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Who killed Crispín Aguilar? Violence and order in the postrevolutionary countryside

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Crispín Aguilar was a *pistolero*, one of the violent entrepreneurs who struggled for power across most of Mexico after the armed revolution. During Aguilar's lifetime his murky biography interested journalists, peasants and policemen, who held "el patrón" responsible for the deaths of hundreds of men, women and children, some of whom vanished into a secret burial ground in the hills above his home town of Actopan in central Veracruz. A handful of hastily pencilled, near-unreadable pages in the Gobernación archives form one of his testaments, part of the "Incomplete list of crimes committed by ... Crispín Aguilar": a catalogue of 94 killings over six years.¹ Different types of social scientist could find different reasons to be interested in Aguilar's life. A sociologist might delve into his struggle to remain a node of multiple political, economic and criminal networks, and to dominate a radical *agrarista* peasantry.² A political historian might find his links to the army and President Miguel Alemán worth a look.³ Legal historians might be interested in his trial, acquittal and subsequent jailing; while a criminologist or an aficionado of discourse analysis might like the Lombrosian press descriptions of Aguilar and his peers as

"...short, fat, "*rechoncho*" with a bulky, dangling belly, "like a tear", which is the work of the beer that they put away like pachyderms do water. The complexion battered by drink; red, it shines and sweats, without the hair of a beard or moustache. The top of the skull, flattened, is not abundantly covered and on the inside, the few good ideas which there may be have their own caciques, which are the bad

thoughts. As is generally seen in that class of subhuman being, the lower lip hangs down, a sign of stupidity and inconfessable degeneration. The bulging red eyes, the low brow, indicative of little intelligence for good, but plenty for evil.”⁴

Crispín Aguilar was killed in a cleverly choreographed ambush at the noisy height of *sábado de gloria* in Actopan. More than his life or filmic death, however, it is perhaps its date which is of the greatest interest; for Aguilar did not die in the convulsive agrarian violence of the 1930s, but rather in March 1950.⁵

Crispín Aguilar was a major figure in the politics of a major state from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. He was a key lieutenant of Manuel Parra: a violent agrocapiatalist whose *pistolero*, political and financial networks underpinned a regional power stretching over 25 municipios.⁶ But Aguilar was far from unique. On the rich lands of central Veracruz Aguilar jostled up against several rivals, the principal of whom, Rafael Cornejo Armenta of Plan de las Hayas, was capable of mustering large bands of armed men to “invade” Aguilar’s territory.⁷ Similar competition persisted through the early 1940s in southern Veracruz, where coalitions of ejidos under Juan Paxtián and Nicolás Parra fought it out with cattle raids, canefield ambushes, kidnappings, killings of dependents and hamlet burnings in a “reign of terror” that aimed to build *agrarista* fiefs and personal livestock businesses.⁸ Contemporary Veracruz enjoyed a reputation as a failed state. Yet violent entrepreneurs like the Aguilars and Armentas were to be found in many parts of Mexico, variously dubbed caciques, *matones*, *luchadores*, *valientes*, *gallos* and *pistoleros*. They were the flagship species of rural societies which remained markedly violent long after the traditional watershed of 1940: the year, so Mexicans and Mexicanists once concurred, when the lead of the revolution was transmuted (by the philosophers’ stone of cardenismo) into the *época de oro* of political stability and economic development. In 1950 the municipio of Ometepec, Gro., for example, had a homicide rate high enough

to place it among the twenty most violent municipios in Antioquia, Colombia (the third most violent department during the *Violencia*.)⁹ The idea that Mexican and Colombian provinces might be compared in terms of violence during the 1940s and 1950s is admittedly counter-intuitive. The metanarrative of modern Colombian history revolves around a peculiarly high degree of violence, making violence “a privileged historical referent...one of the poles of attraction for ... social investigation.”¹⁰ Mexico, on the other hand, has been repeatedly presented as exceptional in its post-1940 stability. Very different historians have begun questioning the overwhelming weight of violence in interpretations of the Colombian past.¹¹ This study contends that Mexico’s post-revolutionary narrative of rapid PRIísta pacification demands parallel re-examination.

