

"Total Liberty in Casting our Ballots':
Plebes, Peasants, and Elections in Oaxaca, 1808-1850"

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On August 15, 1828 members of Oaxaca's state militia attacked a crowd in the capital city of the state. The crowd had gathered to vote that day in elections for the state's congress. Voters were incensed to find that government officials had stationed contingents of armed state militia at the polling places. They sent a delegation to protest to the state governor. The crowd followed, but as it waited outside the attack began. In a few minutes of violence four men were killed and several others were wounded. The crowd dispersed, and the election proceeded on schedule.

Whatever else this tragic incident tells us, it dramatically underlines the most salient feature of the city's politics in the era. The city of Oaxaca, or Antequera as it was most often known then, was polarized into two fiercely competitive political parties. The "aceites," or oils, as they were called, began as a home-grown version of Mexico's escoses party. Their opponents, the vinagres, or vinegars, began as radical yorkinos. Aceites and vinagres continued to be important political groups in the city long after the Masonic lodges they sprang from dissolved. The aceites became a de facto conservative party, while the vinagres evolved into popular federalists. These party divisions persisted for decades. When Benito Juárez became governor of Oaxaca in the late 1840s he made overcoming this division one of his first priorities, and as late as 1850 the open advocacy of parties was considered inflammatory enough to merit immediate intervention by the governor.¹

The incident also stands out in contrast with politics in much of the state's countryside. In the district of Villa Alta,

¹*Esposición que en cumplimiento del artículo 83 de la Constitución del Estado hace el Gobernador del mismo al soberano Congreso al abrir sus sesiones el 2 de julio del año de 1849.* (Oaxaca : Impreso por Ignacio Rincón, 1849).pp.-3-4, Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (hereafter AGEO), Fondo Juárez, Vol 1 exp 19, Vol 13 exp. 2.

from which much of the material for the present paper was drawn, indigenous peasants eschewed the party politics which dominated the urban scene. Indigenous peasants tended to choose administrative officials and parish priests to represent them in secondary elections for state office. Not surprisingly, these notables often faithfully delivered the district's votes to the candidates of the party in power. Nevertheless, this seeming passivity should not be construed as evidence of political ignorance or disengagement with the new political norms of citizenship and equality. Indigenous peasants engaged these innovations, including elections, in different ways. They also continued to use older forms of politics like legal petitioning and riots.

Early nineteenth-century elections have drawn a great deal of interest in recent scholarship. Research by Richard Warren, Richard Graham, and Antonio Annino shows that elections were not complete fictions far removed from a real politics of military coups and oligarchic rule. Latin American elections were both heavily contested and symbolically important. Sometimes incumbent governments were unseated in elections and even where they were not elections allowed opposition groups to show their force, lent crucial legitimacy to regimes, or provided potent occasions for demonstrating social hierarchies.²

In this paper I will try to answer two questions. First, why did elections in Antequera become so important to political mobilization, polarization, and conflict? Falling back on factors such as the density of urban social networks and access to mass communications will not help here, as levels of urban political mobilization and polarization were low before the introduction of electoral practices. Second, why did the indigenous peasants of Villa Alta district not engage in similar kinds of mobilization and polarization? Again, the answer is not obvious, precisely because before elections were introduced indigenous peasants were far more politically active than the urban plebe. As we will see, it was less a question of peasants being politically inactive than it was one of peasants separating their political activity from elections.

I'll begin with some social history, briefly describing as well as I can society and the texture of politics in both

²Richard Warren, "Elections and Popular Political Participation in Mexico, 1808-1836," pp. 30-58 in Vincent Peloso and Barbara Tenenbaum, eds. *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1996); Richard Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1990), 71-145; Antonio Annino, "The Ballot, the Land, and Sovereignty: Ceadiz and the Origins of Mexican Local Government, 1812-1820," pp. 61-86 in Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed. *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (NY: St. Martin's Press 1996).

Antequera and the district of Villa Alta. I will then work through the history of electoral law in the period, including the purposes lawmakers envisioned for elections. From there I will move to politics and electoral organizing in the city before examining the same subjects for Villa Alta. I'll conclude with some reflections on my findings and what they suggest for future research.

Social Background

At the end of the colonial period the city of Antequera was home to around 20,000 individuals. The city was mostly an administrative and marketing center, but like most colonial cities in Mexico, it had experienced a significant increase in textile production as Spain's participation in European wars disrupted the supply of textiles to New Spain.³ The wealthiest families earned most of their cash as intermediaries trading goods produced by the province's large population of indigenous peasants. The most famous of these goods was cochineal, a valuable dyestuff composed of insects who fed on certain kinds of maguey. Peasants also produced and traded cotton textiles and thread. This trade was supported by collusion with colonial administrative officials.

The consumption habits of Antequera's elite lent the city an air of opulence and supported numerous artisans. In 1792, for instance, there were 36 painters, 10 gilders and 106 silversmiths. Yet, for most of the city the pickings were slimmer. The population survived from producing textiles and providing services for the haciendas and indigenous villages of the province's central valleys. For instance, there were 135 blacksmiths, 22 cart-makers, and 15 muleteers. Those needs were not always directly related to production. The village ceremonial calendar also generated a need for specialists. The city harbored 26 musicians, 33 fireworks makers, and at least one person who made a living by renting costumes to villages.⁴ The city was also the site of a royal cigar factory where large numbers of women worked.⁵

The city was multi-ethnic. The largest ethnic categories in the 1792 census were Indians (31.9%), Creoles (28.4%), and mestizos (17.1%) . The African-American population was small:

³John Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1978), 145-148.

⁴Chance, *Race and Class*, 148, 160.

⁵Eduardo Muhlenpfordt, who lived in Oaxaca in the early 1830s, gives a figure of 900. Muhlenpfordt, *Ensayo de una descripción fiel de la República de Méjico, con especial referencia a su geografía, etnografía y estadística, Estado de Oaxaca*. Mexico: CODEX Editores, 1993 34-35.

pardos, mulattos, and negros together made up less than 10% of the population.⁶ Moreover, as John Chance has shown, ethnic categories were fading and blurring. Priests and officials were more likely to allow people to define their own ethnicity when producing documents, and ethnicity no longer was a reliable guide to people's socioeconomic status. Greater and greater numbers of people were considered to be Creoles. Although people still strove to avoid inclusion on the tribute roles as mulattos or pardos, they were less concerned about avoiding classification as mestizos.⁷

Other forms of corporate identity also seem to have been weak or weakening. Officially there were 35 guilds in the city. Guilds held annual elections for alcaldes and inspectors, and were supposed to enforce guild rules and look after corporate interests. Most also had ceremonial obligations during Holy Week and Corpus Christi. However, most of the documentation on guilds was generated by their decadence. Individuals petitioned to be freed from the guild offices they were elected to. Royal officials attempted unsuccessfully to make guilds collect royal tribute from their members.⁸ At the same time, in Antequera as elsewhere the Crown was increasingly reluctant to enforce guild prerogatives. The questions of prerogatives and obligations were linked in an 1818 petition from the city's guild of mecateros, manufacturers of the mecates used to grind corn. They pointed out that only seven masters continued the trade, and they were increasingly impoverished by competition from indigenous artisans from the surrounding villages who sold their wares in the Saturday market. The mecateros wanted to be freed from their duty of carrying an angel in a Holy Week procession.⁹ Another telling blow to guild protection came in 1806, when Intendent Francisco Rendón published his ruling that guilds could not prevent the entry of women into their trades.¹⁰ Guilds were certainly not effective in protecting a limited number of highly trained masters from the competition of a less privileged work

⁶Chance, *Race and Class*, 156.

