

MEXICO 1968
MECHANISMS OF STATE CONTROL
TLATELOLCO, THE PRI AND THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

by

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Carlos Aguirre

On October 2 1968, Mexican government troops fired on hundreds of unarmed student protestors at *la Plaza de Las Tres Culturas* in Mexico City, killing an unknown number of those gathered. The event illustrated a breakdown in Mexican politics, specifically in the legitimacy of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the PRI, for short). The party created its own brand of manufactured democracy, which allowed it to hold the Mexican presidency (under a variety of specific names) from 1929 to 2000. Using violence, generous media and union control, as well as other means, the PRI fought against an upstart student movement. The government massacre on October 2, 1968 illustrated a breakdown in normal mechanisms of control, to which excessive violence was a response. Exceedingly effective in the short term, the massacre delegitimized the PRI in the long-term, and partially contributed to the election of a non-PRI president in 2000, according to many historians. This thesis proposes that in the understandable haste to condemn the Mexican government's actions the night of October 2, 1968, not enough attention is focused on the effectiveness of the violence in silencing student—to a certain degree, popular—resistance to the government.

Acknowledgements

Approximately three years ago I stepped into the office of Professor Carlos Aguirre. As a freshman, I was intent on working hard in the Honors College, and I knew I eventually would have to write a thesis. My Spanish and History double majors made writing a thesis about Latin American history the natural path. I did not know what I wanted to write about, but I knew I wanted to start with the process as soon as possible. So, I did some research, and decided that The War of the Pacific (1879-1883) between Bolivia, Chile, and Peru would fit the bill. I informed Professor Aguirre of my intentions and asked him what I could do. Perhaps taken aback, he gave me a list of sources to read. Three years later, my thesis is *not* about the War of the Pacific, but Professor Aguirre *is* my thesis advisor. Thanks goes to him. Additionally, the other three committee members—Professors García-Caro, Balbuena, and Haskett—deserve recognition for their time. Lastly, this paper wouldn't have happened if not for my semester at *la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. I am grateful for the efforts of the staff at the Office of International Affairs, particularly those of Luis Ruiz.

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INTRODUCTION

Tlatelolco 1968. In Mexico the phrase rings out. On October 2 1968, thousands of protestors gather to demonstrate against the government headed by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). Only a scant ten days before the start of the Olympic games in Mexico, these often young demonstrators are working against what they see as a repressive, authoritarian, and non-responsive government. On the surface, their anger seems misdirected. On average, from 1940 to 1960 Mexico's economy grew 6 percent per year, a phenomenon called the Mexican Miracle. A coming demographic boom will raise the population of Mexico by around 40 percent. The ruling PRI party has held the presidency for the last 39 years. Mexico is touted as a model of stability, and is supposed to be on its way to becoming a developed country. The Mexico of the protestors, however, is one where "the wealthiest 20 percent of Mexican families increased their share of total family income from 59.8 percent in 1950 to 63.7 percent in 1968," and where "the share of family income held by the poorest 60 percent shrank from 24.6 percent to 18.4 percent over the same period."¹ In their country, no matter their vote, the PRI candidate always wins, and will continue to win the presidency for another 32 years. One newspaper, *Siempre!*, puts the number of dead at 40, and another, *El Día*, at 30, and even another account comes up with 300. In the aftermath of the event, the government blames student snipers for shooting on the government troops, and provoking the killings. Domestic and international press coverage, in addition to foreign governments, at least outwardly accepts the government explanation. Only in recent years has declassified intelligence evidence cast serious doubt on the

¹ Middlebrook, Kevin J. *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 215.

government's account. It seems more likely that the Mexican president ordered undercover government troops to fire on other government troops, to provoke the troops and to give the Mexican government *carte blanche* in suppressing the student movement. Whatever the cause, the incontrovertible fact is that on October 2, 1968 Mexican government troops fire on and kill an unknown but significant number of protestors in *la Plaza de Las Tres Culturas* in Mexico City.

This thesis is above all concerned with two historical issues: how the Mexican post-revolutionary political system worked in its attempt to co-opt, control, and/or suppress dissidence and opposition, and how the student movement fought against this control. It ended up suffering fierce repression, and proved to be unable to undermine – at least in the short run- PRI's control over the political system. As to the former issue, in various guises what eventually became known as the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* held the Mexican presidency from 1929 to 2000, a span of 71 years. It participated in a sort of manufactured democracy in which the official candidate of the party would run a campaign and invariably win. In order to maintain its power, among other techniques, the PRI used violence and spied on protestors; nurtured a sycophantic relationship with a largely compliant media; promoted the corporatism of society via the creation of massive unions whose leadership and rank and file were beholden to the Party for most of their benefits; carried out rigged elections; and engaged in patronage politics. On its part, the Mexican student movement for its part resembled other youth movements around the world. Its members could generally be described as young members of the middle to upper middle classes, university students from Mexico City, international counterculture aficionados (baggy clothing, rock music, and the like), stern

opponents of the PRI government, and an enthusiastic audience for events and programs unfolding in Fidel Castro's socialist revolution in Cuba. The Mexican students registered their displeasure with the current status quo through multiple protests where the number of participants reached into the hundreds of thousands, an occupation of Mexico's National Autonomous University (known as la UNAM), and a boycott of classes, among other activities. However valiant or foolish these actions were, the students did not force the ouster of the government, and in fact the PRI would hold the presidency another 32 years. This thesis will explore how, using the aforementioned mechanisms of control, the PRI was able to withstand social unrest and extend its rule for another three decades.

The thesis that follows begins with a first chapter discussing the PRI's beginnings following the Mexican Revolution, and will trace its evolution under a variety of names into the 1960s. Along the way, mechanisms of control exerted by the PRI will be examined in some detail. Chapter 2 studies the student movement that was counter-posed against PRI dominance and which suffered from those mechanisms of control. Since it is imperative to recapture the rebel spirit of the moment, Chapter 2 will consider *who* the students were (socioeconomic background, gender, and location) as much as *what* they did and which political causes they supported. More conservative Mexicans, including the ruling elite, took the students' different ways of dress, taste in music, and of course political ideologies as threats. So, this *what* will include explanations of massive protests, organizational efforts, strikes, and a takeover of Mexico's National Autonomous University. Having explained some of the clash between the PRI and the students, the thesis will finally approach the protest itself in

Chapter 3, which addresses the events of October 2, 1968 by describing the thoughts and actions of some protestors that night, the government's repression of the students, the immediate aftermath of the massacre, and the struggles the government faced following Tlatelolco. By way of conclusion, Chapter 4 reflects on the outcome of October 1968, arguing that the government fared much better than the student movement. Not only did the public initially blame the students for the event, but the students themselves seemed to lose their appetite for massive protests. The Game of the XIX Olympiad proceeded rather smoothly, giving the Mexican government its showcase event. What's more, none of the key government figures behind the government's actions have ever had to face legal action. The Minister of the Interior Luis Echeverría, who in fact was widely considered to have had advocated for the violent government response, was elected as president in 1970. The election of one of the key architects of the government response seems to show that the government's reaction to a peaceful protest was equal parts disgusting and effective.

One can also argue that the events of October 2, 1968 represent the periodic struggle in Mexican politics between two tendencies. On the one hand, Mexico resembles other Latin American countries in its deep economic inequalities. From colonial times onward, a small, landed elite ruled over the masses. In the twentieth century, the PRI favored this class of Mexicans by trying to co-opt any political dissent. On the other hand, the Party of the State enacted populist policies—land reform, nationalizing the oil industry, protecting huge labor organizations—in addition to courting rural *campesinos* as a key electoral support group. The party, in short, attempted to balance the functions of a ruling and opposition party at the same time, and

to meet the dual demands of the Mexican Revolution of stability and justice. Indicative of this trapeze act, the PRI co-opted labor organizations that it nonetheless permitted to grow in influence. It nationalized the oil industry, thereby putting an end to one of the greater signs of foreign imperialism, and installed in its place a behemoth of a national corporation, *Petroleos Mexicanos*, that came with its own powerful *sindicato*. Viewed in this context, the Mexican student movement carried the mantle of reform championed by Mexicans before them, such as Francisco Madero or Pancho Villa.

This struggle continues. Mexico again bears the distinction of having an economy lauded by international organizations. Yet, as of July 2013, approximately half of the Mexican population lived in poverty.² The recent 2012 presidential election bore allegations of classic PRI tactics bringing their candidate to power: soft media coverage of eventual President Enrique Peña Nieto, voter fraud, and a student movement that protested the results of the election. Yo Soy 132 (I am 132)—named in solidarity after the 131 students of the *Universidad Iberoamericana* that posted videos to Youtube stating their opposition to Peña Nieto, after the candidate visited campus and declared that the protestors gathered were not students—only further demonstrates the still-present tension between the student movement and the government.

This thesis builds upon an extensive base of previous scholarship regarding the massacre at la Plaza de las Tres Culturas. I have drawn my own interpretations, though they too are informed in various ways by preexisting work. My own investigation aims to contribute to the field by bringing together different elements that have not necessarily been strongly associated in the past. It views Tlatelolco as a highly

² Wilson, Christopher, and Gerardo Silva. "Mexico's Latest Poverty Stats." (*The Wilson Center*, 2013). http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Poverty_Statistics_Mexico_2013.pdf

symbolic moment for the student movement and the government, as well as Mexican and international counterculture. Whereas many, if not most, of the works upon which I have relied concentrate on a particular angle connected with the protest—be it the student movement, the government’s influence over Mexican society, the domination of the PRI—my study will try to synthesize a number of interrelated themes.