Measuring violence then and now: methods and hypotheses

The continuity of high levels of violence in the Mexican countryside after 1940 has hitherto been underestimated for three main reasons: a lack of reliable primary material, pronounced obstacles to accessing what documents do exist, and clear disincentives to wandering around Mexican hamlets asking who killed who.¹²

A primordial difficulty is that contemporary metropolitan elites – politicians, journalists, generals, spies and diplomats – had a distinctly tenuous grasp on provincial reality. Subordinates and citizens routinely provided fictions concerning most aspects of country life, from harvests to homicides. Censorship made the fourth estate little use as an open intelligence source.¹³ Mexico City newspapers, particularly the “quality” press, were extremely effectively controlled in this period: when rebellion broke out at Balsas, Gro., in 1947, *Excélsior* ran two short articles on the

“poorly armed cattle rustlers” and then dropped the story.¹⁴ Provincial newspapers were less reliably managed, but their contributors experienced pressures ranging from elegant cooptation to outright murder. When Veracruz’s government wished to remove the lurid *nota roja* from the *Diario de Xalapa* they gave the editor access to wire service and a deputyship.¹⁵ Vicente Villasana, the flamboyant PANista editor of Tampico’s *El Mundo*, was less fortunate; he was murdered by a state police commander.¹⁶ The consequent battle for “cognitive capacity” – the “sustained organization to collect, process, analyse and deliver the types of information about society needed for a modern state to monitor and interpret the impact of its measures” – is a staple of contemporary accounts.¹⁷

Realising that neither federal nor state bureaucracies provided reliable reports on the countryside, President Alemán expanded the intelligence agencies, founding the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS) and inflating the Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS) budget some 500%.¹⁸ DGIPS agents regularly found out how violent that countryside really was in the 1940s and 1950s: one, dispatched to the coast of Oaxaca, was given an automatic rifle, 300 rounds and two platoons as an escort (and was attacked nonetheless.)¹⁹ Yet many of the actors involved in rural violence had strong motives to cover up; as we shall see below, even victims could collaborate in under-representing acts of violence. The DGIPS, moreover, remained a small agency even after its dramatic 1940s expansion. Personnel files reveal a handful of full-time spies who were used intensively; the director could only spare fifteen operatives to monitor the 1952 elections across provincial Mexico.²⁰ Thus the description and quantification of violence, despite the federal government’s interest, remained one of the blanker regions of the state’s generally fuzzy cognitive map. In 1950 the governor of Guerrero reported 44 arrests

for homicide. During the same year Ometepe, a market town of 18 000 people, recorded 23 murders in the Registro Civil.²¹ Early PRIístas were unsure as to how violent the countryside genuinely remained; they often suspected the worst, and kept their suspicions as quiet as possible; and quite often they seem to have been right.²²

Just how right they were is difficult to assess, for studying violence in post-revolutionary Mexico is not straightforward. What primary sources exist are not just unreliable; they are often unreachable. Uncontroversial collections of documents can be of limited use due to periodisation schemes which end history (more effectively than Francis Fukuyama managed) in the 1940s; the cataloguing of even the excellent Veracruz state archive ends in 1949. As for the security archives, the reforms of the Fox *sexenio* were less sweeping than they seemed. The DFS, responsible together with the Guardias Presidenciales for much presidential dirty work in *provincia*, opened its doors a decade ago, but only recently has offered a useful search process. The IPS catalogue, helpfully released on disc, is distinctly incomplete. The drawn out liberalisation of the military's archive has been particularly frustrating. Researchers are now allowed far more than the traditional, carefully-negotiated access to personnel records. Yet the Archivo General de la Nación's well-ordered, thematically-catalogued military collection has two major flaws: its 470-odd volumes cover little more than a decade, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s; and they omit monthly zone commander's reports.²³ These institutional essentials would give historians new levels of insight into the army's central role in maintaining internal order, which may be why they are absent. Monthly zone reports occasionally crop up in other archives; in the mid-1940s they are punctiliously divided into "military, political and social activities"; they are extremely revealing.²⁴