⁷Chance, *Race and Class*, 155-185.

⁸AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 31, exp. 06. Here the decline of guild identity possibly intersected the erasure of racial categories. According to John Chance, royal officials complained that guilds would not collect tribute because their members did not consider themselves to be pardos, mulattos, or Indians subject to tribute. Chance, *Race and Class*, 178. The archive was reorganized after Chance consulted it, and I did not find this particular document.

⁹AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 36, exp. 9.

¹⁰AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol.31, exp. 8. Rendón based his rulings on royal decrees first published in Spain in 1779 and 1784.

force of women and indigenous peasants who were willing to labor for far less.¹¹

The inhabitants of Antequera had access to other corporate institutions. There was, for instance, a city government. It provided police, oversaw the guilds, and represented the city's interests to the Crown. However, it was not a very diverse body, as alcaldes and regidores essentially bought their offices. Owners of mines also had a mining deputation to settle disputes and represent owners' interests. Generally, however, it was powerless, and it was held in such low esteem that sometimes the members evaded attending meetings.¹² There were many *cofradías* operating in Antequera. Members, male and female, paid a monthly fee and attended the funerals of their *cofrades*. In exchange they received payments in the event of serious illness or death. *Cofradías* celebrated their patrons, and some also marched in Holy Week or Corpus Christi processions.¹³ At least before independence, however, *cofradías* don't seem to have been an important focus of collective political identity.

One characteristic of these corporate bodies which foreshadowed nineteenth-century political forms is the manner in which they chose officers. *Cofradías*, guilds, and the mining deputation all elected their officials. The documentation left by these elections is sparse. There is no record of any discussion of candidates. Moreover, evidence suggests that members did not seek these offices, which brought significant administrative and ceremonial obligations with little pay or power. Most elections were carried out in meetings, apparently by voice vote.¹⁴ The mining deputation differed. Its elections were held using a secret ballot.¹⁵ The legacy of these corporate elections is difficult to evaluate. Yet, between *cofradías* and guilds it seems that a large number of urban men had some experience with electing officers before the crisis of political legitimacy which dominated the 1810s.

¹¹AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 31, exp. 4.

¹²AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 22, exp. 22.

¹³AGEO, Fondo Legajos Encuadernados, Sección Eclesiástica, Vol. 6 1752; AGEO, Fondo Legajos Encuadernados, Sección Eclesiástica, Vol. 12-1788b.

¹⁴AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 31, exp. 05; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 38, exp. 09; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 38, exp. 12; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 38, exp. 13; AGEO, Fondo Legajos Encuadernados, Sección Eclesiástica, Vol. 15 1828. For *cofradia* elections see Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Oaxaca (Hereafter AHAO), Fondo Parroquial, Sección Disciplinar, Serie *Cofradías* 1815-1822; , Fondo Parroquial, Sección Disciplinar, Serie *Cofradías* 1823-b.

¹⁵AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 31, exp. 25; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 31, exp. 30; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 31 exp. 32; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 32, exp. 05.

The district of Villa Alta presented a very different picture. The region contained 112 villages. The indigenous peasants of these villages spoke six different languages, Nahuatl, Nexitzo Zapotec, Cajonos Zapotec, Bixanos Zapotec, Mixe, and Chinantec. The district was administered from the town of Villa Alta, where there was an extremely small Spanish and mestizo population led by an *alcalde mayor*, and later a *subdelegado*. The Spanish and mestizo population of the district included priests and sometimes their families, schoolteachers, a few artisans, and the administrators themselves. The total population of the district in 1782 was around 42,800.¹⁶

The district contained extremely varied ecologies, and indigenous peasants planted a wide variety of food crops in different microclimates for local consumption.¹⁷ They also cultivated some cochineal and a great deal of cotton. Indigenous women spun the cotton and wove mantas. Although indigenous merchants seem to have controlled the trade in raw cotton, Spanish officials and merchants bought up the finished manta and shipped them to mining areas of New Spain, where it was in great demand. For most of the eighteenth century this trade was financed through the *repartimiento* system, where officials loaned money to villagers in exchange for the right to buy the finished product at a fixed price. Even after the prohibition of the *repartimiento* officials continued this practice surreptitiously, apparently on a smaller scale. Indigenous peasants also marketed yarn and straw products, often traveling to the city of Antequera, several days walk away.

Indigenous identities in Villa Alta were centered very firmly on corporate villages. The documents show this in two complimentary ways. First, although political activity was common, petitions or lawsuits which united more than one village were very rare. They only surfaced at rare moments when villages shared a problem.¹⁸ The second way in which the salience of village identity is revealed in documents is more interesting. Although villages were not harmonious communities, indigenous political culture stressed the importance of respect for village authorities and de legitimated any political activity which did not stem from the entire village. Villagers condemned neighbors who held meetings or collected money for lawsuits without the official backing of village government.¹⁹

¹⁶John Chance, *People of the Sierra: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Oaxaca*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1989), 69.

¹⁷See the description in Muhlenpfordt, *Ensayo de una descripción*, 89.

¹⁸AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 11, exp. 04; AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 16 exp. 21.

¹⁹For an example see Archivo de Villa Alta (hereafter AVA), Fondo Criminal, Exp. 414 1798.

In other words, indigenous peasants did not build political identities beyond the village, and they did not consider political activity or solidarities within the village to be legitimate. In comparison to the relatively weak corporate structures of Antequera, Villa Alta's villages were bastions of corporatist politics.