CHAPTER 1: THE PRI AND ITS MECHANISMS OF CONTROL

General Porfirio Díaz' nearly three-decade rule from 1876 to 1911 resembled that of other Latin American strongmen. The *Pax Porfiriana* (Porfirian Peace) masked general instability. During the *Porfiriato*, the dictator's armed forces maintained a stalemate with opposition strongmen and other would-be challengers to the status quo. Latin American dictators like Díaz sometimes succeeded in bringing stability and political development, but this outward stability usually reflected fierce inward tensions: Díaz' declaration to an American journalist that the 1910 elections would be free and that he would eventually "retire" to Europe marked the beginning of the end for the dictator. He would be persuaded to run for office again, despite his earlier statement, and go on to win the 1910 presidential election. Things quickly changed after that. Francisco Madero, an avowed opponent of the regime and contender for the 1910 presidency in 1910, whom Díaz had previously jailed, called the people of Mexico to challenge the illegitimate Díaz regime. An uprising ousted Díaz, and in October 1911, Madero became the constitutional president of Mexico. His, and the other various revolutionary factions, attempted to address some of the long-term inequalities that had up until that point plagued Mexico, principal among them the differences between a landed, richer, fairer-skinned aristocracy and a poorer, darker-skinned collection of laborers. In 1913, only two years after toppling the *ancien régime*, Madero's government was ended by a former Díaz crony, General Victoriano Huerta, who himself would only lead Mexico for a short time. Venustiano Carranza, a wealthy landowner whom Madero trusted and who himself had risen to the rank of general, would oust his military comrade a year later. While *pax Carranza* certainly never

existed—the wealthy landowner and former governor of Coahuila was killed on the orders of his supposed supporter General Álvaro Obregón about 7 years after his rule started—Mexico did take some important steps forward. The drafting of the very liberal 1917 constitution that, for example, classified all natural resources as property of the state and forbid foreigners from owning land was a huge step forward for a country previously ruled by fiat. Excessive executive power did not end with Carranza—he, after all, called himself the Premier Jefe and, among other actions, refused to implement some of the more liberal articles of the Constitution—but the beginnings of rule of law would grow in the years to come.

In 1920, after Carranza's assassination, regional *caciques* (warlords) and other would-be plotters reflected a weak Mexican state that had nonetheless started to stabilize. Building off the achievements of the Carranza era, Obregón implemented land reform, supported the formation of labor unions, and helped begin Mexico's nationalist project. Mexico again appeared to be stable until the time for transition came; forced by constitutional term limits to step down in 1924, Obregón arranged for comrade and friend Plutarco Elías Calles to take up the reigns of power. The apparent peaceful transition of power in reality masked stiff opposition from the Catholic Church. The ecclesiastical authorities neither liked the strict separation between church and state imposed by the Constitution of 1917 or the threat of losing Church lands and other properties to the state. *La ley Calles*, a set of laws that the President helped pass in 1929 worsened the situation. Among other requirements, law codes forbid the wearing of religious symbols in public, the teaching of religion in state schools, worshiping in public (targeting such things as traditional processions and saints' festivals), and forbid

publically criticizing the Constitution. As can be imagined for a country as devoutly Catholic as Mexico was, these laws were not popular. It was so unpopular, in fact, that brigades of citizens known collectively as the Cristeros staged armed uprisings against the government. Never fully successfully, the violence still consumed the country.

Like his predecessor, Calles was eventually forced by term limits to give up the presidency; when the president elect Álvaro Obregón was assassinated by a Catholic partisan, however, stability seemed sure to falter. In order to maintain the progress that the country had made from the start of the revolution, Calles helped form the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR). Although Calles never held the presidency, he was nonetheless the power behind the scenes as the *Jefe Máximo*. Along with Calles, other Mexican powerbrokers made the PNR an alliance of elites. The PNR, which would become the *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano* (PRM) in 1938, and then finally the PRI in 1946. The emergence of this broad-based, power party put an end to the constant vying for power by different factions and political tendencies by sharing power. Whereas previously a Mexican head of state would often leave power in exile (like Díaz) or death (like Carranza), the genius of the PRI and its predecessor organizations was to offer continued stability à la Díaz with some populist concessions. By carrying the mantle of the revolution, the PRI started a durable political system with many facets to it.

Presidential populism was one such occasional strategy. Unlike other famous Latin American populists, such as Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Perón of Argentina, Mexican PRI candidates were usually more aloof. Presidents Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) and Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) are

the exceptions. President Calles ran on a platform of expanding the public school system, ensuring more equitable land distribution, enforcing existing labor regulations, and defending Mexico's sovereignty in face of a more-powerful United States.³

President Cárdenas carried on with some of the same populist initiatives as Calles had. Where Calles disliked the Church and indigenous groups, Cárdenas had his quarrels with the National Autonomous University in Mexico City. He helped found the National Polytechnic Institute in January 1936, in order to diminish the former's importance in Mexico. Importantly, Cárdenas earned the loyalty of the masses by using the full power of his office to promote nationalistic reforms, chief among them land and natural resource reform. On March 18, 1938 his government nationalized seventeen foreign oil companies, including companies from the United States and Europe. The resulting creation of *Petroleos Mexicanos*, the state oil company known as Pemex; this State corporation still exists, though it has become much more controversial over the years. Even though the American and British governments reacted predictably by banning all Mexican oil imports and eventually requiring the Mexican government to pay a significant indemnity, the move was popular with average Mexicans. Other moves by the president included the banning of capital punishment, and the welcoming of exiled intellectuals from around the world. He won further acclaim by reaching out to rural and poorer Mexicans. One story popularly told amongst Mexicans during the era relates how Cárdenas receives a list of important matters to attend to from his secretary. Banking reserves are low, an agricultural problem has struck, and the national railroad company has gone broke. Finally, the secretary mentions that a poor Mexican from a

³ Kiddle, Amelia M, and María L. O. Muñoz. *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 46.

rural area is having problems with some of crops. Rather than attend to some of the very serious national crises, Cárdenas leaps to the aid of the poor Mexican. “Order the presidential, [sic] train at once...I am leaving for Huitzilpitzco.”⁴ This story illustrates Cárdenas’ focus on ordinary Mexicans. Populist Mexican presidents had a definite impact on Mexican society.

Pre-revolutionary features of Mexican political culture—corporatism, presidencialism, *caciquismo*—survived and shaped the PRI’s rule. From the president down, *El Jefe* or the boss had extreme power. The president could rule by fiat, declare how *he* wanted to interpret Congress’ regulations, and decide the legislative agenda.⁵ On a more local level, politicians saw it as their duty to redistribute federal monies. A form of “Big Man” politics, these *caciques* established patronage networks that propelled their political careers. Luisa Paré, a Mexican professor with the UNAM, suggests that, “A cacique is not chosen for his virtues or popular authority, but ‘his power is supported by economic influence and is therefore coercive.’”⁶ After leaving office in 1940, for example, President Cárdenas was appointed the head of a government commission responsible for distributing construction funds. Like a good *cacique*, he had the authority to dole out all contracts for “irrigation canals, electricity, motorway and road construction, clinics and hospitals, sewer systems...”⁷ On the local level, PRI candidates cultivated local officials and formed patronage networks. Campaigns did not revolve around policy debates as much as which candidate could

⁴ Kiddle et al. 19.

⁵ Williams 163, 164.

⁶ Knight, Alan, Wil Pansters, and Daniel Newcomer. 2007. “Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico” (*The American Historical Review*, 2007), 352.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

appear to be the strongest through mass rallies, ballot box stuffing, and above all through the allegiance of local leaders. This network of favored individuals, called the *camarilla*, were “loyalty-based, patron/client networks that link[ed] individuals of different political status, different ministries, different levels of government, and even different regions.”⁸ These individuals promoted the candidate, in addition to identifying how best to spend government money. Mass rallies were used to gauge a candidate’s strength, and a turnout numbering in the double digits was often seen as a weak showing.⁹ The PRI also had a host of other advantages on its side. It had more money than its competitors, and could run extensive advertising campaigns. *Bardas* (painted walls), flyers and posters lined villages in campaign season. If necessary, PRI candidates would resort to paying *mapaches*, hired locals, to rig an election.

Economic populism was another key trait of the Mexican political system. Table 3.1 from *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival* by Beatriz Magaloni shows the PRI spent more federal money in the average election year than in the average non-election year:

⁸ Williams, Mark E. "Traversing the Mexican Odyssey: Reflections on Political Change and the Study of Mexican Politics." (*Mexican Studies/estudios Mexicanos*, 2002), 159-188.

⁹ Langston, Joy, and Scott Morgenstern. "Campaigning in an Electoral Authoritarian Regime: the Case of Mexico." (*Comparative Politics*, 2009), 166.

Budget Cycles under PRI Hegemony

Table 3.1. *Summary statistics for various components of the budget, 1938–2000, real 1994 pesos (billions)*

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Mean Non-	
	(I)	(II)	(III)	Electoral Year	Electoral Year	Difference
				(IV)	(V)	(IV–V)
Total expenditure	756	9.08	9.35	9.66	8.79	0.87*
Budgetable expenditure	756	5.35	4.93	5.74	5.15	0.59**
Current expenditure	756	1.80	1.56	1.93	1.73	0.20**
Capital expenditure	756	2.17	2.15	2.35	2.08	0.27**
Current transfers	756	2.05	2.57	2.24	1.96	0.28*
Revenue sharing	755	1.12	1.41	1.20	1.07	0.13

t-test (one-tailed): * 90% significant; ** 95% significant.

