,349	1,917	1,915	2,349	1,917	1,909
R^2	0.36	0.43	0.43			

Columns 1 to 3 are OLS regressions. Columns 4 to 6 are logistic regressions. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Geographic controls include distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, and average annual rainfall (mm).

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Simple differences-in-means are consistent with the regression results. Overall, trust in the police is 3% lower in municipalities with historical militia mobilization, on average (N = 7,940, $p<0.05$), and there is 11% lower agreement that police forces respect human rights (N = 1,293, $p<0.001$). Residents of municipalities with a history of militia presence also estimate that the police would take longer to arrive if called to respond to an emergency, a good measure of the actual reach of the state (3.2 vs. 3.4 in a 5-point scale; N = 2,619, $p<0.01$) (Luna and Soifer 2017).

Columns 6 to 8 in Table 2 indicate that formal dispute-resolution institutions across Mexican municipalities are also weaker on average where militias were more prevalent. After controlling for potential confounders, column 7 reports 5 less civic judges per hundred thousand citizens for every additional militia unit in the municipality.

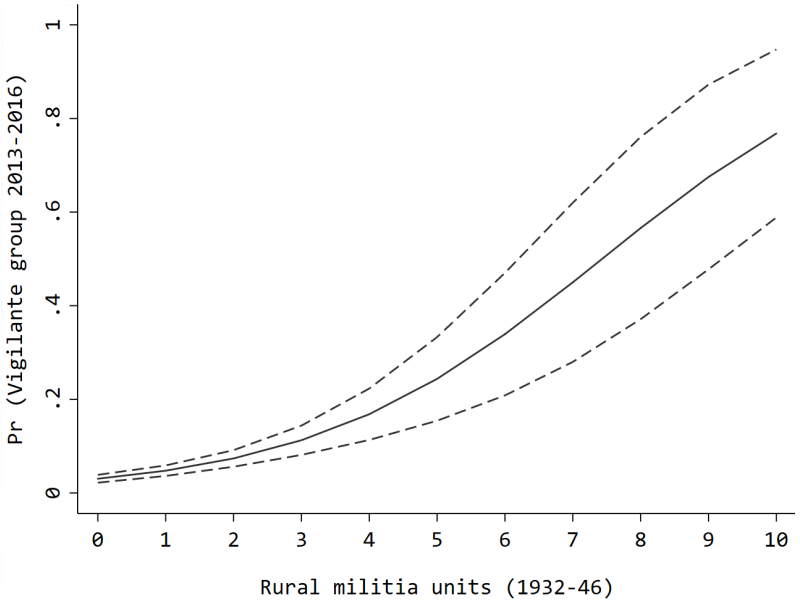
Turning to the output-based measures of the strength of the rule of law, columns 1 to 3 in Table A4 suggests a negative relationship between the reliance on militias and the homicide rate in the long run. For every additional locality in which a militia unit operated in the 1930s and 1940s, the average homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants from 2000 to 2015 is about one unit higher.

Columns 4 to 6 indicate that the presence of state-sanctioned rural militias historically is also strongly associated with the presence of vigilante organizations today, after accounting for potential confounders. Using the results presented in column 5 and holding all other variables constant at their means, the predicted probability of contemporary vigilantism goes from 0.03 in municipalities with no evidence of historical militia activity, to 0.65 when the number of rural militia units in the municipality takes its highest value in the sample (10).

To illustrate this result graphically, Figure 2 below shows the predicted probability that a

vigilante group operated in a municipality between 2013 and 2016 as a function of the number of organized rural militia groups present in the localities of that same municipality between 1932 and 1946, according to my historical dataset. To generate the predicted probabilities, all other variables in model 5 of Table 3 were held at their means.

Figure 2: Historical Militia Presence and Contemporary Vigilantism



Note: Predicted probability of vigilantism (2013-2016) across Mexican municipalities, at different levels of historical rural militia presence (1932-1946). Probabilities were calculated using logistic regression coefficients presented in column 5 of Table 3 and holding all other variables at their mean value. Dotted lines mark the 95% confidence interval.