The most important village officers were elected, but only a few elders were allowed to vote in these elections. Most of these elders, often called *principales*, attained their status by faithfully serving the village in a number of service posts beginning with such menial jobs as sweeping the plaza or serving as temporary domestic servants of parish priests. Some of the labor was actually provided by wives as well as husbands. Climbing this hierarchy of offices took years. In principle this was an egalitarian system in which all males had equal opportunity to serve. In practice some males, either through perceived ineptitude or from lack of prestige, filled lower posts all of their lives. Moreover some families which claimed descent from pre-Hispanic nobles were exempt from service in lower offices. As the eighteenth century went on it became fashionable for men who had become elders through service to claim that this put them on par with the pre-Hispanic noble families, able to pass their exemption from lower office on to their sons. Strikingly, these pretensions were opposed not by noble families, but by commoners who were concerned that the pool of labor available for necessary services would dry up, or more directly that the frequency with which they were called to service would become intolerable.

Elections in the Nineteenth Century

Beginning with Spain's liberals and continuing after independence, elections became the principal mechanism through which officials nominally reached office. Elections were now also an important way in which officials at every level legitimated their authority. Yet, as Rodríguez has shown, the first elections sparked by the 1808 crisis continued to follow corporatist patterns. *Ayuntamientos* in Spanish American cities chose representatives to the Spanish Cortes.²⁰ Following mandated procedures, the members of Oaxaca's *ayuntamiento* each openly voted for three candidates. The names of the top three candidates, or *terna*, were placed in an urn. A young boy pulled

²⁰Jaime Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*. (NY: Cambridge University Press 1998) 60-64. See also François Xavier-Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias: Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica 1992) 177-228.

in from the street then selected the winner randomly.²¹ Notably the urban ayuntamientos were themselves not elected bodies. Their claim to represent Spain's American population rested on their quasi-corporatist position as leaders of provincias or reinos.²² The choice of representatives through elections was newly significant, but the form of the election and the basis of representation were both purely Old Regime.

José María Morelos led an insurgent army into Antequera in November 1812. The insurgents governed the city until March 1814. Notably, elections in Oaxaca under the insurgents were similar to early efforts of Spaniards to organize resistance to Spain. Ideas of representation were built on pre-absolutist precedent. Elections themselves were affairs of the already distinguished. In 1813 Oaxaca's representative to the insurgent government was chosen in an indirect election. Electors were chosen by "los Jueces mayores, en union de los vecinos principales, así Ecclesiasticos, como seculares."²³ The 1812 liberal constitution was not promulgated in Oaxaca until after royalist armies recaptured the city. The insurgent occupation of Oaxaca actually delayed the more revolutionary impact that Spanish liberalism had in many parts of Spanish America. Antequera's first municipal elections under the liberal constitution were not held until April 1814.²⁴ Almost simultaneously in Spain, Fernando VII abolished the constitution and ordered that ayuntamientos revert to those who held them in 1812. The elected ayuntamiento only governed for a few months before word of his decision reached Oaxaca. The early experience of Villa Alta's remote villages with Spanish liberalism was even more attenuated. I have not yet found solid evidence of constitutional elections in 1814 for any of those villages.

Nevertheless, Oaxaca's encounter with Spanish liberalism in the crisis years of the 1810s would have lasting effects. In Antequera in particular, the dual blows of insurgent occupation and Spanish decrees destroyed the official existence of the caste system. The Spanish Cortes abolished caste privileges and this abolition was promulgated in Antequera in 1812, before the insurgent occupation began.²⁵ José María Morelos declared the

²¹Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de Oaxaca, (Hereafter AHCO) Tesorería Municipal 1764-1829.

²²Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias*, 191.

²³ AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia I, Vol. 13, Exp. 28. See also Virginia Guedea, "Los procesos electorales insurgentes," *Estudios de historia novohispana* 11(1991)214-222.

²⁴AGEO, Fondo Real Intendencia II, Vol. 38, exp. 18.

²⁵Antonio Bergoza y Jordan, Antonio. *Nos el doctor don Antonio Bergosa y Jordan por la gracia de dios y de la Santa Sede Apostolica : obispo de*

end of the caste system in 1810, and he repeated this call in Antequera in January 1813, emphasizing his point with humor. He decreed the abolition of "the very beautiful gibberish of qualities Indian, mulato or mestizo, half-breed, etc."²⁶ More importantly, the 1812 constitution was again put into effect in 1820. Several elections were held before independence, and the 1812 constitution provided the basic blueprint for electoral rules throughout the 1820s.

The two most important characteristics of elections under the 1812 constitution were their indirect nature and the provision for broad suffrage. Almost all men were allowed to vote in primary elections in each parish. Rules against voting by domestic servants, and, initially, voting by persons with African ancestry gave those running elections some legal grounds for excluding the rabble. However, in practice exclusion was extremely difficult.²⁷ Electors designated on the parish level met later to choose the members of town councils. Elections for legislative bodies were held separately but the basic principles were the same.

The Spanish Cortes deputies who initially set these norms do not seem to have anticipated the possibility that elections would become the scenes of party conflict, something we take for granted. They inherited Hispanic political culture's abhorrence of organized political division, and its tendency to try to marginalize organized political groups as "factions."²⁸ Yet, the deputies probably did consider the mobilizational possibilities of elections. The Cortes was, after all, striving for legitimacy even as it demanded extreme sacrifices of a Spanish world struggling against Napoleon's armies. Elections had enormous potential as symbolic occasions linking society with the state. Probably the only Old Regime moments with similar power were the rare ceremonies marking dynastic deaths, births, marriages or coronations, and perhaps the arrival of bishops or viceroys in the New World.²⁹ The new electoral apparatus provided for practically annual ceremonies. Although these ceremonies were less elaborate and ornate than dynastic

Antequera de Oaxaca, electo arzobispo de Mexico, Caballero de la real y distinguida orden española de Carlos Tercero, del consejo de S.M. &c. Oaxaca : s.n., 1812.

²⁶Ernesto Lemoine *Morelos: su vida revolucionaria a través de sus escritos y otros testimonios de la época.* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1965), 264.

²⁷Warren, "Elections and Popular Political Participation," 25.

²⁸Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias*, 361.

²⁹On dynastic ceremonies see Cheryl Martin *Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), 103-105.

occasions and entradas, they did effectively emphasize the connections between officials and society.

As Virginia Guedea, Richard Warren and Antonio Annino have shown, elections under the 1812 constitution immediately became occasions marked by political organizing and conflict. In particular groups caught on to an important way to circumvent the indirect nature of elections. They prepared lists of candidates for elector, and distributed the lists before parochial elections. Rather than being forced to choose electors known to them personally, and allow the electors to vote their conscience, parochial voters could avail themselves of strangers pledged to support a particular candidate or slate of candidates for office.³⁰ This technique suddenly made the partisan mobilization of even relatively poor voters the key to electoral success.