Note: Budgetable expenditure refers to total expenditure minus interest payments, debt expenditure, and revenue shares to the states. Current expenditure is the current expenditure of the federal government minus total (current) transfers. Capital expenditure includes capital expenditure and capital transfers. Current transfers are total (current) transfers. Revenue sharing refers to revenue transfers that the federal government gives to the states under the Revenue Sharing Agreement.

Magaloni tracks budget expenditures from 1938-2000 using a couple of different sources. The 1938 to 1976 data comes from the Finance Ministry, while the remaining information comes from the Central Bank. She only uses the accounting concepts that can apply to both sets of data.¹⁰ She accounts for inflation using different sources, including the General Wholesale Price Index for Mexico City and the Consumer Price Index at different points. She also accounts for other factors, which she explains in the book. The key columns to compare are the fourth, Mean Electoral Year, and the fifth, Mean Non-Electoral Year. They compare spending. The first bullet item, Total expenditure, is 9.66 (billion) during an average electoral year compared to 8.79 (billion) compared to an average Non-Electoral Year.¹¹ The other figures, budgetable expenditure, current expenditure, capital expenditure, current transfers, and revenue sharing reinforce this relationship. All show higher expenditures during a mean

¹⁰ Magaloni, Beatriz. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

electoral year than a mean non-electoral year. This graph is hardly the only analytical evidence: Magaloni additionally links the rate of inflation to the electoral cycle, attempting to show that the government introduced temporary anti-inflation measures in election years, and shows the rate of growth in a president's first year of office was higher than subsequent years thanks also to Federal monies. Together, these trends show that the PRI manipulated the economy as a tool to be used to reward the masses.

One sixty-five-year-old peasant from Morelos summarized the PRI's control in 1994 when he said:

I have always voted for the PRI because only this party can win. Why would I support the opposition if it can't win? They told me that this time they would also give us checks [he was referring to cash transfers within the then recently instituted Farmers Direct Support Program (PROCAMPO) designed to support small-scale farmers]. I must thus vote for the PRI to get my check.¹²

This quote emphasizes the dominance of the PRI—"because only this party can win"—and the support for patronage politics—"I must thus vote for the PRI to get my check."

Magaloni points out that in many countries, including rich ones, parties and governments increase expenditures in order to attract votes or are at least are accused of doing so. In the United States, Republicans sometimes levy these same charges against Democrats regarding the expansion of social entitlements, such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid or other federal programs. The difference, according to Magaloni, is that, in more authoritarian countries, such as the PRI's Mexico, voters for the opposition bloc are "punished" since favored candidates cannot distribute Federal largess as the PRI does.¹³ The student groups might qualify as being "punished" for not

¹² Magaloni 29.

¹³ Ibid., 68.

supporting the PRI, in terms of Federal largess those students believed was short-changing many Mexicans, particularly poor ones.

Cooptation of organized labor provided mixed results for Mexican workers. It first of all made them dependent upon State-negotiated frameworks for benefits. In the years after the Mexican revolution, *Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Conciliation and Arbitration Boards) ruled on workplace disputes. The Manuel Ávila Camacho administration nationalized this scheme in 1940 when it created the *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social*. While designed to give workers a forum in which they might air grievances, the new institution in fact operated so slowly that it delayed, if not permanently commuted, employee concerns. According to Kevin Middlebrook, “between 1934 and 1976...an average of 224 days elapsed between the filing of a union’s application and its final approval.”¹⁴ What is more, 13.2 percent of all applications to form a union took more than a year to process. In another study that Middlebrook conducted, he found that one prominent company, *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México*, the national railroad company, operated at such a slow pace so as to deter claimants. A worker, Gilberto Saavedra, put in paperwork to receive a raise to which he thought he was entitled. The *Junta* ruled in his favor, but he did not receive back pay until 16 years after he had filed his original claim.¹⁵ It took on average 3.1 years for a claim filed with the *Junta* to be resolved.¹⁶ In ten cases (6.0 percent) it took the *Junta* more than ten years to resolve the case, and in three of these ten cases, the worker died before his case had been processed. The *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión*

¹⁴ Middlebrook, Kevin J. *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995),180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

Social and the *Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje* worked more to the benefit of businesses than organized labor.

Critically, Mexican authorities strove to control the labor movement as much as they could. They had the power to approve or deny union elections and regulations. Additionally, while the government facilitated the power of unions, it made sure that no one union grew to be too powerful. The *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (CTM) was the biggest such union. In one such move by the government, in 1940 unions that had left the CTM were not compelled to rejoin it.¹⁷ Likewise, in 1952 the Miguel Alemán administration helped foster the creation of a rival to the CRM, the *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos* (CROC). President Adolfo López Mateos adopted a similar strategy when his administration helped create the *Central Nacional de Trabajadores*, which was opposed to the policies of the CTM. The government wanted a powerful labor union, but one receptive to government demands.

Despite these clear inefficiencies, the system empowered labor union chiefs, who sometimes wielded their power for the greater good. Certainly, a fair number of them used their influence to benefit themselves. When Joaquín Hernández Galicia, the former Oil Workers Chief, died in 2013, the *New York Times* obituary noted that Galicia might have bilked union funds for personal use, permitted nepotism, and even allowed for contracted workers not to work in exchange for paying a portion of their salaries to their bosses.¹⁸ With that said, some labor union bosses appear to have represented workers' interests. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, founder of the CTM and later the

¹⁷ Middlebrook 150.

¹⁸ Yardley, William. "Joaquín Hernández Galicia, Oil Workers Chief, Dies at 91." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 Nov. 2013. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

Partido Popular, railed against what he saw as the foreign imperialism of the United States. For Toledano, socialism could provide a more equitable Mexico.

The PRI-controlled state also enlisted intellectuals in its project of imposing political hegemony. Among other things, intellectuals helped promote Mexican nationalism, a project that started in the early 20th century. Two intellectuals, Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos, were particularly influential. Gamio, who came from a prosperous Mexico City family and had attended some of the elite schools of the day, was well known for calling upon Mexico to embrace its indigenous roots. Although he believed that indigenous and mestizo people “suffered from ‘deformed’ traits that impeded their continued ‘cultural evolution,’” he also believed that Mexico should abandon its worship of Europe, and instead embrace Mexico’s indigenous culture. In order to improve their lot, Gamio believed all Mexicans had to receive an education, which would form a “cultural conduit linking each segment of society to the rest of the population.”¹⁹ Gamio established the first such government-supported institution with the Bureau of Anthropology (Dirección de Antropología) in 1917.

Vasconcelos, who came from a more humble background and served in a variety of government posts throughout his life, helped establish the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Instrucción Pública) in 1921. Like Gamio, Vasconcelos believed that Mexico was in need of a more concrete national identity, but the two differed regarding from where this identity would spring. Gamio valued the lower classes, whereas Vasconcelos’ *Raza Cósmica* theory only paid lip service to Mexico’s ethnic diversity. In an era in which Social Darwinism had yet to die, Vasconcelos still

¹⁹ López, Rick A. *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State After the Revolution*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 131.

identified more with European philosophers and European thought. For them, Mexico was inferior, a notion Vasconcelos never fully rejected. The former Secretary of Education (1921-1924), however, deserves credit for promoting the creation of schools not just in the capital and other major cities, but throughout Mexico as well.

The post-revolutionary government not only recruited intellectuals, but it also funded other institutions such as the Museum of Popular Art (Museo de Artes Populares), the National Museum of Anthropology, and the UNAM. Projects ranged from the publishing of an encyclopedia that linked the Mexican state to pre-Columbian societies, to the funding of the *Muralismo*, mural painting, movement. The government financed this latter project in the hopes of shaping popular opinion, because it was thought that the written word might prove too much of an obstacle for Mexico's masses (many of whom were literate or semi-literate) and because of the popularity of pre-Columbian paintings. Many works dealt with Mexico's pre-Columbian past, its ever more industrial present, and inequalities between rich and poor, and indigenous and European citizens. Perhaps the most famous Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, did that in many works, including *Market in Tlatelolco*, which shows the pre-Hispanic capital of Tenochtitlan in Aztec times. *Destruction of the Old Order*, by José Clemente Orozco, another prominent muralist, echoed some of these same themes. Two humbly-attired shoeless Mexicans only wearing white shirts and pants gaze back into an ornate building with columns crumbling in cubist fashion. As the title indicates, the building's demise is the fall of previous social hierarchies. The potential *campesinos* are marching off into the uncertain future.

Muralismo valorized Mexico's indigenous masses and pre-Columbian roots. The Departamento de Monumentos Artísticos, Arqueológicos e Históricos (Department of Artistic, Archaeological, and Historic Monuments) was formed in 1930 under the Emilio Portes Gil administration. The next step came in 1938 when President Cárdenas eliminated the DMAAH and created the National Institute of Anthropology and History (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e History, INAH). Government-financed organizations better helped to define Mexican national identity, and created if not an alliance a common purpose for intellectuals and the PRI.

This common purpose was far from seamless; indeed, intellectuals often chafed at informal restrictions. Publishers would avoid authors and works that they thought would arouse government ire. Various laws authorized government censorship well into the 20th century. From 1916-1937 a law banned “malicious expressions calculated to excite hatred of the authorities, the army, the national guard, or the fundamental institutions of the country.”²⁰ In 1946 President Miguel Alemán helped pass an even more restrictive law, one that “g[ave] the state the right to restrict or prohibit publication of photographs of people without their permission or of works considered contrary to the respect due private life, morals, and public.”²¹ The state could also bribe intellectuals to say positive things about the government or to destroy the reputation of opposition leaders. One intellectual, Mario Guerra Leal, claims that President Adolfo López Mateos administration paid him 100,000 pesos to write negative articles about a

²⁰ Camp, Roderic Ai. *Intellectuals and the state in twentieth-century Mexico*. (Austin: University of Texas, 1985), 193.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

labor union leader.²² Writer Jorge Ayala Blanco alleged that the government assessed excessive taxes against those individuals it disliked. One government official, Alberto J. Pani, ordered a tax inspection of two businesses advertising in a Mexican newspaper that had offended Pani.²³ The Mexican state was creative in finding ways of pressuring intellectuals whom it disliked.