These archival missing links have been reinforced by careerist sanctions against scholars and violent sanctions against journalists who are interested in violence.²⁵ The historians of the Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements of the Past were fired without pay and their report, a detailed critique of the military during the counter-insurgency in Guerrero, was edited to remove names and evidence. The perpetrators of Mexico's disappearances were themselves to be disappeared from public history.²⁶ Manuel Parra – the greatest *pistolero* of them all – rose from the dead to literally haunt sociologist Antonio Santoyo when he delved into Parra's life forty years post mortem.²⁷ While the current, extremely high, death rate amongst journalists in northern Mexico is notorious, inquisitive journalists in PRIísta Mexico always ran risks. Finally, such lacunae may also obey theoretical preferences: it is difficult to square high levels of post-1940 political/state violence with either neo-Gramscian interpretations of the revolution or corporatist models of the post-revolutionary state.

None of these problems are insuperable. There is abundant qualitative data on violence in the reports of DGIPS agents, more prolix than their (more thuggish) counterparts in the DFS; in political correspondence at the lowest levels of Mexican government, particularly that between *comisariados municipales* and ayuntamientos; in state judicial archives; in the voluminous protests countrymen sent to the Presidency and Gobernación; in those provincial newspapers which resisted censorship, such as Ignacio de la Hoya's magnificently plainspoken *La Verdad de Acapulco*; and in the work of contemporary ethnographers such as Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Paul Friedrich and Marcos Muñoz. (Some of whom had a clear elective affinity for caciquismo; Friedrich was told "You could be a leader here, Paul, you could order killings.")²⁸

Quantative data is more complicated, despite Pablo Piccato's useful compilation of federal and state crime statistics for the twentieth century.²⁹ Federal homicide statistics were not compiled until the late 1930s, providing no valid baseline for post-revolutionary levels of violence. The series that does exist is moreover incomplete. Not all years are covered, and some of the missing data, such as that covering Guerrero in the late 1970s, or Veracruz in the mid-1940s, coincide with periods of unusually intense violence. The lack of a census for 1980 means, additionally, that the population data necessary for calculating homicide rates grows sketchy just as Mexico's population grew fastest. Above all, there is a fundamental reporting problem: fear of reprisal and mistrust of local government meant that homicides in particular went routinely unreported. Reviewing the Cuajinicuilapa, Gro., registro civil for 1948, Aguirre Beltrán found that only 30% of all deaths went recorded; Veronique Flanet obtained a similar estimate of reporting frequency twenty years later in Jamiltepec, Oax.³⁰ A 1948 protest from the eastern highlands of Guerrero pinned twenty murders on the Salgado brothers – well-connected cattle rustlers – and explained the rationale for victim under-reporting:

“There was no investigation by any Authority of these killings, it was kept quiet and the very mourners knew...who they were and said nothing to avoid the same fate....Generals and representatives of the Sr. Gobernador have come and have left Huamuxtitlán with a few thousand pesos in their pockets and they go and mislead the Governor that all is quiet and that there are no such troubles.”³¹

“It is customary”, one Veracruzano told the president, “that anyone who sees anything and tells tales to the Authorities is murdered.”³² The consequent omissions of reporting inject a tangible unreality into governmental accounts of crime.³³ In some cases official homicide counts actually decline as violence peaks; and no one was using household surveys to provide alternative statistics in 1940s Mexico.³⁴ “It is

important”, Moisés de la Peña noted in the late 1940s, “to point out that that the data on recorded presumed crimes does not represent anything but a minimal part of the real number of crimes committed”.³⁵