The coefficient decreases in size but remains statistically significant if the contemporary capabilities of local state agencies—as measured by local police per capita—are introduced as a control. This result provides indirect evidence in support of the social norms mechanism discussed in the theory section above. While historical militia mobilization appears to be linked to the recent emergence of vigilante groups at least partially through its weakening effects on local civilian institutions, there also appear to be other pathways connecting the uncovered

association. The statistical results are consistent with socialization into norms supporting extra-legal means of providing security and justice being one of them.

Consistent with Philips's findings (2016), column 6 shows that economic inequality is positively associated with vigilante mobilization. However, the negative coefficient on police per capita in the same model contrasts with his conclusion that state capacity is not systematically related to vigilantism. Most likely, this difference emerges from the fact that his measures of the state (GDP per capita and libraries per capita) are not directly linked to law enforcement, unlike here.

Overall, the results presented in this section point to a strong connection between patterns of distribution of coercion during the period of state formation, and the contemporary unevenness of the rule of law. The reliance on irregular, village-based militias to maintain local order and counter societal resistance stabilized the postrevolutionary state; paradoxically, however, it held back the development of formal institutions capable of enforcing legal order in the long run.

7 Mechanisms

7.1 Institutional substitution

Primary archival sources are consistent with popular militia mobilization exerting negative effects on the rule of law in the long run partially through a mechanism of institutional substitution. Once formed during early revolutionary struggles, militias represented a ready-made technology available for policing and local dispute-resolution, especially where central rulers remained weary of local populations. A 1944 internal report to the president and the Secretary of Defense explained that the militias, "initially lacking serious organization and tied together only by camaraderie and mutual sympathies," had nevertheless become key "for maintaining public

order across the republic," "suffocating revolts," and "collecting information."

The report also noted their shifting role from auxiliaries in the military campaigns against the "Cristeros" and army defectors to "rural policing." Thus by the mid-1940s their "main function [was] not combat, but protecting public order." Though they tended to embroil themselves in "local vendettas" and their performance was mediocre, they offered they key advantage of reaching deeply into the countryside without making fiscal obligations more burdensome.[30] Overall, archival documents suggests militias tended to substitute for civilian police forces in remote areas.

As in the example quoted in the data section for the 1930s, militias sometimes *de facto* decide "who was to be punished and how." Later, in the counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1970s, army publications spoke of troops and militias acting as "Solomonic judges" in rural areas to "reconcile collective sentiments."[31] As local extensions of the central state, militias continued to play a role in the provision of order in several areas, thus substituting for the development of local state civilian institutions.

7.2 Organizational turf protection

Relatedly, militias and the military authorities that loosely supervised them actively opposed investments in civilian institutions by local authorities. Such investments would have diminished the central authoritarian state's hold over local government elites and, by creating competing structures, undermined the military's and the militia's local influence. Analytically, this is another mechanism connecting historical militia mobilization to long-run weakness in local civilian rule-of-law institutions.

[30] Comandancia del 8° Cuerpo de Infantería al C. Secretario de la Defensa Nacional, AGN, Ávila Camacho, 550/24.
[31] Revista del Ejército y la Fuerza Aérea, December 1972, 56.

Already in the 1920s, a bill in Congress considered irregular forces to be "a threat hanging over local governments" and called for their disarmament in order to "restore municipalities' constitutional right to command their own police."[32] Some of the complaints and petitions to disarm the militias found in the presidential archives came from mayors themselves. Occasionally, militias were accused of obstructing the local government's operation and even attacking its civilian police.[33] When the governor of Guerrero "begged" the regional military commander to disband some of the militias in the mid-1930s, given "their lack of respect for civilian authorities and citizens' lives," the army denied the requests and praised the militia for their service.[34]

7.3 Social propensity to wield violent means

Recent etnographic studies of the rise of vigilantism in the context of the drug war—which, as shown, are systematically associated with the incidence of militia mobilization historically—note the existence in vigilante-ridden areas of a "*ranchero*" ethos valuing competence in the use of violence and individual initiative and autonomy from the state for protection (Le Cour 2016). This is consistent with an attitudinal mechanism helping translate militia mobilization during postrevolutionary struggle into contemporary weakness of the rule of law. Other work traces current norms favoring organization for self-defense to the Cristero conflict in the 1920s (Osorio, Schubiger, and Weintraub 2016).