The PRI did their best to form a system that placated the public in exchange for the PRI's continued electoral dominance. Electioneering and populist candidates glorified the average Mexican and gave him/her the illusion of choice. Increased public spending during election years and on favored social groups provided a tangible benefit to some Mexicans, but drove attention away from long-term macroeconomic (mis)management. Vast labor unions ensured that workers would have a way to address their grievances, but the slowness of the government-designed system took away true justice from some claimants. Intellectuals joined the government, to a point, in its nationalistic projects, but also had to guard against government retribution for unapproved actions. Joined together with an often-flattering media engaging in self-censorship, the intellectuals helped drive a national discourse that promoted Mexico and the PRI. Although many of these trends predated the PRI—*caciquismo* and economic populism among them—the party of the State quickly adapted them for its own benefit. The PRI, in short, coopted opposition with pseudo-democratic institutions more legitimate than those associated with a dictatorship but whose key mission was to ensure continued PRI rule in ways that did not necessarily represent the best interests of ordinary Mexicans.

²² Camp 201.

²³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Student protest and organization has a long history in Mexico. The early era of Mexican higher education saw the formation of student organizations and minor clashes with the state. President Porfirio Díaz inspired an early protest on March 21, 1910. The Maderist Student Club was concerned with the dictator's grasp on power. That summer, students from the National School of Medicine called together a nation-wide congress in order to address common complaints with the government, ranging from dirty classrooms to lack of professional opportunities afforded them after graduation. The construction of national centers of higher education, including the UNAM in 1910, gave the students a platform upon which to stage their demonstrations. Campus-wide strikes, with masses of students, protests, and slogans against the government, taught the ruling elites to keep careful watch of student activities by cutting the budgets of national universities, passing laws limiting freedom of speech, and controlling who was appointed University Rector. An August 1920 protest that ended with the expulsion of twelve students, for example, was organized by the *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria* (FEU), and dealt with the sacking of a former UNAM Rector.²⁴

Ensuing post-revolutionary decades saw much of the same. The formation of student groups, such as the *Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes* (CNE) in 1931 and the *Confederación Estudiantil Socialista de México* (CESM) in 1935 demonstrated greater student strength. The defeat of and the protests inspired by the so-called Organic Law, which would have divided the National Polytechnic Institute (Instituto Politécnico Nacional) into several smaller trade schools, showed this growing clout. A March 1942

²⁴ Mabry 36.

march against the law saw six dead and twenty injured.²⁵ The prospect of another Organic Law led to an April 1948 strike that lasted until the beginning of May, when student infighting caused a majority of the protestors to begin to listen to government offers. After these two demonstrations, similar rallies would not occur until 1968.

Playing into renewed student mobilization in the Tlatelolco era was the deeply unequal nature of Mexican society, the authoritarian character of the PRI state, and the influence of the Cuban revolution, along with and other foreign developments. In the economic arena, between 1940 and 1960, Mexico's economy grew by more than 6 percent a year. This rapid economic growth—dubbed the “Mexican Miracle”—brought growing social inequalities: The “wealthiest 20 percent of Mexican families increased their share of total family income from 59.8 percent in 1950 to 63.7 percent in 1968,” and where “the share of family income held by the poorest 60 percent shrank from 24.6 percent to 18.4 percent over the same period.”²⁶ Rampant inflation, which averaged 17.8 percent per year between 1941 and 1946, further cut into the livelihoods of average Mexicans.²⁷ Periodic peso devaluations, such as was the case in 1948 and 1954, further put stress on average Mexicans.

The students themselves came from varied backgrounds. A majority of UNAM students—58%, according to 1964 university data—came from Mexico City.²⁸ They generally came from middle or upper-middle class families, as the typical student's

²⁵ Pensado, Jaime M. *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture During the Long Sixties*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 48.

²⁶ Middlebrook 215.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ Mabry 217.

family income was on average 219% higher than the national median.²⁹ To no great surprise, a clear majority (70%) received family support in order to attend university. The students benefited from a growing middle class. In 1895, the middle class represented 16 percent of the population, in 1940 16 percent, in 1960 22 percent, and in 1970 29 percent.³⁰ Doctors, lawyers, and professors, joined artists, secretaries, and clerks in this new middle class that emerged from the “Mexican Miracle,” as it was called.

Students in Mexico, as elsewhere in the world, were undergoing a process of radicalization linked with the rise of the “New Left.” Up until the mid 1950s, the Soviet Union had served as the primary inspiration for leftist movements. Unequivocal support for the USSR faded, however, with Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 denunciation of former leader Joseph Stalin, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, events that both signaled Soviet ideological inconsistencies. Around the same time, the escalating Cuban Revolutionary movement presented Latin America with leftist style apparently more compatible with the continent than the Soviet model. Instead of stressing a “heroic caudillo figure capable of leading the masses toward liberation...” the Cubans adopted *foquismo*, a strategy that declared that a group of small band of guerillas could established a revolutionary beachhead that would then spread.³¹ Alternatives to the Soviet hierarchical discourse might have had appeal in Mexico, a country where the PRI controlled official political dialogue. In order to fit in with the New Left, students

²⁹ Mabry 217.

³⁰ Walker 3.

³¹ Zolov, Eric. “Expanding Our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an Old to a New Left in Latin America.” *A Contracorriente: Revista de Historia Social y Literatura en América Latina* 5.2 (2008): 47–73.

attempted to stress their revolutionary, proletariat credos. In the context of a nation with widespread poverty in which most student activists came from middle to upper middle class backgrounds, many would compete with each another to be as little bourgeois as possible. Some would take the bus when they could drive, and wear old clothes instead of new purchases.

If socioeconomic and gender roles divided the students, ideology, specifically the socialism of the Cuban Revolution, proved to be more of a uniting force. When rebel Fidel Castro and his guerillas in the July 26 Movement (so called for the date of the failed assault on the Moncada Barracks in 1953) entered Havana on January 8 1959, their revolution marked not only the fall of U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista but also the beginning of a sometimes-armed but more often a contest of rhetorical contest between the United States and Cuba over the role of democracy in the Western Hemisphere. After consolidating power from 1959-1961—a process that included the trials of former Batista officials and supporters, some of which ended in death by firing squad—Castro proclaimed the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution on April 16 1961, declaring that henceforth Cuba would be a Communist country. Numerous groups within the Latin American left started guerrilla movements inspired by the Cuban model. Successful or not, revolutionary movements in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, and other Latin American countries all looked to Havana for ideological guidance.

The Cuban Revolution—and the PRI government's fear of its influence—had a broad effect on the Mexican student movement. Ideologically, student groups from what was called the New Left profited, including the CNED and the PCM. While not

advocating for the violence of the Cuban Revolution, these group nonetheless took inspiration from its calls for social equality. Popular media depicted students as vulnerable to *manos extrañas*, foreign hands, which was understood to mean the threat of international communism. One cartoonist for the popular newspaper *Excélsior* printed two cartoons that showed these estranged students. One, titled “Psycho-students,” shows a doctor examining a young student accompanied by his mom. The properly-dressed mom—she is wearing a hat and heels—contrasts with the son’s ill-fitting jeans and jacket. The mother holds her son, whose face appears to be caught in a snarl. The mom, for her part, looks quizzically at the doctor. At the bottom of the cartoon, a line of text from the doctor reads: “Sorry, but I cannot diagnose [your son].”³² A more evocative cartoon shows a father dressed in a suit walking down to the school with his son. The son, dressed with a collared shirt and in lock step with his father, looks back at a man hidden in the corner. He is holding the flag of the USSR. Scattered on the ground are sheets of paper that carry the words “strike.”³³ The Cuban Revolution inspired the Mexican left and the student movement, and provoked a heavy handed response in popular media.

The Mexican government’s relationship with Castro veered between acceptance and rejection. Mexico had served both as a refugee for Spanish-speaking intellectuals across the world during the twentieth century while at the same time committing its own intelligentsia to nationalistic projects. The López Mateos administration’s decision to denounce Cuba’s role in the Cuban Missile Crisis and at the same time to maintain official ties with the island nation in the face of great U.S. pressure is typical of the

³² Pensado 94.

³³ Ibid 96.

Mexican government's approach. The Mexican government supported Cuba in international forums against US hostility, while at the same time cooperated with US agencies in fighting against the "Communist threat." It is in this vein that Mexican students' enthusiasm with the Cuban revolution Castro and company fell; while there existed an official Mexican Communist Party (PCM), the PRI took great exception to the possibility of it winning any substantial power.³⁴ In the context of the Cold War, government forces took a dim view of any mass rallies, which they (deservedly or not) identified with Communism and subversion. A July 26, 1968 rally commemorating the Cuban Revolution, for instance, was met with police violence. Just as Mexico welcomed foreign intellectuals but attempted to control the best and brightest born in Mexico, so too did the Mexican government befriend the Cuban government while denouncing its ideological presence in Mexico. Concerning the student movement's high regard for the Cuban Revolution, one student reported that: "Maybe that's why we chose Che as our symbol at demonstrations from the very beginning. Che was our link with student movements all over the world! We never considered Pancho Villa."³⁵ This is the same Ernesto "Che" Guevara that President Echeverría would describe, along with his *comandante* Castro, as his "admirable friends."³⁶

The countercultural inclinations of many students did not help improve their reputation vis-à-vis government officials. Known as *jipitecas*, the typically young hippie tended to dress in baggy clothing and have longer hair, just like his or her

³⁴ Calderón, Fernando H. *Giving Up Books for Bullets: Students in Mexico's Guerrilla Wars, 1968-1977* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon, 2006), 31.