Yet this is a standard problem: using police or military statistics as an index of the real level of violence is “highly suspect” in many societies.³⁶ Colombian statistical records are similarly variable: the Ministry of Justice homicide rate for the *violencia* in Antioquia is roughly half that calculated by the department’s governor.³⁷ There is something of a paradox in that the more significant a society’s homicide rate is, the more difficult it becomes to measure accurately. (And the less politically convenient: an instance of Campbell’s Law, which holds that the more politically-charged a statistic is, the less likely it is to be accurate.)³⁸ Thus civilian casualties during the occupation of Iraq, 2003-2006, were estimated to sum between 44 and 48 000 by the occupiers; and 655 000 – an order of magnitude greater – by *The Lancet*.³⁹ The Piccato dataset is clearly imperfect: it makes Guerrero one of the least violent states in 1940s Mexico. Yet it has multiple, critical applications. If we assume either constant or rising reporting rates since 1940 – which given the growing “degree of stateness” across the period is a justifiable assumption⁴⁰ – then its finding of a long term decline in the national homicide rate from 1940 onward is reliable.⁴¹ Furthermore, acknowledging the crude quality of both Mexican and Colombian statistics should not prohibit their comparison. At a regional level, such an exercise reveals broadly similar rates of homicide in Guerrero, San Luis Potosí and Veracruz in Mexico and all bar the most violent Colombian departments between 1946 and 1960.⁴² This, it must be stressed, can only be a tentative, suggestive finding. But it is reinforced by what we might call “grassroots statistics”: the homicide rates revealed by interviews and by the *libros de defunciones* of registros civiles. In La Montaña, Gro., (notably less violent

than Tierra Caliente or the coast) 1953 figures gave results of c. 100 homicides per 100 000 population for Ahuacotzingo and Xochihuéhuetlan, and considerably above that for Olinalá and Huamuxtitlán.⁴³ The high forced migration rates that can be extrapolated from ejidal census results are further indicators of violence. In Tulapan, Ver., in a zone where opportunist agrarian bosses battled with peculiar ferocity, the 1952 census revealed that half the original inhabitants had abandoned the ejido.⁴⁴ The Mexican countryside remained a profoundly violent place in the 1940s and early 1950s: army officers in Guerrero stressed the “intense” and “very common” incidence of homicide, while in Veracruz an agent reported that “not a day [passed] without underhand murders.”⁴⁵ Both government and grassroots statistics reinforce qualitative evidence that the PRIísta state was not born of any *pax cardenista*.⁴⁶