As done above with respect to attitudes toward the local police, I draw on available survey data from LAPOP to document the plausible linking role of distrust and social norms favoring extra-legal responses to insecurity in the causal chain. Residents of municipalities where militias

[32] "Proyecto de decreto por el que se derogan autorizaciones concedidas a gobiernos de los estados para organizar fuerzas de seguridad," 1923, AGN, Obregón-Calles, 104-D-9.
[33] "Queja en contra de la Defensa Rural de Cacalutla, Atoyac de Álvarez," AGN, Abelardo Rodríguez, 541.5/63-5.
[34] "Reiterando las súplicas hechas a esa Comandancia Militar, para el desarme de las Defensas que se expresan." AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 555/10.

were mobilized in the postrevolutionary period are today more supportive of gun ownership by some 6% (N=2,180), less proud of the armed forces (the militias' principal) by 13% (N= 1,391), have lower trust in the justice system, and more trust in the Church (consistent with the mobilization of militias in areas of Catholic opposition).[35]

Though there are limitations to this approach given uncontrolled comparisons and over-sampling of non-militia (more urban) municipalities in these nationally-representative surveys, these differences and the quantitative results above are consistent with militia mobilization helping reproduce attitudes of self-provision in security and justice, instead of conceiving it as a domain reserved to state authorities.

8 Robustness Checks

I perform three sets of robustness checks. First, I replicated all models focusing on the intensive margin (recoding militias as a binary variable indicating existence in the municipality, instead of the raw sum of village militias). All results remain robust. Second, I replicate all models in Tables 1, 2, and 3 allowing for the outcomes of any given municipality to affect the outcomes of its neighbors.[36] Tables A2, A3, and A4 in the Appendix report estimates for the spatial lags, the spatial error terms, and average direct and spillover effects of the key explanatory variable in each set of models. There is indeed evidence of significant spatial spillover effects for all outcome variables. My conclusions regarding the effect of religious insurgency on militia mobilization and of this variable on rule of law outcomes in the long run, however, remain unchanged. The only exception are the models that relate historical militia mobilization with

[35] All differences statistically significant at least at $p < 0.05$.

[36] I introduce spatial lags in all models using a one-order binary spatial contiguity matrix with elements equal to one if a pair of municipalities is formed by direct neighbors, and zero otherwise. I also allow for spatial interactions in the disturbances. Parameter estimates are obtained via the generalized spatial two-stage least squares estimator derived by Kelejian and Prucha (2010).

the long-run homicide rate, in which the average effect is no longer statistically significant.

The third set of robustness checks consists of another round of regressions replicating all models shown above, but now restricting the sample to pairs of adjacent municipalities with discontinuity in the "treatment" at the border and adding to the models a full set of neighbor-pair fixed effects. All municipalities surrounded by neighbors without variation in the relevant explanatory variable are excluded. To illustrate this approach, Figure A2 in the Appendix visually presents the pairs included in the estimating sample to examine the effects of Cristero War insurgency on militia mobilization.

Tables A5, A6, and A7 in the Appendix reports the results. Reassuringly, comparing direct neighbors and neutralizing constant unobservables across municipal borders produces the same conclusions. The only exception are again models for the homicide rate, where as in the spatial models above, the average effect of militia mobilization is not significant. I therefore cannot rule out the possibility that the association uncovered above between historical militia mobilization and the structural homicide rate is an artifact of spatial contagion in homicides across municipalities or unobserved characteristics shared by municipal neighbors. In all other cases, the relevant coefficients are statistical significant and in the expected direction. This remains true both for models that examine the historical determinants of militia mobilization and those evaluating its long-run effects.

9 Conclusions

The findings presented in this paper carry several implications for our understanding of institutional development in modern Mexico and the state-building process more generally. A first conclusion is that rural militias played an under-appreciated role in the production

of local order under Mexico's authoritarian regime. As semi-official extensions of the army in the countryside, the "defensas rurales" were simultaneously concrete manifestations of the revolutionary origins of the state, an institutional trace of its formative struggles, and one of the sites where it intersected with society. Though semi-formal and thus not counted in official statistics as troops or members of the state, militias were one of the mechanisms through which the postrevolutionary state exerted local authority.

Second, the results in this article indicate that the contemporary reliance on the military for domestic security is not simply a consequence of the weakness of civil security institutions. Rather, that very weakness is closely related with the role that the military and its militias played historically in policing and controlling the Mexican countryside. The paper thus provides a historically-grounded understanding of the poor shape of crucial civilian institutions and suggests such underdevelopment is in part rooted in the solutions that state-builders found to contain societal resistance in the aftermath of the Revolution.