Many of Mexico's early lawmakers were very unhappy with this kind of politics. It led to disorder and unpredictability. However, replacing this electoral pattern did not seem crucial to most because the party politics of the 1810s had played out between gachupines and autonomist creoles. It was easily explained as an aberration in very unusual times. Thus, with the exception of the brief and unpopular experiment with occupational representation under Iturbide, most electoral legislation of the 1820s replicated the basic structure of elections established in 1812: very broad suffrage supposedly tempered by indirect elections.³¹

After the mid-1820s urban elections in most of Mexico again became occasions of mass partisan mobilization. Conservative and moderate legislators responded in a very piecemeal fashion, trying to preserve the basic principles established in 1812 while reducing actual attendance at the polls and short-circuiting the lists which made partisan electioneering possible.³² However, these measures were not enough to prevent the possible beneficiaries of electoral mobilization from gaining power via other means. Moreover, even when effective the new regulations did not guarantee electoral victory for their authors.

³⁰Virginia Guedea, "Las primeras elecciones populares en la ciudad de México, 1812-1813," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 7:1(Winter 1991) 9-13; Warren, "Elections and Popular Political Participation," 34-36; Annino, "Ballot, the Land, and Sovereignty," 67-73.

³¹For the makeup of Congress under Iturbide see Timothy Anna, *Forging Mexico 1821-1835*. (Lincon: University of Nebraska Press 1998), 91-93

³²For the DF see Warren, "Elections and Popular Political Participation," 44-46. For Oaxaca see *Colección de leyes, decretos y circulares del estado libre y soberano de Oaxaca*. Oaxaca : Imprenta del Estado en el Instituto, <1851?>-1914, Vol. I 347-353.

Urban Elections

In Oaxaca, the urban elections of the early 1820s were relatively staid affairs. Party divisions seem to have been insignificant, or at least surreptitious. The issues which would inflame passions later in the decade lay dormant. Although to date I have discovered little direct evidence of electoral organizing, radical pamphleteers in Mexico City argued that in these early elections clerics working through *cofradías* were decisive. As late as 1826, Pablo Villavicencio complained of "reuniones nocturnas que acostumbran concurrir a la casa de un devoto dueño de estandarte y algunos faroles que, como tal, es el capataz de cincuenta o sesenta, en cuya compañía sale resando el rosario por las calles y cantando a gritos el Ave María." There priests would preach against the *vinagres* and urge the faithful to accept lists from the *aceites*.³³ It seems possible that in the absence of clear electoral programs and organizing that the mobilizational capacity of a few *cofradías* was decisive. Although at times debates about candidates during secondary elections became heated, the overall political temperature of urban Oaxaca remained tepid.³⁴

The fierce political partisanship which shook Antequera in the late 1820s mostly developed out of resentment over the apparent collapse of the region's economy. Although the actual causes of the collapse were both complex and still debatable, in Antequera the most visible aspect was the flood of imported textiles which made life miserable for those trying to earn a living as weavers. By 1827 a city that had contained 500 working looms was down to thirty.³⁵ In Oaxaca, as elsewhere, the cotton economy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was characterized by booms and busts driven by international politics. When the trade routes which linked Mexico with English mills were open prices fell and Mexico's production withered. When trade was cut off cotton growers and weavers made a good living. However, this economy was actually articulated by Spanish merchants who moved raw materials into the hands of artisans and bought up the finished products.

³³Pablo Villavicencio, *Ya tenemos in Oaxaca parte de la Santa Liga* 1826, reproduced in James C. McKegney, *The Political Pamphlets of Pablo Villavicencio "El Payo del Rosario"*. Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V 1975, Vol. II, 600. The pamphlet is quoted in Torcuato Di Tella, *National Popular Politics in Early Independent México, 1820-1847*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1996), 168.

³⁴For violent arguments during the 1823 secondary election for the state legislature see AGEO Fondo Gobernación, Vol. 7, s/e.

³⁵*Memoria que el Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca presentó en la apertura de las sesiones ordinarias del Segundo Congreso Constitucional del mismo, verificado el 2 de julio de 1827*. (Oaxaca: Imprenta del Gobierno 1827), .8.

These merchants were vulnerable to scapegoating on the numerous occasions when foreign textiles undercut local wares. The anti-Spanish program of Morelos during the insurgent occupation undoubtedly exacerbated this tendency, and it remained even after the insurgents were driven out of the city. For instance in 1816 the weaver Francisco Chavez insulted a Spanish soldier from the Savolla regiment, calling him a "licker of Spanish asses."³⁶ In the early 1820s the frustration and fear of the city's plebe again manifested itself in prejudice against the city's small population of European Spaniards. Despite the pledges of the unity which came with independence, European Spaniards rapidly found Oaxaca an uncomfortable place. Their harassment was led by General Antonio de León, who in 1824 threatened to overthrow the state government and also proposed a law to expel Spaniards from the government. In 1824, some of his men even murdered a Spanish tax collector.³⁷

Still, the degree of conflict was tempered by the success relatively moderate politicians enjoyed during elections. Scions of the city's wealthy families, they worked hard to contain political tempers.³⁸ Available evidence does not allow me to confidently estimate how much their electoral success stemmed from the support of *cofradías* and how much stemmed from the prestige they enjoyed among the relatively neutral secondary electors likely to be returned in non-partisan primary elections. Generally these politicians were sympathetic to the plight of the Spaniards and rallied to their defense. A combination of foot-dragging and appeals to the federal government allowed the state government to weather the early storms. Although they showed some sympathy to the plight of artisans, their economic orthodoxy prevented them from taking decisive or even visible action on the matter. In his 1827 report to the state legislature Governor José Ignacio Morales lamented the unemployment of so many honorable artisans but at the same time recognized "las ventajas considerables que evidentemente resultan a la parte mas numerosa, y mas pobre de los habitantes aun comprendidos ellos mismos, de la comodidad y menor precio de los efectos extranjeros."³⁹

³⁶AGEO, Fondo Colonial, Vol. 8, s/e. See also the strange denunciation of Spanish counterfeiting made eight years earlier by an unknown author using the name of a silversmith. AGEO, Fondo Colonial, Vol. 12, s/e..

³⁷Jorge Fernando Iturribarría, *Historia de Oaxaca*. (Oaxaca: Ediciones E. R. B., 1935-56), Vol. I, 36-8, 44-45; Guillermo Rangel Rojas.. *General Antonio de León: Consumador de la Independencia de Oaxaca y Benemérito del Estado de Oaxaca*. (Oaxaca: Ayuntamiento Constitucional 1997), 45-47.

³⁸Carlos Sanchez Silva, "Patrimonialismo y poder político en Oaxaca, 1786-1860," *Cuadernos del Sur* 3:10 (mayo-agosto 1995)57-89.

³⁹*Memoria que el Gobernador*, 8.