³⁵ Poniatowska, Elena. *Massacre in Mexico*. (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 15.

³⁶ Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México D.F.: Editorial Grijablo, 2001), 107.

American or European peer. They attended music festivals, participated in protests, and (sometimes) advocated for social change. One historian described them as, “wearing very long hair and listening to loud music like rock and roll.”³⁷ This latter point was especially notable. One band’s journey illustrates the popularity of the 1960s’ counterculture and the government’s attempts to control it. Los Dug Dug’s, a *rocanrol* band out of the rural state of Durango, made a quick journey to fame. Called *refritos*, meaning “refried” in Spanish, bands like Los Dug Dug’s adopted a distinctively North American attitude. From the apostrophe in the name to the many English-language songs in its repertoire to its American record company, the band like its peers exuded a foreign influence. By 1967 the band had established itself in Mexico City, was performing on television and made appearances in two Mexican films.³⁸ With this popularity, came government scrutiny. The mainstream media railed against what they perceived to be subversive bands like Los Dug Dug’s. One paper warned against a “Beatlebolshhevik Revolution.”³⁹ By 1969, in the aftermath of state violence at Tlatelolco, the band found Mexican youth much less receptive to their music. In some fashion, the government helped limit Los Dug Dug’s and other Mexican rock groups’ popularity.

Another cultural trend that influenced youth mobilization and political awareness was the so-called The New Song Movement, or *Canto Nuevo* or *Nueva Canción* in Spanish. Artists such as José de Molina, Oscar Chávez, Ámparo Ochoa, Ángel Parra, and Judith Reyes all expressed demands for social and political change.

³⁷ Richman et al.

³⁸ Pilcher, Jeffrey M. *The Human Tradition in Mexico*. (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2003), 216.

³⁹ “Los Cerebros de la ‘Revolución Bolchebeatle,’” “ 6 September 1968, Departamento de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Archivo General de la Nación, Gallery 2, Box 2925, Folder 32, no. 3-5.

Students embraced Nueva canción and, not surprisingly, singers also manifested some form of solidarity with the students. The unofficial anthem of the students, “Me gustan los estudiantes,” by Chilean artist Violeta Parra, was partial to one side of the student-government conflict. The title, as well as lyrics like “Que vivan los estudiantes /jardín de las alegrías” (“Long Live the Students / Garden of Joys”) and “Son aves que no se asustan” (“They are Doves that Don’t Startle) painted a positive image of the individuals involved in the clashes with *granaderos* (riot police). Other common themes discussed in Nueva Canción songs included urban life, rising up from humble beginnings, and the challenges ordinary Mexicans faced trying to better their lives. One song by José de Molina expressed popular frustrations with Mexican politics:

La democracia, la democracia
en México ya murió
los diputados, y el presidente
la llevaron al panteón.

Ya murió la democracia
ya la llevan a enterar
entre los expresidentes
y éste que es transnacional.

el imperialismo yanqui
en Salinas encontró
su caballito de Troya
para hundir nuestra nación

Democracy, democracy
has expired in Mexico
the representatives, and the president

took her to the cemetery.

The democracy has died
they take her now to be buried
among the ex-presidents
and this one who is transnational.

The Yankee imperialism
found in Salinas (de Gortari)
their little Trojan pony
in order to sink our nation.

Mexican authoritarians reacted predictably to the youth rebellion. Beyond using violence to crush protests, government officials adopted a variety of approaches. A new law passed in 1960 obliged broadcasters to “take advantage of and promote national artistic values and expressions of Mexican art,” which was widely interpreted to mean playing fewer foreign artists.⁴⁰ Mexican officials made sure to harass foreigners, especially those appearing to be hippies, entering the country.

The 1968 Olympic Games thus came at a delicate moment for the PRI. The distinction of being the first developing country to host the Games brought its share of scrutiny. An editorial from the *Detroit News* in 1965 asked if the “land of mañana” could reliably organize the event, and Art Lentz, executive secretary of the U.S. Olympic Committee predicated that the Olympics might end up in the U.S., because of Mexican ineptitude.⁴¹ Wedged between Cuba and the United States, the government had to make sure to project the appropriate geopolitical message. White doves of peace

⁴⁰ Zolov 60, 69.

⁴¹ Zolov, Eric. “Showcasing the ‘Land of Tomorrow’: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics.” (New York, NY: Routledge), 165.

became a lasting message on which both geopolitical camps could agree. While the Mexican government only spent \$176 million (a trifle compared to the \$2.7 billion Tokyo spent for the 1964 Games), this sum was still substantial for a country with the deep economic divides Mexico had. Hosting the Games was an accomplishment for Mexico, but one that came with its own challenges and costs.

On the eve of the Tlatelolco massacre, the Mexican student movement was shot through with long-existing yet recently aggravated tensions. A tradition of protest, stretching from the early 20th century on, established a pattern of students mobilizing in different organizations. Sometimes their complaints were more trivial (the condition of the medical school, for example, during the rule of Porfirio Díaz) than at others (the 1968 protests), but along with the students' less serious concerns came more serious ones. While the condition of the medical school might not raise too many national alarms, the longstanding dictatorship of Díaz did. In the same fashion, the apparently trivial start to the 1968 protests—two rival bands of students fighting for no apparent reason (see below for further discussion)—belied a movement concerned about the nature of Mexican democracy. Hailing from diverse backgrounds, these students nevertheless tended to be more fortunate than the average Mexican. This inevitably created some class tensions between the students and the average Mexicans they sought to represent. In other ways, namely gender relations and the counterculture movement, the Mexican student movement exhibited decidedly liberal values. Though the movement was no utopia—women students often carried out cleaning and cooking duties—the fact that men and women performed some tasks together led them to see each other not only as possible mates but comrades too. The counterculture movement

expressed a break with the past. Students adopted a casual appearance, baggy jeans and longer hair in defiance of accepted middle-class norms of proper dress. They listened to music that pushed for social changes and described the students as productive members of society; it also grated on the ears of older adults, marking the student aficionados of *rocanrol* from their stuffy, traditionalist elders. They simultaneously fought for social change and represented a threat to law and order. The rioting and looting following demonstrations, as happened during July 26, 1968 for example (see below), showed the ambiguities of the student movement. Many Mexicans supported the government crackdown. President Díaz Ordaz received a letter a day after the massacre that stated: “The true Mexican people congratulate you for having exercised, at last, the authority [of our government].⁴²” The stereotype of the lazy beatnik did not encompass the student movement, but neither were the students all virtuous or popular.

⁴² Pensado 20.

CHAPTER 3: OCTOBER 2, 1968

1968 unrest started from small roots. On July 22, 1968 a fight between two groups of students from different secondary schools took place. The *Arañas* (spiders) and the *Ciudadelos* (City Boys) were the two largest student groups involved.⁴³ The next day, students again fought, and were this time met by two hundred *granaderos* (riot police). The students did not enjoy this police response, and their anger only further intensified when initial press coverage depicted the “rioters” as thugs. Then on July 26, the *Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos* (National Center of Democratic Students, CNED), the *Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Técnicos* (National Federation of Technical Students, FNET), and other UNAM student groups congregated together at the Zócalo at separate rallies to commemorate the then fifteen year-old attack on the Moncada barracks, which marked the start of the Cuban Revolution. These groups represented a wide spectrum of students. The CNED, supported by the *Partido Comunista Mexicano* (PCM) served as an umbrella organization for other student groups, while the FNET was another such coalition. Members of the approximately five thousand-person crowd looted local shops. Whether these students formed a majority of the group, as the government alleged, or a radical subset, as the students themselves believed, remains unclear. In the melee that followed, the students erected barricades around parts of the UNAM campus. The tension between the students and the government continued afterwards, when the police

⁴³ Carey, Elaine. *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 39.

attributed student violence to Communist elements among the students.⁴⁴ Matters stayed this way—with the government eager to link the students to communism and radicalism and the students portraying themselves as moderates intent on reform—until the next fracas, which occurred on July 26 when a city bus gravely injured one of its passengers. Students used the occasion to commandeer 300 city busses. After more fighting between the students and police, as well as government accusations of thoughtless looting, the two groups again clashed, this time at the UNAM. The students used one of the busses as a barricade outside one of the UNAM's high schools. An uneasy sort of stalemate in which the students held off the *granaderos*, and the *granaderos* kept the students from spreading, held for the night. By July 29, the government had lost its patience: it violently retook control of the UNAM, and even used a bazooka to force its way into one of the high schools. Again, government repression engendered more student reaction. On August 1, 100,000 or so people staged a protest in the UNAM, and on August 13 between 150,000 to 200,000 demonstrators ended up at the Plaza of the Constitution, the Zócalo, in Mexico City.⁴⁵ This count itself was eclipsed by the many as 250,000 that showed up in early September to a march at the Zócalo.⁴⁶ On September 18, tired of the campus takeover, the government reclaimed the UNAM.

On October 2, 1968, following this intense summer of protestor-government clashes, a local student group called for another peaceful protest, this one to start at 5:00 pm. Between five to ten thousand protestors gathered at the designated rallying point,

⁴⁴ Carey 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁶ Mabry, Donald J. *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1971* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 261.