From a strictly Weberian standard, the importance of rural defense forces for the postrevolutionary order, and their century-old persistence, represent symptoms of a defective, incomplete process of state formation. Deep-seated societal disagreement and contention around the political project advanced by revolutionary elites can be said to have arrested the process of monopolization of violence by formal security forces, bound by strict rules and clearly differentiated from society. This insight may be potentially exportable to other experiences of state-building not instigated by external war (Centeno 2002) and drawing on national cohesion, but instead fraught with internal dissension.

However, the reliance on coercive actors outside the realm of formal institutions should not be readily conflated with state "weakness." Despite the multiple principal-agent problems in the

relationship between formal authorities and rural defense forces, the latter played a fundamental role in the reproduction of state rule and the enforcement of social order. Rather than simple "nonstate" armed actors, militias were a particular, if indirect, institutional form through which central state power was exercised locally. They allowed the military to deeply embed itself in society at a low financial cost and bring remote areas within their reach. What is more, their durability presupposed central rulers' tacit, even if sometimes reluctant, consent and support. In this sense, popular militias augmented state power, rather than being unambiguous signs of weakness.

Finally, an important contribution of this analysis, emerging from the adoption of a historical perspective, lies in the identification of state-building as a process potentially affected by time inconsistencies. Conceiving institutional development in this way helps us understand potential continuities and reversals in social and political outcomes. Rather than a predefined linear progression, state-building is a multipronged process in which actors, out of political expediency, make short-term decisions that may nevertheless produce unforeseen long-run consequences. In this article, I have shown that emerging revolutionary rulers may be caught in situations where the order-creating strategies of today backfire tomorrow, yielding territorial unevenness in the reach of the state and serious weaknesses in the rule of law.

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Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive statistics. Dataset on rural militias and the rule of law in Mexico

	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
Number of localities with rural militia (1932-46)	2,349	0.61	1.16	0	10
Municipal police per 100,000 people (average 2008-14)	2,434	372.68	588	0	7,641
Municipal police stations per km^2 (2014)	2,277	25.25	67.22	0	939.4
Civic judges per 100,000 people (2014)	2,339	37.63	96.8	0	1,389
Homicides per 100,000 people (average 2000-15)	2,457	14.21	16.81	0	253.1
Vigilante organization (binary) (2013-16)	2,457	0.06	0.23	0	1
Other variables					
Cristero War insurgency (binary) (1926-29)	2,303	0.26	0.44	0	1
Agrarian reform beneficiaries (1916-1946, % 1946 pop)	2,268	9.76	9.93	0	80.15
Mexican Revolution insurgency (binary) (1910-1917)	2,264	0.34	0.47	0	1
State officials per 1,000 people (1900)	1,983	1.21	2.15	0	25.10
Terrain roughness (Std. Dev. altitude within mun.)	2,425	171.73	156.65	0	1,108
Distance to Mexico City (km from municipal head)	2,457	455.65	374.36	2.21	2,299
Distance to state capital (km from municipal head)	2,457	100.35	70.67	0	524.2
Rural population (% 1930)	2,223	87.54	24.84	0	100
Population in industry and commerce (% 1930)	2,233	2.90	3.77	0	60.31
Literacy (% 1930)	2,233	20.62	12.23	0	65.33
Population (1930, logged)	2,233	8.26	1.06	5.32	12.13
Population density (1930)	2,199	33.57	65.96	0	1,538
Homicides per 100,000 people (average 2000-07)	2,454	11.33	13.71	0	151.4
Municipal taxes per capita (pesos, average 2000-07)	2,424	61.61	124.98	0.003	2,193
Economic inequality (Gini, 2010)	2,454	41.20	3.90	28.6	59.10
GDP per capita (2010, in 2005 US dollars, logged)	2,456	8.96	0.45	7.79	10.76
Municipal police per 100,000 people (average 2008-12)	2,433	361.44	572.11	0	7,079
Homicides per 1000,000 people (average 2010-12)	2,456	20.17	34.55	0	566.9