This situation became much more unstable as national battle lines between yorkinos and escoseses began to harden. The influence of this competition became compelling in November 1827, when the city's garrison left its barracks to pressure the state government to expel most Spaniards. The legislature again dragged its feet, but this time the rebels took control of the government's press and published their call for expulsion. This proclamation emphasized the danger which Spaniards posed as possible collaborators with Spanish reconquest.⁴⁰ Although the rebels returned to their barracks without bloodshed, they did not do so until after the municipal elections held in the first days of December. Direct evidence of electoral organizing is not available, but the state legislature certainly considered these elections tainted by military and/or yorkino influence. Criticizing the "infracciones de constitucion cometidas en las elecciones...y la falta de libertad que retrajo a la inmensa mayoria de ciudadanos a dar sus sufragios en ellas," it annulled them and set new elections for January.⁴¹

For Oaxaca, the first evidence of parties elaborating lists of electors to give to parochial voters comes from these January 1828 elections. The state senate asked the governor's secretary to report on the state of public tranquillity. The secretary explained that "se están haciendo listas para las proximas elecciones de oficios de Ayuntamientos, y en esta virtud había algunas reuniones que son en cierto modo indispensables, y no sospechosas, pues que, como es publico, la opinion está dividida en dos partidos que cada uno por su parte solicita ganar dichas elecciones." Faced with the Senate's concern that some of these meetings might involve conspiracies against public order, the secretary agreed to have the meetings end at eight each night.⁴²

What were the two parties referred to, and how did they hope to reach voters? The aceites, as they were called, were Oaxaca's version of the escoses grouping on the national level. Although the escoses lodges had fallen into disrepute, the aceites continued to defend resident Spaniards. It would be imprecise to call them a conservative or even centralist party, however. These men had run Oaxaca's government during its tense 1823 confrontation with the national government over federalism. The legislature they controlled was fond of egalitarian rhetoric, and it released the villages around Antequera of their duty to provide flowers for the annual Corpus Christi festival.⁴³

⁴⁰Iturribarría, *Historia de Oaxaca*, I, 84-88. These pages also contain the text of the rebel proclamation.

⁴¹AGEO, Fondo Impresos, decree, January 1, 1828.

⁴²Libro de Actas Secretas del Senado, January 1828, AGEO, Fondo Legajos Encuadernados, Sección Decretos, Vol. 70 1825a.

⁴³AGEO, Fondo Legajos Encuadernados, Sección Decretos, Vol. 70, Decreto 19.

However, behind all of this was a very solid defense of the interests of the states wealthy families. These families were not in an enviable position. The famed cochineal trade was declining, and opportunities to cash in on the labor of Indian women through the manta trade had been minimized by foreign competition. To some extent the aceites responded by looking to the region's agricultural potential. When that was at stake they were willing to overlook the liberal principles of the constitution they wrote and openly discuss the possibility of reviving debt peonage on haciendas.⁴⁴ By 1826, however, the aceites were known above all for their staunch defense of resident Spaniards, who after all were sometimes their relatives.⁴⁵ This attitude more than anything else exacerbated the growing party division in Oaxaca.

The vinagres emerged as a political force in Oaxaca in the mid-1820s. By August 1826 they had a recognizable presence in the parochial elections for the state legislature.⁴⁶ The vinagres were associated with yorkinos on the national level, although according to one historian the first York rite lodge was not established in Antequera until the spring of 1828.⁴⁷ The vinagres gained adherents quickly in Antequera, and in many ways they offered a focus for the fears and resentments of the city's struggling population. They reached out to the angry workers displaced by foreign textiles with a protectionist program to improve their lot. The yorkinos encouraged the scapegoating of Spaniards for Mexico's economic problems but also successfully tied anti-Spanish agitation to the defense of Mexico from Spanish plots to recover it. They combined these elements of their program with a very fierce egalitarianism which had great appeal in a city like Antequera where a few families dominated commerce and government.⁴⁸ The city quickly became bitterly divided between aceites who upheld the existing order and controlled the state legislature and vinagres who advocated protectionism, the expulsion of the Spaniards, and later the presidency of Vicente Guerrero.

⁴⁴*Colección de leyes*, I, 324-328.

⁴⁵See, for example, the January 1824 decree of the state congress ordering the punishment of anyone who promoted disunion between Spaniards and Americans. *Colección de leyes*, I, 13-14.

⁴⁶*Un Espectador Imparcial, Elecciones parroquiales de Oajaca en los días 15 y 16 del corriente* (Oaxaca:1826).

⁴⁷Rangel Rojas, *General Antonio de León*, 51.

⁴⁸For this egalitarianism see *Un Ciudadano. A mis conciudadanos de Oajaca y todo el Estado*. (Oaxaca: 1826). See also *Alcance al Numero 6 del Periodico Sociedad de Amigos del Pais* (S/f, probably 1826). For the domination of commerce and government by a few families see Sanchez Silva, "Patrimonialismo y poder," 239-243..

By 1828 this polarization was severe. Surviving records do not indicate which party won the new municipal elections of January 1828, but the state legislature and governorship continued to be dominated by *aceites*. Local political passions grew as the national competition between the partisans of Vicente Guerrero and Manuel Gomez Pedraza gained momentum. By July 1828 Governor José Ignacio de Morales was so alarmed by "gritos escandalosos por las Calles de vivas y mueras y otras alarmas" that he prohibited meetings of more than four men in the street after 7 PM, tightened rules against carrying certain kinds of weapons, and limited liquor sales. Even as he issued these regulations, Morales hinted at the irony in the situation by pointing out the "nulidad e impotencia" of the enemies of order.⁴⁹ In establishing the electoral procedures through which the president would be chosen, Mexico federal constitution set up a very effective set of brakes on the political passions of the majority. The president was to be chosen by the state legislatures, and in most cases these were legislatures elected months or years before the beginning of *de facto* presidential campaigns. In the case of Oaxaca, although in August 1828 voters would indirectly select a new state legislature, that legislature would not take office until after the outgoing body had cast its vote in the presidential race. The key legislature has been elected in August 1826, before the *vinagres* began effective campaigning in elections.

Frustration over this fact undoubtedly contributed to the tragedy that followed. According to law, the administrator of the state's central district, Manuel Maria Fagoaga, was charged with overseeing the elections scheduled for August 15 and 16. When *vinagre* voters arrived at the polling table in the city's central plaza they found themselves facing armed militia posted at different points. Moreover, they discovered that a decisive step had already taken place. According to Oaxaca's state constitution, the secretary and vote-counters were named by the citizens as soon as thirty had appeared to vote.⁵⁰ These officials had final authority over both counting the vote and admitting the votes of individuals. On August 15, 1828 Fagoaga arranged for these posts to be filled before the arrival of *vinagre* voters. He also ordered the jailing of several *vinagres* for promoting disorder.⁵¹

Vinagres José María Pando and Father Ignacio Fagoaga, Manuel's brother, set off to protest their lack of "todo

⁴⁹See his *bandos* of July 15 and July 29 in AHCO, Tesorería Municipal, 1764-1829.