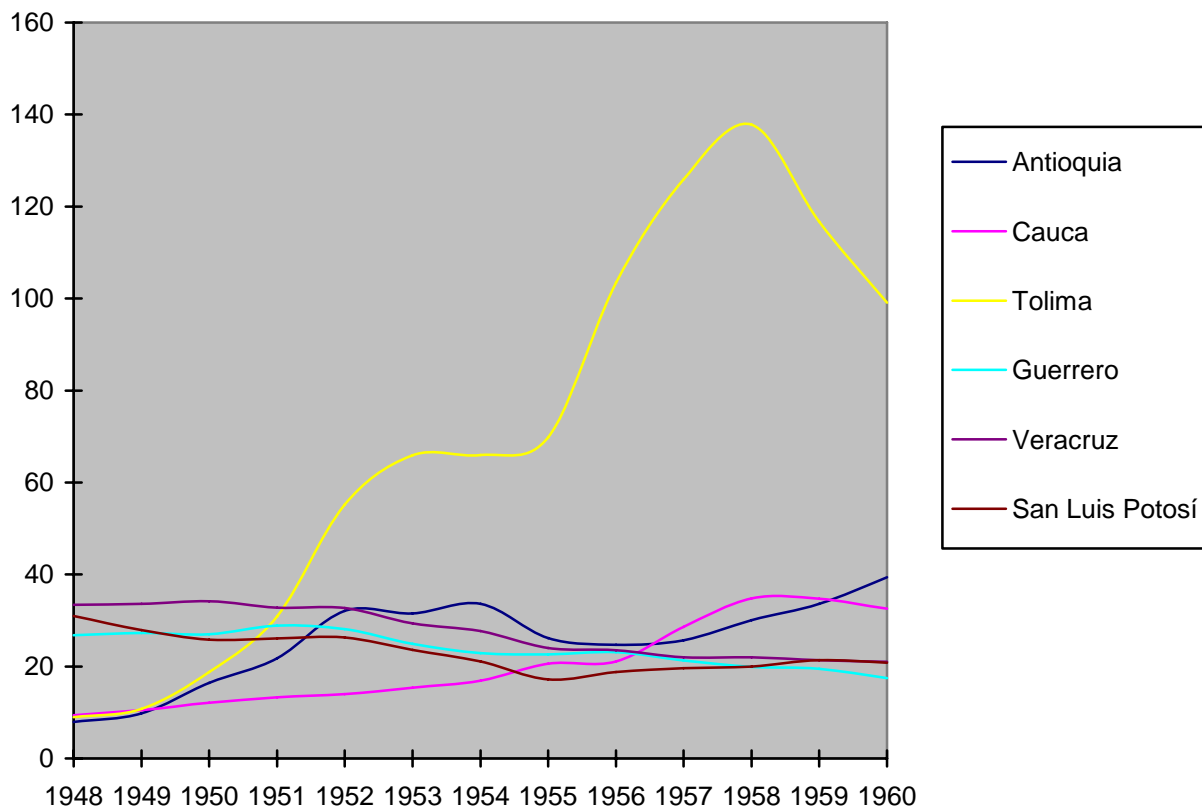


Figure 1.1 *Three-year moving averages of homicide rates per 100 000 population, selected Mexican states and Colombian departments, 1948-1960.*

Sources: Ministerio de Justicia, *Cinco años de criminalidad aparente, 1955-1959* (vol 2, Bogotá, 1961), reproduced in James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bleed: A History of the Violencia in Tolima* (University of Alabama, 1985), p.254, Pablo Piccato, “Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001”, INEGI, *Estadísticas históricas de México CD-ROM* (México DF, 2000).

Municipio & Year	Homicides per 100 000 population
Ometepec, Guerrero, 1950	129
Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero, 1948	397
Huamuxtlán, Guerrero, 1953	203
Naranja, Michoacán, 1950	c. 600
Caucasia, Antioquia, 1949-1953	840
Dabeiba, Antioquia, 1949-1953	670
San Luis, Antioquia, 1949-1953	189
Anzá, Antioquia, 1949-1953	478

Figure 1.2. *Homicide rates in selected Mexican and Colombian municipios, 1949 -1953*

Sources: Libros de defunciones, Ometepec & Ixcateopan registros civiles; Marcos Muñoz, “Mixteca-Nahua-Tlapaneca” in *Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista* vol. IX (México DF, 1963); Paul Friedrich, *The Princes of Naranja: an essay in anthrohistorical method* (Austin, 1986); Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Cuijla: esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro* (México DF, 1995 [1958]) INEGI, *Estadísticas históricas de México CD-ROM* (México DF, 2000); Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953* (Duke, 2002).

Homicide was, of course, merely one point on a broad spectrum of violence. At one end of this spectrum lay the “everyday” violence of intimidation, jailings, fights and beatings. At the other end were fully-fledged (if failed) rural rebellions, such as the 1946 Padillista risings (when several hundred armed men took to the sierra in the defeated presidential candidate’s *patria chica* of northern Guerrero), or the 1947 rebellion at Balsas, Gro, or the 1954/1955 henriquista risings in Chiapas, Chihuahua, Morelos and Veracruz.⁴⁷ In the middle lay rapes, riots (particularly

common after contested elections), murders, petty massacres, forced migrations and peasant jacqueries, such as the lynching of a vet and seven soldiers in Senguio, Mich., during the campaign against foot-and-mouth disease.⁴⁸ The marked diversity of violent behaviour may be conceptualised in various ways. A common framework seeks to divine the goals of the perpetrators, dividing their acts into social, economic and political categories.⁴⁹ This tripartite conceptualisation often breaks down in practice, however, due to a) frequent contests over the meaning of violent acts, and b) frequent overlaps between all three categories. In mid-century Mexico, at least, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the ready interconvertability of different forms of social capital – symbolic, economic and political – may offer more analytical insight.⁵⁰ Violence during the revolutionary and immediate post-revolutionary periods constituted a key commodity, as it could be very readily traded for any and all of these forms of social capital. Why that should have been so – why Mexico remained distinctly violent – will be the subject of the “rank” section of this analysis: a synchronic sketch of violence in the early to mid-1940s. What changed (and what did not) over the whole of the transition period, 1940-1955, will form the “files” of this history.