Table A2: Direct and spillover effects on rural militia presence, 1932-1946

	Total militia units in municipality		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Spatial lag	0.044	-0.035	0.227***
	(0.119)	(0.072)	(0.064)
Spatial error term	0.539***	0.468***	0.018
	(0.123)	(0.073)	(0.081)
Direct effects			
Cristero War insurgency (1926-29)	0.631***	0.418***	0.421***
	(0.084)	(0.077)	(0.076)
\% land reform beneficiaries (1916-46)		0.006**	0.008***
		(0.002)	(0.002)
Revolution insurgency (1910-17)		0.127*	0.096
		(0.062)	(0.057)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		0.041	0.018
		(0.032)	(0.033)
\% rural pop (1930)		0.004***	0.005***
		(0.001)	(0.001)
\% in industry and commerce (1930)		-0.004	-0.006
		(0.007)	(0.008)
\% literate (1930)		-0.001	0.009**
		(0.003)	(0.003)
Log population (1930)		0.507***	0.524***
		(0.038)	(0.041)
Log pop density (1930)		-0.101***	-0.1***
		(0.025)	(0.024)
Spillover effects			
Cristero War insurgency (1926-29)	0.029	-0.014	0.118*
	(0.079)	(0.029)	(0.047)
\% land reform beneficiaries (1916-46)		0	0.002*
		0	(0.001)
Revolution insurgency (1910-17)		-0.004	0.027
		(0.009)	(0.018)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		-0.001	0.005
		(0.003)	(0.009)
\% rural pop (1930)		0	0.001*
		(0.000)	(0.001)
\% in industry and commerce (1930)		0	-0.002
		(0.000)	(0.002)
\% literate (1930)		0	0.002*
		(0.000)	(0.001)
Log population (1930)		-0.017	0.147**
		(0.035)	(0.053)
Log pop density (1930)		0.003	-0.028*
		(0.007)	(0.012)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	NO	NO	YES

Table reports average direct and spillover effects obtained from spatial autoregressive models with autoregressive disturbances. Parameter estimates were obtained using a one-order row-normalized binary contiguity spatial matrix and the generalized spatial two-stage least-squares estimator derived by **KelejianSpecificationestimationspatial2010_**Errors are treated as heteroskedastic and appear in parentheses. The vector of geographic controls is the same of analogous specifications in Table 1 (estimates not shown). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A3: Direct and spillover effects on state capacity for law and order, 1932-1946

	Local police per capita, average 2008-2014			Police stations per 1,000 km^2, 2014		Civic judges per capita, 2014		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Spatial lag	0.819***	0.782***	0.825***	0.743***	0.796***	0.87***	0.841***	0.96***
	(0.084)	(0.097)	(0.087)	(0.105)	(0.109)	(0.11)	(0.081)	(0.08)
Error lag	-0.517**	0.544**	-0.64**	-0.398*	-0.508*	-0.764**	-0.689**	0.917***
	(0.187)	(0.199)	(0.196)	(0.199)	(0.204)	(0.24)	(0.215)	(0.222)
Direct effects								
# of localities with rural militia (1932-1946)	-32.137***	-21.948***	-13.629*	-1.801**	-2.188**	-4.893***	-2.944**	-1.27
	(5.112)	(4.921)	(5.452)	(0.616)	(0.679)	(1.097)	(0.924)	(1.246)
Spillover effects								
# of localities with rural militia (1932-1946)	-109.952	-59.406	-46.635	-3.968	-6.209	-23.131	-10.942	-15.912
	(61.362)	(33.624)	(33.055)	(2.468)	(4.449)	(21.353)	(6.586)	(33.633)
Socioeconomic controls	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Contemporary covariates	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
State fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	2,331	1,912	1,899	1,784	1,771	2,241	1,836	1,823
Pseudo R^2	0.29	0.33	0.34	0.32	0.33	0.21	0.28	0.27

Table reports average direct and spillover effects obtained from spatial autoregressive models with autoregressive disturbances (often referred to as SARAR or SAC). Models are spatial equivalents of those presented in Table 2. Parameter estimates were obtained using a one-order row-normalized binary contiguity spatial matrix and the generalized spatial two-stage least-squares estimator derived by **KelejianSpecificationestimationspatial2010**. Errors are treated as heteroskedastic and appear in parentheses. Socioeconomic controls include state officials per 1,000 (1900), the share of population in rural areas (1930), the share working in industry and commerce (1930), the literacy rate (1930), and population density (1930). Geographic controls include distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, and average annual rainfall (mm). Contemporary covariates are the average homicide rate (2000-2007), average municipal tax revenue per capita (2000-2007), inequality (2010), and GDP per capita (2010). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A4: Direct and spillover effects on strength of the rule of law, 2000-2016