La Plaza de Las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco, where pre-Hispanic ruins shared space with a colonial church and *colegio* and modern apartment blocks.⁴⁷ Two helicopters, hundreds of *granaderos*, and government tanks confronted the students.⁴⁸ The protestors remained in an uneasy calm until approximately 6 P.M., at which point shots fired from one of the apartment complexes hit some of the troops. At the lighting of a flare—a pre-arranged signal, as it turned out—plainclothes government security forces entered the crowd. Each wore a white glove to signal his allegiance with the government. They, along with the other security forces, fired into the crowd. A handful of armed students responded. The government crackdown lasted for hours. The tanks fired on nearby apartment buildings as white-gloved security forces harassed, killed, and denied medical help to those gathered on the scene. Students were made to strip down to t-shirts and underwear. Students reported seeing government troops “dragging bodies by the legs down.”⁴⁹ One Italian journalist, in Mexico to cover the Olympics, described having to lie in a pool of her own blood while security forces dragged students away by their hair.⁵⁰ By the morning of October 3, the bodies of the dead had mysteriously disappeared. Hundreds of pairs of abandoned shoes attested to their former owners’ fate. The government refused the Red Cross access to the plaza, and watched over those protestors fortunate enough to make it to the Red Cross Hospital.⁵¹

The government maintained that the students were responsible for starting the hostilities on October 2. Years later when asked who he thought had opened fire on the

⁴⁷ Mabry 264.

⁴⁸ Preston, Julia, and Sam Dillon. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*. (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 70.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵¹ Poniatowska 223, 261.

government troops, President Echeverría responded “There were always a lot of armed men at these events [protests].” When asked if he thought the students had started the violence he said, “someone. The students were in very heterogeneous groups, with very different ideological backgrounds of different ages.”⁵² General Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, present at the Plaza that night, had even more forthright comments: “If the night of October 2 was bloody, it was due to the premeditated aggression of [those subversives] who [targeted] the Mexican army, whose clear intention was that there be deaths, a fact that would give them a rallying call to justify their acts and give the final blow...⁵³” Estimates of the number dead vary from as low as a couple of dozen to in the hundreds. The government reported that only 57 died that night. One newspaper, *Siempre!* put the number of dead at 40, and another, *El Día*, at 30, while the students themselves arrived at 300 as an appropriate figure.⁵⁴ Ten days later, the Games of the XIX Olympiad started smoothly.

Newly declassified CIA, State, and Defense Department cables do not back up the Mexican government’s interpretation of events. A cable dated from October 3, 1968, from the Assistant Secretary of State declares that the Díaz Ordaz government used “excessive force” in its handling of the protestors and says that security forces “gross[ly] overreacted.”⁵⁵ Mexican authorities used Communism and the role of “foreign elements” as a sort of chimera: an ever-present threat responsible for the violence, a fact impossible to confirm. The Americans accepted the existence of

⁵² Casteñeda 139.

⁵³ Aguayo Sergio. *1968: Los Archivos De La Violencia* (México, D.F: Grijalbo, 1998), 243.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵⁵ Oliver, Covey. “*Mexican Situation—Information Memorandum*. National Archives,” RG 59, 1967-69 Pol 23-8 Mex, Box 2343. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc37.pdf>

Communist leadership in the student movement, but did not buy the Mexican government's overall claim that they and foreign bodies, e.g. the Soviet Union, directed the students. A cable called "Students Stage Major Disorders in Mexico" by the CIA credits Communist students' ability to "divert a peaceful demonstration [a summer demonstration commemorating the Cuban Revolution] into a major riot," but at the same time casts doubt onto the theory that the Soviets organized it, as the Mexican government maintained.⁵⁶ In another cable, this one from September 9, the CIA again reports that the Mexican government continues to promote the Soviet-Mexican connection: "the Government has not failed, of course, to avail itself of the opportunity to blame the Communists."⁵⁷ Another cable stated: "Mexican [government] has strong evidence corroborating public charges of Mexico City police chief that Communist party chief engineered July 26 student fracas."⁵⁸ Even the American government, predisposed to accepting the credibility of Communist threats, knew the Mexican government's claims stretched the truth.

American government and press scrutiny in the days after the massacre could not reliably identify those responsible. LITEMPO, a covert CIA operation working in Mexico at the time (it paid senior government officials, including President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, for intelligence about the student movement), could not paint an accurate picture of what had happened. One report produced October 5, 1968, proposes that the

⁵⁶ United States. Central Intelligence Agency. *Students Stage Major Disorders in Mexico*. *National Security Archive*, George Washington University. n.d. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB10/docs/doc03.pdf>>.

⁵⁷ United States. Central Intelligence Agency. "Situation Appraisal of the Mexico City Student Movement." *The National Security Archive*, George Washington University. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc67.pdf>>.

⁵⁸ United States. Central Intelligence Agency. *The National Security Archive*, George Washington University. n.d. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc5.pdf>>.

students were the first to fire.⁵⁹ Another report, this one from October 2, estimates the number of students dead at twenty-four, which would be low by contemporary standards.⁶⁰ Wallace Stewart, a State Department employee, summed up the confusion present at the time when he wrote to a colleague that the CIA “had some 15 differing and sometimes flatly contradictory versions of what happened all from either ‘generally reliable sources’ or ‘trained observers on the spot.’”⁶¹ He also admitted that, “If asked how the fracas started or who started it, a Departmental spokesman might, it seems to me, quite honestly and properly have said that the situation was very confusing and that we do not know.”⁶²

To no great surprise, media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the massacre was soft. On the day of the massacre, only the 11:30 pm newscast on one television station mentioned the event, and even then most coverage was dedicated to international affairs, including the upcoming Olympic Games.⁶³ The eventual reports that later came out stressed the foreign nationalities of supposed provocateurs and stuck to low death counts. The October 3 edition of one leading Mexican newspaper, *Excélsior*, printed a large black box with the words: ¿Por qué? (why), but still stuck to government figures for the number dead.⁶⁴ The incentives for self-censorship were clear. Many television

⁵⁹ United States. Central Intelligence Agency. *Mexico City*. n.d. Web. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc74.pdf>>.

⁶⁰ United States. Central Intelligence Agency. *National Security Archive, George Washington University*. n.d. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc75.pdf>>.

⁶¹ Stewart, Wallace. Letter to Maxwell Chaplin. 18 Oct. 1968. MS. [Http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc20.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc20.pdf).

⁶² Stewart, Wallace. Letter to Maxwell Chaplin. 18 Oct. 1968. MS. [Http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc20.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/Doc20.pdf).

⁶³ De Bustamante, Celeste González. “1968 Olympic Dreams and Tlatelolco Nightmares: Imagining and Imaging Modernity on Television.” (*Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 2010), 10.

⁶⁴ Brewster, Claire. “The Student Movement of 1968 and the Mexican Press: the Cases of “excélsior” and “siempre!”” (*Bulletin of Latin American Research*. 2002), 182.

executives financially benefited from government contacts. Reporters, for their part, risked their careers if they did not comply with the government's interpretation of events. Television and radio host Jorge Saldeña deviated from the official government line, and was fired from Telesistema Mexicano and Televisión Independiente more than six times throughout his career.⁶⁵

American press coverage in the immediate aftermath of the massacre was brief. While acknowledging that, "Many women and children were among the dead and injured," and quoting one witness who said that government troops "entered without warning...There was no tear gas. They just shot at everyone," the article importantly still attributed blame for the snipers to the students.⁶⁶ By October 5, coverage by even the venerable *New York Times* had returned to more positive events: on that day a full-page spread discussed the Games. Seven large photos accompanied an article with the title "Olympics 1968: Mexico City Is Ready."⁶⁷ One photo showed an Olympic athlete wearing a mariachi hat. Another showed the new Olympic Stadium, while another showed a 2-year-old dressed in traditional Mariachi *sombrero*, embroidered jacket, and pants, playing his guitar. The article reflects the positive tone the photos strike. The first column admits "Mexico has traveled a rocky road toward the 1968 Olympic Games," and details some of the concerns the IOC had about Mexico before discussing ticket sales, Olympic venues, taxi rates, and things to do beside watching the Games. As the article concludes, "It [the Olympic Games] is all part of a once-in-a-lifetime effort to promote Mexico and make people want to come back for reasons other than the

⁶⁵ González de Bustamente 28.

⁶⁶ Montgomery, Paul L. "At Least 20 Dead As Mexico Strife Reaches a Peak." *New York Times* 2 Oct. 1968.

⁶⁷ Giniger, Henry. "Olympics 1968: Mexico City Is Ready." *New York Times* 5 Oct. 1968: S15.

Olympics.”⁶⁸ Another article, this one from August 1968, reinforces this narrative. Titled “Mexico City’s Metro—the World’s Highest Subway—Quietly Rolls Along,” it discusses the new public transit system. Mexican officials brag about new features, such as technology that reduces vibration, tunnels designed to withstand Mexico City’s frequent earthquake—one key engineering chief even goes so far as to say, “Indeed, the safest to be in Mexico City in the case of an earthquake would be in a subway station.”—turnstiles that use an air vacuum to accept tickets, and the Aztec artwork gracing some stations.⁶⁹

Participant recollections from that night provide for compelling reading. Artemisa de Gortari returns home with her husband and child of two years. As they enter the apartment at eleven at night, they notice that there is a stranger seated. He almost immediately declares that he has to take de Gortari’s husband away. When she asks why and where, he does not respond. Then an unknown car pulls up to the apartment and takes her husband away.⁷⁰ Elvira B. de Concheiro, described as the “mother of the family” says: “Little Lucias is there inside!”⁷¹ Diana Salmerón de Contreras asks, “Little brother, why don’t you answer?,” presumably talking to a dead relative. She then declares: “Let me go with him. I’m his sister,” with the caption adding that “they,” presumably security forces gave her permission to go with her brother to the military hospital. The short declarative phrases give the reader a sense of linear action in certain parts. In one section, an army official yells out that they

⁶⁸ Giniger.