⁵⁰See the constitution in *Colección de leyes*, I, 58.

⁵¹AGEO, Fondo Gobernación, Vol. 2, s/e.

libertad para emitir sus votos" to the state's governor, José Joaquín Guerrero. They apparently believed Guerrero was neutral. The governor was actually Pando's uncle. Moreover, Guerrero could not have had any direct responsibility for electoral arrangements, as he had only taken office three days earlier. The governor received the complaints of Pando, Fagoaga, and other prominent vinagres. However, he argued that he was constitutionally powerless to stop the election. Even as he did so a large crowd of vinagre voters moved from the plaza to the street outside Guerrero's residence. At that point the militia led by Manuel Miranda opened fire on the crowd and charged it, assaulting the vinagres with swords, bayonets, and musket butts. In a few minutes four vinagres were dead or mortally wounded, and others were hurt badly.⁵²

The election proceeded, and the aceites retained control of the incoming state legislature. Soon afterwards the outgoing state legislature cast its ballot in the presidential race, backing Manuel Gomez Pedraza despite threats that doing so would lead to a riot. It also exiled vinagres Ignacio Orduño and José Mariano Toro from the state. The state government began an investigation of the August 15 incident and imprisoned 27 vinagres, including José Maria Pando as well as Manuel Santaella and José Domingo Romero, two of the men wounded in the massacre.⁵³

In Veracruz in September 1828 Antonio López de Santa Anna began a revolt against the election of Gomez Pedraza. His proclamations condemned an escoses, pro-Spanish conspiracy to force state legislatures to elect Gomez Pedraza. His troops found themselves unable to hold Veracruz. In late October they occupied Oaxaca, and Governor José Joaquín Guerrero resigned. The rebels ordered the release of the vinagres imprisoned after the August confrontation.⁵⁴ Troops sent by that national government closed in, and the vinagres rallied to Santa Anna. Government troops besieged Santa Anna until the Revolution of the Acordada in Mexico City overthrew the national government.

After the Revolution of the Acordada vinagres controlled the municipal government. They repeatedly asked governor Ramón Ramirez Aguilar to annul the August 1828 election, where as they put it in a published proclamation, troops had fired on the people when it was "reunidos y vestidos con el caracter de

⁵²AGEO, Fondo Gobernación, Vol. 2, s/e; Iturribarría, *Historia de Oaxaca*, I, 96-99.

⁵³Iturribarría, *Historia de Oaxaca*, I, 99-100, Biblioteca Del Estado de Oaxaca, Fondo Manuel Martinez Gracida, Vol. 72.

⁵⁴Michael Costeloe. *La Primera República Federal de México (1824-1835)*. (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1975), 193-202; Biblioteca Del Estado de Oaxaca, Fondo Manuel Martinez Gracida Vol.72.

Pueblo soberano."⁵⁵ They also tried to prevent Manuel Maria Fagoaga and others they considered responsible for the massacre from being allowed to return to Oaxaca.⁵⁶ Yet even as it worked on behalf of the vinagres, the municipal council ordered the punishment of those who insulted each other "con las espreciones denigrativas de aceite y vinagre; pues estos resentimientos odiosos deben borrarse de la memoria de todo buen americano, que solo se debe llamar la atencion de todos nuestra union."⁵⁷ This was the first of many calls for Oaxacans to put the extreme polarization of aceites and vinagres behind them.

Events on the national level were not conducive to calming political spirits. In the next few years the aceite/vinagre division was if anything exacerbated by two highly symbolic events. The first was the Spanish invasion of Tampico in July 1829. The second was the execution of Vicente Guerrero in Cuilapan, right outside the city of Oaxaca, in February 1831.

In the summer of 1829 rumors of a Spanish invasion grew and spread. Many rightly believed that such an expedition could only prosper if it received very active support from people already in Mexico. Although in hindsight we know that the invasion did not receive this support, its leaders certainly counted on it. Moreover, the political battles of the previous two years had provided vinagres with a plausible fifth column. Thus, vinagre politicians linked the impending defense of Mexico's sovereignty to local politics. For example, when Juan Victoria Gamboa argued the need for a new militia to the town council on July 20, 1829, he pointed out that

"En el año pasado, el 15 de agosto corrían millares de hombres por las calles pidiendo se les armase para sostener sus derechos contra los opresores. En Octubre y Noviembre del mismo año, vi en las fronteras de esta Capital y en las calles de ella presantese con la herocidad de hombre libre por defender su amada patria...¿Donde están estos hombres?"⁵⁸

The vinagres who controlled the city believed that their government and Mexico's independence were threatened by hundreds of aceites willing to collaborate with a Spanish invasion. They posted guards and patrolled the city. Twice people who allegedly shouted Viva España were arrested and tried. Two

⁵⁵AHCO, Libro de Actas 1829, fols. 63v-64v, 79, 81-83v. The quote is from 83.

⁵⁶AHCO, Libro de Actas 1829, fols. 125-128.

⁵⁷AHCO, Libro de Actas 1829, fol. 5.

⁵⁸AHCO, Libro de Actas 1829, fol. 231.

others who made and sold seals with Viva Fernando VII impressed on them were also arrested.⁵⁹

The vigilance of the vinagres was unable to prevent Vicente Guerrero from being overthrown in December 1829. In the War of the South that followed, rebel groups in Michoacán and Guerrero sought to return Vicente Guerrero to the presidency. The vinagres in the city of Oaxaca were unable or unwilling to mount an armed movement in Guerrero's support. Yet, authorities worried over a series of incidents in which citizens shouted vivas to Guerrero during street fights. One vinagre was arrested for such an expression but was freed for lack of evidence.⁶⁰

In January 1831 Vicente Guerrero was kidnapped and brought to the city of Oaxaca for trial. Guerrero was a controversial figure. Many pillars of Mexico's elite saw him as either a cause or a catalyst of the frightening disorder of the previous few years. Guerrero, of modest rural origins and mixed racial heritage, had been a polarizing symbol in 1828 presidential campaign, the Revolution of the Acordada, and the 1830 War of the South. With Guerrero at last in its power, the Bustamante government lost no time in arranging his trial and execution. In doing so they unwittingly made him into an even more potent symbol, at least in the short term.

Although the city of Oaxaca remained calm through Guerrero's trial and execution, party tensions continued to seethe beneath the surface. Throughout the 1830s party conflict surfaced in street brawls. Some *aceites* were even accused of protesting their loyalty to Fernando VII.⁶¹ *Aceites* and *vinagres* continued to compete fiercely in elections. On two more occasions the streets of the city became battlegrounds. In 1833 Valentín Canalizo attacked the city as part of his effort to overthrow the liberal government of Valentín Gómez Farías. In 1836 Miguel Acevedo led a contingent of Mixtec Indians as part of an effort to restore federalism.⁶² Through the 1830s parties and party loyalties continued to dominate politics in the city.