	Homicide rate, average 2000-2015			Presence of vigilante group, 2013-2016		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Spatial lag	1.06***	0.986***	0.984***	0.782***	0.841***	0.83***
	(0.043)	(0.05)	(0.043)	(0.063)	(0.069)	(0.06)
Error lag	-0.722***	-0.634***	0.667***	-0.533***	-0.567***	-0.567***
	(0.137)	(0.104)	(0.108)	(0.117)	(0.12)	(0.116)
Direct effects						
# of localities with rural militia (1932-1946)	0.237	0.632	0.684	0.029***	0.025***	0.023***
	(26.706)	(0.526)	(0.452)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Spillover effects						
# of localities with rural militia (1932-1946)	-4.05	20.057	18.952	0.082**	0.096*	0.081**
	(23.452)	(71.349)	(49.823)	(0.025)	(0.038)	(0.029)
Socioeconomic controls	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Contemporary covariates	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
State fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
N	2,349	1,917	1,915	2,349	1,917	1,909
R^2	0.36	0.43	0.43			

Table reports average direct and spillover effects obtained from spatial autoregressive models with autoregressive disturbances (often referred to as SARAR or SAC). Models are spatial equivalents of those presented in Table 3. Parameter estimates were obtained using a one-order row-normalized binary contiguity spatial matrix and the generalized spatial two-stage least-squares estimator derived by **KelejianSpecificationestimationspatial2010**. Errors are treated as heteroskedastic and appear in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A5: Neighbor-pair fixed effects estimates of rural militia presence between 1932 and 1946

	Total militia units in municipality		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Cristero War insurgency	0.727***	0.275**	0.269**
	(0.088)	(0.093)	(0.086)
% land reform beneficiaries (1916-46)	-0.011*	-0.005	-0.004
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Revolution insurgency		0.064	0.026
		(0.122)	(0.119)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		0.061	0.053
		(0.059)	(0.065)
% rural pop (1930)		0.004*	0.003
		(0.002)	(0.002)
% in industry and commerce (1930)		0.007	0.012
		(0.015)	(0.014)
% literate (1930)		0.001	0.002
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Log population (1930)		0.902***	0.834***
		(0.102)	(0.093)
Log pop density (1930)		-0.081	-0.083
		(0.078)	(0.079)
Constant	0.760***	-6.177***	-5.897**
	(0.070)	(1.341)	(1.811)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	NO	NO	YES
Neighbor-pair fixed effects	YES	YES	YES
N	2,458	1,916	1,916
Number of pairs	1,229	958	958
R^2	0.64	0.74	0.77

Table reports results of linear models for which the estimation sample is formed by pairs of neighboring municipalities with and without insurgency during the Cristero War. Each municipality in a pair shares a neighbor-pair fixed effect. Observations are included only if municipalities share a border, have opposite values in the Cristero insurgency binary variable, and none of the elements of the pair has missing values in any of the variables in the models. Geographic controls include the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), and average annual rainfall (mm). Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level and appear in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A6: Neighbor-pair fixed effects estimates of state capacity for law and order