⁶⁹ Wise, Sidney T. "Mexico City's Metro--the World's Highest Subway--Quietly Rolls Along." *New York Times* 3 Aug. 1968, Travel and Resorts sec.: XX1.

⁷⁰ Poniatowska 100.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

(presumably the students) are shooting at them from below and for the troops to duck. A woman cries out that she can't handle the stress anymore. Another voice declares that s/he is wounded and needs a medic. A soldier threatens a protestor saying that if s/he moves, the soldier will punish them.⁷²

According to Jorge Jörgensen, Poniatowska and other student movement proponents represent: “one of the relatively early attempts to recuperate a kind of *visión de los vencidos*...of the confrontation between the movement and the government of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.⁷³ By this he means that the book largely reflects the students' perspective, both in vision and number of commentaries. In sum, he believes that, “[b]y portraying the student movement as representative of a broad spectrum of Mexican society, the editor has confirmed from the outset the democratic claims made by the students...”⁷⁴ He furthermore proposes that Poniatowska's use of repetition and the arrangement of the testimonies additionally influences the reader. In other words, Jörgensen's admits that Poniatowska accurately portrays the Tlatelolco massacre, but he insists that she only does so from only one perspective.

The violence at Tlatelolco and the government characterization of the students as radicals did not match up with the students' vision of Mexico or of the student movement itself. Elisa Ramírez, a student, says: “We were so civilized, so Americanized. And we had the Olympic Games.”⁷⁵ Another student, Marcela Fernández de Violante, declared, “We were very young, very naïve. But for the first

⁷² Poniatowska 199.

⁷³ Jorgensen, Beth. “The Role of the Editor in Elena Poniatowsk's La Noche de Tlatelolco,” 82.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁵ Richman, Joe, Anayansi Diaz-Cortes, and Chris Turpin, prods. *Mexico '68: A Movement, a Massacre and the 40-Year Search for the Truth*. National Public Radio. 01 Dec. 2008. Web. 22 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.radiodiaries.org/audiohistory/storypages/mexicotranscript.html>>.

time, you had this notion that this country was going to be changed by the power of our convictions.”⁷⁶ Similarly, historian David Huerta described the students, including himself as, “urban middle class, low middle class bunch of young people. Many of us were wearing very long hair and listening to loud music like rock and roll.”⁷⁷ Students employed more ominous terms to describe the government. Alejandro Alvarez Bejar, another student, said: “The government was talking of the Mexican miracle. Even though in the reality of those days, things were not as happy as they appeared.” To these students Mexico was a country of haves and have-nots, and the students normal Mexicans wishing to change the country.

Gender fault lines extended into the student movement. Men disproportionately held leadership positions, and women students often were responsible for traditional “women’s work,” such as food preparation and dishwashing.⁷⁸ Male students furthermore reinforced these gender roles by often whistling and jeering during presentations by female peers.⁷⁹ Women faced the added social expectation of modesty, which forbid them from spending significant time with non-family males outside of relationships. One student named Landa recounted that she had “terrible, terrible fights” while trying to convince her parents to give her permission to participate in the movement.⁸⁰ Another student, Elena Castillo, stated that before the movement she had an approximate 8:00 pm curfew.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Richman et al.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Frazier, Lessie Jo, and Deborah Cohen. “Mexico’68: Defining the Space of the Movement, Heroic Masculinity in the Prison, and ‘Women’ in the Streets.” (*Hispanic American Historical Review* 2003), 638.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 650.

⁸⁰ Carey 52.

⁸¹ Frazier and Cohen 652.

Participation by women in the movement had the not entirely unexpected effect of liberalizing gender relations to some degree. One female student said that eventually female students were able to move beyond cooking and cleaning: “Yes, cooking was our role, and we did it well. But we also put an end to this role... (*Sí, [cocinar] era nuestro papel y lo hicimos bien. Pero también acabamos con ese rol...*).⁸² The election of women to the UNAM strike council and other student bodies demonstrated that, though a minority, women could advance. One student believed: “Before the movement, we said to ourselves, ‘I have to marry, I must be a virgin. I need to marry dressed in all white in a church, have kids, and dedicate my self to family life (*“Antes [del] movimiento] nos decíamos a nosotras mismas: ‘Debo casarme, debo ser virgen. Me tengo que casar de blanco en una iglesia, tener hijos y dedicar mi vida a mi hogar...’*).⁸³ Another student, Rosa, remembers how her participation in the student movement was the first time in her life in which she had non-sexual friendships with men. The movement opened up a new front in gender relations for many students, and combated existing sexism.

As long as the relevant parties deny involvement, the reasons why the government sent troops into the Plaza will never be fully known, but some explanations seem more plausible than others. The government itself might have panicked. Mexico had a history of student protest and government clashes, but never before did the government react with such violence. Perhaps, given that the regime felt so much pressure with the upcoming Olympic Games—these being seen as Mexico’s chance to

⁸² Semo, Ilán. *La Transición Interrumpida: México 1968-1988*. (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, Departamento de Historia, 1993), 83.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

highlight to the international community its rise to the club of rich, first-world countries—it overreacted. Mexico was the first “third world” country to host the international sporting event, and the Mexican Miracle, along with the stability of the PRI regime, was supposed to signal Mexico’s coming out moment. The government might also have felt that the student movement was crossing invisible red lines. Previous protests had remained domestic affairs. When students protested the Díaz or the Valdés regimes, the affairs had stayed self-contained. This is not to say that the students provoked the violence, but that their conduct put added pressure on the government. Beyond public relations and economic concerns, the Tlatelolco violence can be viewed as a reaction to the Mexican Miracle. If the PRI was indeed the “perfect dictatorship,” it depended upon a compliant population. The steady economic growth of the Mexican Miracle breathed life into a powerful Mexican middle class whose members wanted a prosperous Mexico for average Mexicans, not only for politically connected individuals. A more negative interpretation of the Mexican Miracle would point out how the rich became richer and the poor poorer. In this vein, the student movement might have represented mass frustration with an unjust economic system. Given modern echoes of Tlatelolco discussed in the conclusion, it seems that the October 2 protest represented a pattern of state authoritarianism, albeit one that got out of hand.

In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the government felt that it had pacified the student movement: not only had Mexican security forces sent an unequivocal message to Mexican students, but the government also had public and international support. Its narrative that students had initiated the violence, and that

security forces had merely stepped in to make sure matters did not get out of hand stuck. As incomprehensible as it may be to the modern observer, international press attention at the time—even international organizations, such as the CIA and the FBI—believed that it had been the students who had struck the initial blow. With this understanding, the Mexican government garnered sympathy for its actions, and managed to roll up the student movement before the Olympics. No protests occurred in the immediate aftermath of Tlatelolco or during the Olympics. The students officially disbanded their strike of the UNAM that December. The small marches that did occur later were easily handled by government troops. When students from the University of Nuevo León in Monterrey organized a protest on June 10, 1968 police stood by as right-wing groups attacked them. Some 25 students died in what would later be called the Corpus Christi Massacre, for the day on which it occurred. While the government pardoned some of the students involved in the seizure of the UNAM during the strike, others were held in jail until 1978. In January 1969, The Mexico City police purchased new armaments, including tanks. In an April 1969 protest seventy students were arrested. Most importantly, after Tlatelolco, and despite public disgruntlement, the PRI government remained in power.

The 1970 presidential election demonstrated that the PRI's mechanisms of control were most needed during a period of public crisis. That year, the government official most closely associated with the violent government response, former Secretary of the Interior Luis Echeverría, ran for President. Echeverría won the presidency for the PRI in an election in which 34 percent of eligible voters abstained, and 25 percent of the

ballots cast were annulled.⁸⁴ President Echeverría attempted to relegitimize the electoral process in classic PRI fashion: with a carrot-and-stick combination. Regarding the former, the President underwent a dramatic public relations makeover from the Tlatelolco villain to a populist defender. He apologized for the state's reaction to the events of October 2. Despite the risk he took in angering the conservative faction of his own party—former President Díaz Ordaz, for one, was said to be apoplectic upon hearing Echeverría had apologized—the President met with intellectuals, students, and teachers in order to better court them.⁸⁵ He acknowledged the “persistent myth” of the Mexican Miracle's equitable growth, and called for “*desarrollo compartido*,” or shared development.⁸⁶ On the campaign trail, the PRI's candidate began to wear *guayaberas*, a traditional dress shirt popular with Mexico's rural residents. During his campaign, Echeverría logged more than 55,150 kilometers, including travel to many rural areas. He also reached out to intellectuals. In the days after the Tlatelolco massacre, the intelligentsia largely rejected the PRI's approach. Writers Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes resigned their ambassadorships (Paz from India and Fuentes from France). Journalist Elena Poniatowska, compiler of *The Night of Tlatelolco*, of course, greatly contested the government's interpretation of events. Détente only occurred when Echeverría appointed intellectuals to prominent government positions. Fuentes, for example, became a member of the UNAM's presidential cabinet.

⁸⁴ Shapira, Yoram. “Mexico: The Impact of the 1968 Student Protest on Echeverría's Reformism” (Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs, 1977), 566, 567.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 573.