Politics in Villa Alta

The district of Villa Alta presented an entirely different picture. Although this populous district was subject to the

⁵⁹AGEO, Fondo Juzgado del Distrito, Vol. 14 exp. 12, Vol. 14 exp. 13 and Vol. 15 exp. 4.

⁶⁰AGEO, Fondo Juzgado del Distrito, Vol. 17 exp. 10.

⁶¹AGEO, Fondo Juzgado del Distrito, Vol. 16 exp. 01, Vol. 17exp. 10, Vol. 20 exp. 7, Vol. 26 Exp. 2.

⁶²Iturribarria, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 195-197, 218-223; AGEO, Fondo Juzgado del Distrito, Vol. 24 exp. 13, Vol. 14 exp. 14, Vol. 25 exp. 4.

same laws as the city, and as far as I can tell from the records electoral law was adhered to as least as closely, party politics never took hold in Villa Alta. The most important posts were those in the state congress, as in addition to legislative duties the congress chose the governor and cast the state's vote in presidential elections. In indirect elections for state congress, the indígenas of Villa Alta regularly chose white or mestizo village priests and administrative officials to represent them in state elections. Not surprisingly these electors seem to have closely followed the lead of sitting state governors, and observers generally agreed that rural votes from places like Villa Alta gave whatever party was in power a secure advantage in elections.⁶³

The temptation is to fall back on time-honored explanations for this apparent electoral passivity. Such explanations emphasize the cultural distance between rural and urban Mexico, or between Hispanic and indigenous Mexico.⁶⁴ They also argue that the parties which made Mexico such a battleground tended to close ranks when faced with the possibility or real change or disorder in the countryside.⁶⁵ Moreover, the pattern in which peasants chose priests or government officials as electors might also be interpreted as evidence of patron-clientalism.⁶⁶ Contemporary observers explained the problem away by conjuring up a supposed Indian passivity or docility.⁶⁷ In the end, though, I find none of these explanations to be particularly convincing. Studies of rural rebellion make the thesis of Indian docility as untenable as it is distasteful. Recent research, including some of my own, has shown how indigenous peasants could form coalitions with other groups and even adapt the language of party politics

⁶³*El Zapoteco*, 20 septiembre 1832; *El Zapoteco*, 23 septiembre 1832.

⁶⁴Eric Van Young, "The Raw and the Cooked: Elite and Popular Ideology in Mexico, 1800-1821," in Mark Szchuman, ed. *The Middle Period in Latin America: Values and Attitudes in the 17th-19th Centuries*. (Boulder: Lynne Reiner 1989), 88-89.

⁶⁵Antonio Annino. "El pacto y la norma. Los orígenes de la legalidad oligárica en México," *Historias* 5(1984)3-31.

⁶⁶Richard Graham makes a strong case for the pervasiveness of patronage in Brazilian elections. See *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1990). François Xavier Guerra and Marie Demélas-Bohy suggest this was true throughout the Hispanic world in "The Hispanic Revolutions: the Adoption of Modern Forms of Representation in Spain and America, 1808-1810," pp. 33-60 in Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed. *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* NY; St. Martin's Press 1996.

⁶⁷José María Pando, who in 1828 had been a fire-breathing vinegar defender of the people's rights, called the indigenous villages of Villa Alta "masas inertes" in 1836, when he was serving as administrator of the district. AGEO Fondo Gobernación, Vol. 12.

to their own ends.⁶⁸ My research on Villa Alta shows that indigenous peasants were active politically in other ways. It also demonstrates that they were quite aware of changes in the legal and constitutional environment.⁶⁹ The same research belies the existence of an effective patron-client system. Elite control of trade in Villa Alta had collapsed, and elites never did control significant land or other natural resources. Far from clients, indigenous peasants continued to pursue their interests versus priests and officials through the court system and occasional riots.

Several factors prevented party politics from emerging. First, indigenous political culture was extremely disapproving of anything that smacked of factionalism. Although villages were actually divided and conflicted polities, their political values stressed unity and harshly criticized any group that did not hew carefully to the line set out by elders and village government. Second, there was virtually no history of multi-village politics in the district. Of the hundreds of lawsuits and dozens of riots that are recorded for the district in the late colonial and early national periods only a handful allied more than one village with each other. In fact, territorial conflicts often fostered fierce rivalries between precisely the villages which were close to each other and often spoke the same language. Third, there was no issue that could potentially unify groups from different villages. Villages controlled the agrarian resources of the district. Until the 1840s head taxes remained below colonial levels. And, although foreign imports severely affected the region's textile production, the political impact of this decline was muted. Colonial merchants and officials had actually enjoyed most of the profits of the district's textile production. Moreover, that production was carried out by peasant women as a supplement to farming. Its decline was not the mortal blow to peasants that it was for urban artisans. In fact, the opportunity cost of women's labor

⁶⁸Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1995); Michael Ducey, "Liberals and Peasants on the Periphery: A Reevaluation," Paper presented at the Seminario: Nuevos Enfoques en la historia económica y social de México, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Mexico City, August 20, 1991; Guy Thomson, "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10:3 (1991) 265-292; Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996).

⁶⁹Peter Guardino, "Bourbon Judges, Spanish Liberals, and Republican Reformers: Changes in Oaxaca's Political Culture, 1750-1850," Presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Conference on Latin American History, Seattle, January 9.

was so low that they continued to produce some cloth, apparently for local markets where they could even undercut English mills.

Still, understanding why indigenous peasants stayed at the margins of party politics requires us to pay closer attention to the modalities of elections and parties. According to the state constitution, the voters of each parish chose electors. These parochial electors did not have to be able to read or write. They traveled to the departmental or district capital, where they chose departmental electors who would travel to the state capital to choose legislators. These departmental electors had to be residents of the department who were able to read and write, mostly to facilitate the secret ballot.⁷⁰ In essence, the dozens of indigenous peasants who reported to the departmental capital to choose electors had a very restricted set of options. Bourbon officials, republican prefects, and priests had worked for decades to promote village schools. Their efforts were not fruitless, and probably there were a few literate males in every village.⁷¹ Yet electors were unlikely to know indigenous peasants from villages other than their own, and even less likely to select such men to represent them. Between parish priests, schoolmasters, merchants and government officials there were at most a hundred other literate residents of the district. Schoolmasters were unknown outside the village which employed them, and were generally on rather poor terms even with those villagers. Not surprisingly electors turned mostly to priests and government officials. They had no other palatable legal choices.