	Local police per capita, average 2008-2014			Police stations per 1,000 km^2, 2014		Civic judges per capita, 2014		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
# of localities with rural militia (1932-46)	-62.660***	-52.349***	-44.187***	-2.908***	-2.958***	-8.484***	-6.208***	-4.727**
	(9.703)	(10.867)	(10.839)	(0.758)	(0.757)	(1.388)	(1.524)	(1.587)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		19.551	24.228	2.184	2.322		0.922	1.509
		(14.221)	(14.079)	(1.218)	(1.228)		(1.855)	(1.829)
% rural pop (1930)		3.632***	3.226***	0.211***	0.235***		0.369***	0.266***
		(0.802)	(0.721)	(0.055)	(0.058)		(0.058)	(0.052)
% in industry and commerce (1930)		7.608	8.446	0.232	0.179		-0.499	-0.242
		(9.764)	(9.683)	(0.326)	(0.319)		(0.722)	(0.701)
% literate (1930)		0.693	1.942	0.532**	0.245		0.002	0.313
		(2.189)	(2.620)	(0.205)	(0.204)		(0.315)	(0.387)
Log pop density (1930)		7.995	8.160	17.006***	16.148***		4.966*	6.526**
		(21.460)	(21.067)	(2.371)	(2.403)		(2.404)	(2.343)
Homicide rate (avg 2000-07)			-3.239		0.008			0.365
			(2.497)		(0.063)			(0.479)
Municipal taxes per capita (avg 2000-07)			0.208		0.023			0.046
			(0.107)		(0.024)			(0.024)
Inequality (2010 Gini)			-11.157**		-0.949***			-2.722***
			(3.438)		(0.285)			(0.627)
Log GDP per capita (2010)			-70.947		17.299*			-14.940
			(69.043)		(6.707)			(9.854)
Constant	255.401***	9.808	1138.507	-78.001***	-193.603**	3.097	2.807	243.378**
	(55.689)	(182.793)	(614.592)	(18.786)	(61.970)	(9.072)	(25.096)	(82.765)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Neighbor-pair fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	5,086	3,792	3,758	3,414	3,380	4,742	3,536	3,502
Number of pairs	2,543	1,896	1,879	1,707	1,690	2,371	1,768	1,751
R^2	0.66	0.66	0.67	0.73	0.74	0.60	0.61	0.62

Table reports results of linear models for which the estimation sample is formed by pairs of neighboring municipalities with and without rural militia presence between 1932 and 1946. Each municipality in a pair shares a neighbor-pair fixed effect. Observations are included only if municipalities share a border, have opposite values in a binary variable indicating rural militia presence, and none of the elements of the pair has missing values in any of the variables in the models. Geographic controls include distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, and average annual rainfall (mm). Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level and appear in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A7: Neighbor pair fixed effects estimates of strength of the rule of law

	Homicide rate, average 2000-2015			Presence of vigilante group, 2013-2016		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
# of localities with rural militia (1932-46)	0.220	0.218	0.202	0.022***	0.017***	0.015**
	(0.152)	(0.177)	(0.179)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Log state officials per 1,000 (1900)		0.665*	0.658*		0.006	0.005
		(0.310)	(0.309)		(0.007)	(0.007)
% rural pop (1930)		-0.010	-0.011		-0.000	0.000
		(0.008)	(0.008)		(0.000)	(0.000)
% in industry and commerce (1930)		-0.035	-0.028		0.002	0.002
		(0.057)	(0.058)		(0.001)	(0.001)
% literate (1930)		-0.022	0.004		-0.000	-0.000
		(0.048)	(0.051)		(0.001)	(0.001)
Log pop density (1930)		-0.398	-0.299		0.009	0.007
		(0.417)	(0.420)		(0.010)	(0.010)
Inequality (2010 Gini)			0.147			0.005*
			(0.075)			(0.002)
Log GDP per capita (2010)			-1.860			0.011
			(1.164)			(0.025)
Police per capita (avg 2008-12)						0.000
						(0.000)
Homicide rate (avg 2010-12)						0.000
						(0.000)
Constant	6.910*	-10.276	-0.480	0.045***	-0.066	-0.366
	(3.204)	(19.881)	(21.295)	(0.005)	(0.127)	(0.269)
Geographic controls	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
State fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Neighbor-pair fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	5,124	3,812	3,810	5124	3,812	3,784
Number of pairs	2,562	1,906	1,905	2,562	1,906	1,892
R^2	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.69	0.71	0.71