⁸⁶ Walker 27,48.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has pointed out how the Mexican political system worked in its attempt to co-opt, control, and/or suppress dissidence and opposition, and how the student movement fought against this control. The government used violence, labor union cooptation, greater and deliberately strategic federal spending before elections, intellectual and media control, and other methods to promote its own power. The PRI continued to rule in an authoritarian manner, always permitting a certain amount of controlled dissent, but not much more than that. Intellectuals could and did criticize the government, but oftentimes occupied government posts and were thus beholden to that same government and the party that controlled it.

The tension between the PRI and the Mexican student movement stands out for the ways in which it reflected Mexican politics: Like other Latin American nations, Mexico has a history of strong *caciquismo* and clientelism backed up by a strong state. What separates Mexico from other Latin American countries with some of these same traits was the PRI. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional took all the actors that, in their search for power, would normally fragment the state, and transform them into guarantors of the Mexican socio-political status quo. Inevitably, some candidates were disappointed—there could only be one president, after all—but the rotating of candidates ensured that no one faction within the PRI grew too dissatisfied with the status quo.

The phrase *in the PRI* is important, as periodic outsider elements aimed to break the elite stranglehold on power that the PRI represented. The student movement of 1968 was one such group. Rich, or bourgeois to use the vocabulary of the time, as some of the students may have been, their socialist-inspired agenda sought to create a more egalitarian Mexico. The PRI, or in English the Institutional Revolutionary Party, was supposed to carry

the mantle of the Mexican Revolution and its ethos of equality. It is telling that the PRI decided to respond to some of the very same concerns that inspired the Mexican Revolution—namely social inequalities and unrepresentative government—with violence.

The violence that played out in Mexico in 1968 demonstrated the effectiveness of immediate repression. Ten days after the massacre, the Olympics started without a hitch. International attention focused on the investor-friendly image that the PRI wanted to project. Even after the temporary spotlight of the Olympics faded, the student movement remained cowed. There would be no more protests with hundreds of thousands of participants. Gone, too, was the occupation of the UNAM. State-protestor clashes continued sporadically, but on a much smaller scale. The Corpus Christi Massacre that took place in Mexico City on June 10 1971, in which twenty-five students died—many of them at the hands of a “black operations” unit at least partly trained by the CIA known as *Los Halcones* (“The Hawks”), featured 10,000 protestors, a token force compared to the masses of 1968.⁸⁷ In the words of one historian:

The massacre on October 2 succeeded in what the government had been trying to do since early August: discredit the students and their proponents and undermine the movement. The government prevailed in its goals, but it also created an atmosphere of fear. It had successfully split the movement—students distrusted and denounced one another.⁸⁸

What had so violently gripped Mexico during the course of 1968 died an apparent ignominious death in 1971.

Despite the temporary loss of power suffered by the PRI in 2000 and two non-PRI presidents from then until 2012, it seems as if many of the same trends discernable in the

⁸⁷ Doyle, Kate. "The Corpus Christi Massacre." *The Corpus Christi Massacre*. The National Security Archive, 10 June 2003. Web. 12 Mar. 2014. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB91/>>.

⁸⁸ Carey 146.

Tlatelolco era still exist. Once again, the President of Mexico is from the PRI. Like previous elections in which the PRI won, the 2012 victory by official candidate Enrique Peña Nieto featured reports of voter bribing⁸⁹. Peña Nieto also benefited from very favorable press coverage. State Department cables revealed by Wikileaks agree with this assessment. One titled *A Look at Mexico State, Potemkin Village Style* from 2009 declares, "Televisa [one of Mexico's largest television media groups] backs the governor and provides him with an extraordinary amount of airtime and other kinds of coverage."⁹⁰ *The Guardian* newspaper of Britain ran an article in June that alleged Peña Nieto had paid for favorable media coverage from Televisa.⁹¹ *The Guardian* had financial statements that showed money transferred for coverage, but the British newspaper could not verify their contents, which they had received thanks to an anonymous source.

A new student movement organization, #YoSoy132, resembles a smaller version of the 1968 student movement, with organized protests across the country. These students protest what they see as the PRI's unaccountability, specifically Peña Nieto's human rights record when he was governor of Mexico State. The movement started when the then Presidential candidate Peña Nieto visited the Iberoamericana University on May 11 2012, where students questioned him on his record. After receiving little attention from the national media, 131 of the students made a video declaring that they were indeed students, and not imposters hired by other parties as some media outlets had alleged. Since then, individuals have joined in to assert their support for the movement, that is their status as

⁸⁹ Miroff, Nick, and William Booth. "Mexico's Presidential Election Tainted by Claims of Vote Buying." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 05 July 2012. Web. 14 June 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/mexicos-presidential-election-tainted-by-claims-of-vote-buying/2012/07/04/gJQAHqTzNW_story.html>.

⁹⁰ "A Look at Mexico State, Potemkin Village Style." *Wikileaks*. n.d. <<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/09/09MEXICO2778.html>>.

⁹¹ Tuckman, Jo. "Computer Files Link TV Dirty Tricks to Favourite for Mexico Presidency." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 08 June 2012. 14 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/07/mexico-presidency-tv-dirty-tricks?intcmp=239>>.

student “132.” One protest in Mexico City attracted around 90,000 demonstrators.⁹² *Yo Soy 132: Voces del movimiento* reflects Elena Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlatelolco*. The book puts together student testimonies. Similar to their 1968 peers, contemporary Mexican students are dissatisfied with their political leaders. Various students complain that many of the questions asked of the candidate were preselected and noncontroversial. One student named Anna states that he dodged questions about the civil unrest leading to two deaths that happened in a town in Mexico State when he was governor, and killed two.⁹³ They also complain about media censorship that hides their protests. Finally, like their peers from earlier times, they openly dismiss Peña Nieto, shouting, booing, and even calling him an assassination.

Unlike their peers from more than forty years ago, though, the students of #YoSoy132 heavily depend upon technology. Rodrigo, a student monitoring Peña-Nieto’s speech as it streamed online, noticed that the event was attracting a lot of attention. One student’s post stating that she was proud of her fellow students garnered more than 500 followers. Students noticed a plethora of hashtags appearing, to the point where one making fun of a senator, Arturo Escobar, started trending. Students are fully versed in social media, frequently talking about tweets, retweets, Facebook, trending, streaming, and other monikers of the digital age. One student named María, perhaps typical of her generation, learned of the planned protest via Facebook. To sum this change up, one student believes “the internet has been our best friend because other means are much more difficult.”⁹⁴ The last trend to mention is students’ awareness that past movements, particularly that of 1968,

⁹² Estey, Myles. "Public Radio International." *Public Radio International*. N.p., 11 June 2012. 14 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.pri.org/stories/2012-06-11/mexicos-i-am-132-protest-movement>>.

⁹³ Muñoz, Ramírez G, Cassani M. Salas, and Amaranta Cornejo. *#yo Soy 132: Voces Del Movimiento*. México, D. F: Ediciones Bola de Cristal, 2011. 42.

⁹⁴ Muñoz 105.

sputtered. Julio, another student, says: “Good intentions aren’t enough. Often times, #Yo Soy 132 can say that we have good intentions, but can we achieve our goals?”⁹⁵ The introduction to the book *Yo Soy 132: Voces del movimiento* admits that “All social movements have moments of ascent and periods of descent. Moments in which they expand and stretches of road to consolidate themselves.”⁹⁶ These students, in a smaller form than their peers from 1968, are contesting the ruling order.

Another similarity to the conditions in 1968 is the persistence of a deeply unequal society with supposed high economic potential. Around half of the population continues to live in poverty, defined as earning between 1,490-2,329 pesos (\$113-\$178) per month. Yet Mexico is again regarded as being primed for economic takeoff. Goldman Sachs Economist Jim O’Neil, who came up with the BRICS acronym, (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) for emerging economies now speaks of two different phenomena, the Next 11 and MIKT. As the name suggests, the Next 11 are eleven countries whose economies are expected to perform very well in the twenty-first century. Mexico is on the list. MIKT (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey) is an even more exclusive list of countries supposedly set for economic growth. Whether the repression of 1968 heralded the PRI’s eventual electoral defeat in the 2000 presidential race—as numerous historians have alleged—is debatable. Proponents point to President Vicente’s Fox relative amateur political background—as a former Coca Cola Executive and a governor of a small, landlocked state—and, once in office, his ability to open an official inquiry into the events of 1968 as proof of mass frustration with the PRI. Nevertheless, one can attribute the PRI’s waning popularity to a number of other factors, such as President Echeverría’s decision to liberalize the political parties that businesspeople could join, wealthy capitalists’ anger at

⁹⁵ Ibid., 138.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 19.

land expropriations, neoliberal trade policies such as those pursued by Carlos Salinas de Gortari that weakened poor rural Mexican's economic clout, and other factors.⁹⁷

For precisely for these reasons that this thesis proposes that, however morally repugnant and distasteful, state violence and repression was an effective tool for mass control as wielded by the PRI in 1968. The PRI had many tools at its disposal to ensure its continued electoral dominance, ranging from the obvious (the rigging of elections and increased spending for favored social groups) to the more nuanced (an internal succession process in which presidential favorites were played off one another, and the creation and sponsorship of labor union behemoths that really served to weaken the labor movement). Despite these tools, Mexican students and other participants in the 1968 protests represented a popular movement that none of these methods seemed to address. The violence—and blaming the students for it—achieved government stability (at least in the short run) in a way that these other methods could not accomplish.

⁹⁷ Trevizo 131-146.

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