Indigenous peasants were kept from party politics by one other consideration. Oaxaca's state constitution established small municipalities called *repúblicas* in virtually every village.⁷² The factors which prevented conflict in legislative elections did not hold in municipal elections. Electors did not have to be literate. Colonial indigenous villages were already divided and political places, and this continued after independence. Municipal elections were often very competitive and conflictual. It seems possible that indigenous peasants in factionalized villages might have sought allies in other villages to try to influence the state government. However, this remained unlikely because municipal elections were held annually in December, while legislative elections were held

⁷⁰Constitución política del Estado de Oaxaca, in *Colección de leyes*, I, 58-62.

⁷¹In the 1820 election held under the Spanish constitution, 57 indigenous secondary electors, many of whom wrote out their own ballots by hand, voted in the district election. Yet in voting for the electors who would actually choose state deputies, all the votes went to parish priests. AVA, Fondo Civil, exp. 830 1820.

⁷²*Colección de leyes*, I, 85-6.

biannually in August. The chronological separation seems to have short-circuited any possibility that the contentious politics of indigenous municipalities could be reflected in legislative elections.

Even a cursory examination of municipal politics in the villages of Villa Alta demonstrates that the introduction of near universal manhood suffrage and egalitarian citizenship did not pass villagers by. In traditional elections, voting was restricted to elders who had accumulated prestige through years of service in lower posts and males of families which claimed descent from pre-Hispanic nobles. Universal manhood suffrage in village elections ended this practice. Moreover, the state constitution prohibited hereditary distinctions. Beginning in the 1820s these innovations sparked considerable conflict in the villages. In several cases villagers voted in officials against the wishes of the elders and principales. Village governments also used the state constitution to end the exemptions from service previously flaunted by some families.⁷³ The embrace of the new political norms came at a cost. The new officials lacked the moral authority still enjoyed by elders, and their authority was often challenged. Yet when the centralists ended elected local government villagers resented the appointed justices of the peace even more.⁷⁴

Throughout the early independence period indigenous peasants continued to struggle politically to uphold their interests. Their use of the new republican repertoire was, however, limited to municipal elections. When indigenous peasants took on state officials, priests, or other outsiders they continued to rely on the tried and true repertoire of the colonial period. They sued to protect their rights, selectively using arguments from both colonial law and new legislation. Villagers also rioted, using the threat of physical violence to intimidate officials and priests. Ultimately they did not need party politics or alliances with elite politicians to pursue their goals.

Conclusions

In the city of Oaxaca, party politics and urban mass mobilization were intimately connected to the novel political practice of elections. Although legislators beginning with the Spanish Cortes envisioned a polity free from the taint of factionalism, political operatives in Mexico soon developed methods that turned elections into contests between competing

⁷³AVA, Fondo Civil, exp. 1079 1834.

⁷⁴AVA, Fondo Criminal, 808 1844.

groups. Lists of candidates for elector coupled with press campaigns circumvented the rules legislators had inserted to prevent factionalism and dangerous political mobilization. These methods also allowed the emergence of a partisan electoral politics which facilitated open debate about important policy questions. Yet conflict defined in the electoral arena could not in the end be confined there. Parties that were denied electoral victory could and did project their new mobilizational power in violent upheavals. Antonio López de Santa Anna and Lorenzo de Zavala did so successfully in 1828. Porfirio Díaz followed suit in 1876, while Francisco Madero joined the parade in 1910.

For the indigenous peasants of Villa Alta the picture is more clouded. Although the new electoral norms shook the foundations of village government they did not lead to peasant participation in state party politics. The problem was not peasant docility as much as it was the rules which governed elections. Literacy requirements for secondary electors combined with the fragmented nature of peasant political life to make party politics impossible. Peasants instead continued to use lawsuits and riots to address political actors outside the village. The important elections for villagers remained the local ones.

In my previous research on Guerrero I described how peasants, including indigenous peasants, forged alliances with local yorkinos and federalists. In the 1820s, coastal sharecroppers of cotton supported the anti-Spanish, protectionist movement which brought Vicente Guerrero to the presidency, and continued to collaborate with his successors into the 1850s. Indigenous peasants in the district of Chilapa developed alliances with federalists led by Juan Alvarez in the 1840s. Yet in each case these connections were facilitated by characteristics not found in Villa Alta. Coastal sharecroppers depended heavily on the cotton textile trade and had direct contact with Spanish merchants. They thus found the anti-Spanish campaign and protectionism of the yorkinos compelling.⁷⁵ The indigenous peasants of the Chilapa area faced a powerful local elite which used the centralist's reduction of municipalities after 1836 to appropriate peasant lands. They also resented steep increases in taxation. The popular federalist cry for egalitarianism, low taxes, and local autonomy resonated very strongly with them.⁷⁶ In both these Guerrero cases populist leaders like Isidro Montes de Oca and Juan Alvarez effectively connected the peasants to national allies.

⁷⁵.Guardino, *Peasants, Politics*, 115-144.

⁷⁶.Guardino, *Peasants, Politics*, 147-171.

As outlined above, in Villa Alta the textile economy depressed by foreign imports was not central to indigenous peasant subsistence. Moreover, the Oaxaca state constitution granted indigenous villages the right to run their own affairs. Even when the centralists eliminated these municipalities after 1836, there were no local competitors for resources poised to take advantage of the innovation. The new appointed justices of the peace complained that their moral authority was minimal but peasant resistance to the loss of municipalities and elections seems to have been largely of the passive variety. For instance, Miguel Gomes, justice of the peace of San Miguel Reaguis, complained in 1838 of the "gran desprecio" with which the topil and other service officials disobeyed him because he was not "Electo del Pueblo." Without the cooperation and respect of the villagers, he argued that he was "como un muchacho de Escuela."⁷⁷ Yet, the illegitimacy of the justices of the peace never led to anti-centralist violence. The indigenous peasants of Villa Alta either never saw a need for a supra-village politics of the kind so prominent in Guerrero, or they lacked the opportunity.

Ironically, both the massive participation of the urban plebe in party politics and the apparent disinterest of indigenous peasants played into the hands of elite sages who wanted to remove elections from the political repertoire, or at least reduce opportunities for popular participation. I would argue that the drive to reduce electoral participation, separate elections from the way political decisions were really made, or simply to eliminate elections altogether was usually motivated by the electoral defeats of parties representing the most powerful elite interest groups. However those interest groups needed more disinterested arguments to justify their positions. They based those arguments on the behaviors observed in elections. Both the unruly urban crowds who frequented polling places and the seemingly stolid and alien masses of indigenous peasants seemed too removed from the ideal of the sovereign pueblo rationally exercising its will through the ballot. When held up to the fictitious example of European or North American political behavior Mexico's population came up far too short.

⁷⁷AVA, Fondo Criminal exp. 673 1838. For a similar case see AVA, Fondo Criminal exp. 808-1844.