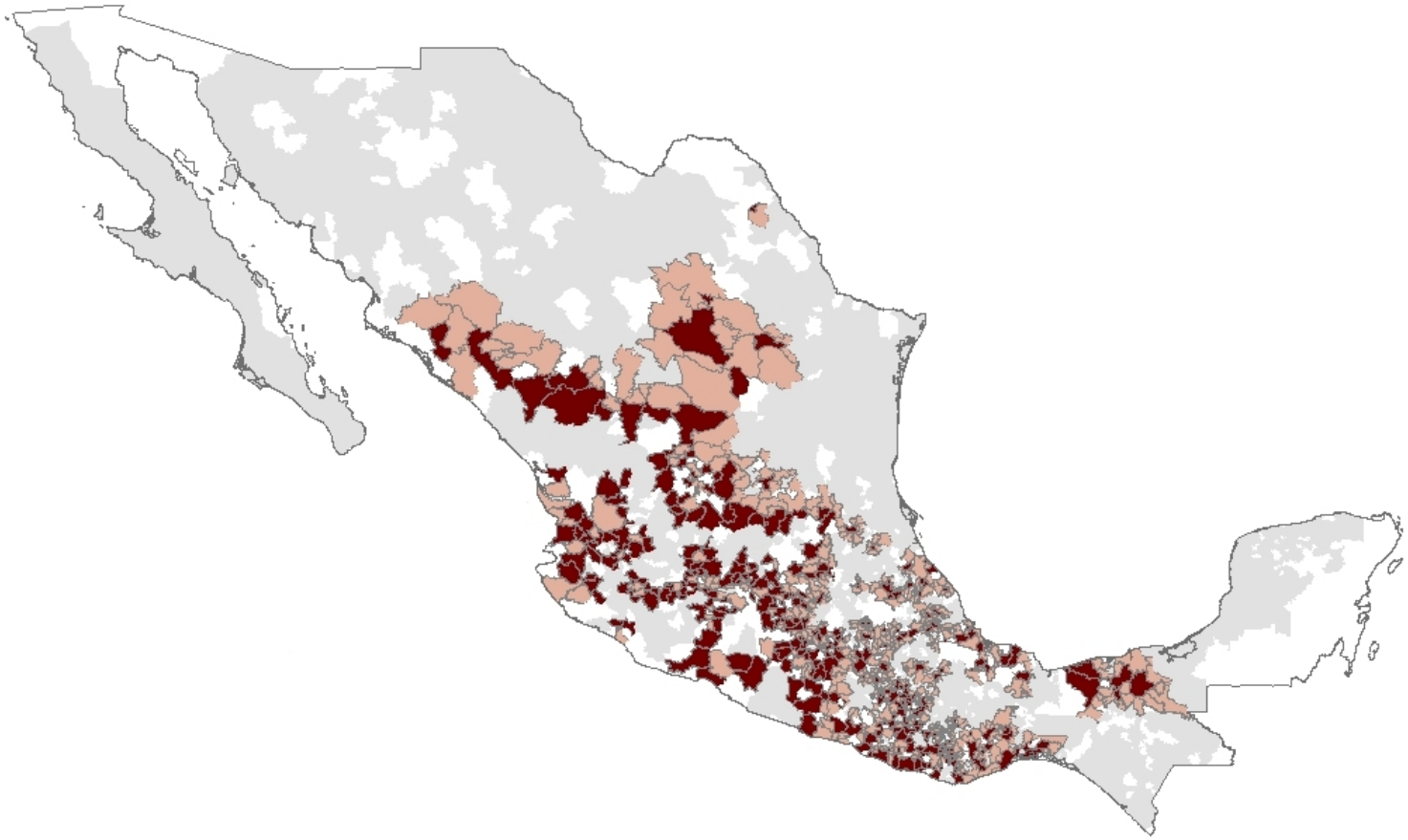
Models 6-8 are linear probability models. The estimation sample for each model is formed by pairs of neighboring municipalities with and without rural militia presence between 1932 and 1946. Each municipality in a pair shares a neighbor-pair fixed effect. Observations are included only if municipalities share a border, have opposite values in a binary variable indicating rural militia presence, and none of the elements of the pair has missing values in any of the variables in the models. Geographic controls include distance to the state capital (km), distance to Mexico City (km), the measure of terrain ruggedness described in the text, and average annual rainfall (mm). Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level and appear in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A1: Geography of the Cristero War (1926-1929)

Note: Dark areas depict municipalities that joined the religious Cristero War. For clarity, municipal boundaries are not shown. Municipalities that did not exist at the time appear in white.

Figure A2: Neighboring municipalities with and without Cristero War participation (1926-1929)



Note: The map shows municipal pairs included in the neighbor-pair fixed effects regression reported in column 1 of Table A5. Dark red municipalities are those that experienced Cristero insurgency *and* have a neighbor that did not, marked in lighter color. The gray area covers municipalities that are excluded because they and their neighbors have the same value in the Cristero War indicator. The white area covers municipalities that are excluded because they did not exist at the time or data are missing from the relevant pairs.