Crispín Aguilar, the army and agrarian capitalism in Veracruz

The end of large-scale fighting in 1920 had left Mexico with a collapsed state, newly-fluid property rights and a society in arms. Such situations favour the emergence of violent entrepreneurship, defined by Vadim Volkov as “a set of organizational solutions and action strategies enabling organized force (or organized violence) to be converted into money or other valuable assets on a permanent basis”.⁵¹ No government in the next twenty years was capable of demobilising these violent entrepreneurs: the Cárdenas government, by cutting deals with regional caciques

while arming agraristas, often succeeded in empowering both peasant militias and *guardias blancas*. Neither of the central components of order enforcement – police forces and a functioning court system – was operationally effective, and state governments lacked the money to improve them. Neither Guerrero nor Veracruz established an effective state police until the late 1940s; in 1935 Guerrero spent 1.5%, and Veracruz 2%, of their respective budgets on policing.⁵² The judiciary, meanwhile, was prey to widespread political and economic corruption at all levels. Municipal judges and *agentes del ministerio público* (investigating magistrates) were usually recruited from or by the dominant local faction. Guerrero’s supreme court was controlled throughout the 1930s and 1940s by Rodolfo Neri, ex-governor and leader of one of the state’s major political dynasties.⁵³ Justice in Veracruz was, a Gobernación agent reported, likewise “completely politicised”.⁵⁴ A combination of low and declining salaries, lucrative opportunities for speculation and a high tolerance of malpractice further stimulated judicial corruption. The state’s formal mechanisms for controlling violence had failed, and both state and local actors consequently dealt with high levels of rural violence by contracting locally-specific protection arrangements with one or more of the four main violent agencies: the army, the *defensas rurales*, the police and the *pistoleros*. The numbers and autonomy of these violent actors produced what Georg Elwert defines as a

“market of violence, [an]...arena...of long-term violent interaction, unrestrained by overarching power structures and mitigating norms, where several rational actors employ violence as a strategy to bargain for power and material benefits.”⁵⁵

Incidents of rural violence were represented by both regional and federal elites as ruptures in the state’s control, driven by powerful traditions of atavistic feud and petty authoritarianism. Alemán delivered a succinct version of this official line during

a chaotic 1949 tour of Guerrero: “The caciquismo which exists in various regions of the Republic”, he told journalists,

“is a problem with colonial roots, characteristic of our country, and whose influence the Federal Government tries to reduce to avoid damage to lives and livelihoods; but without ceasing to recognise that its extinction will only come about through the education of future generations.”⁵⁶

Such structural explanations served elites of all levels in two ways. Their cultural determinism lent the state’s provincial managers a ready-made excuse for failure to control their domains. Governor Rafael Catalán Calvo, for example, explained coastal Guerrero’s extreme violence as having its “...origin, very remote of course, in personal questions and interests...as regrettably the majority of the inhabitants of this zone are uncivilized people...they cannot be kept in line by the judicial authorities...”⁵⁷ In some cases, of course, violence was indeed rooted in local feuds. At other times such a presentation was misleading, and by essentialising regional cultures as intrinsically violent, politicians, caciques, military leaders and landowners all attempted to remove (their) agency from the commission of violence. Political violence is a delegitimising phenomenon for any state to recognise, signifying either the extremes of popular refusal or the incapacity of elites to achieve their ends by more stately means, and Mexican leaders naturally denied the political nature of violence and their deep involvement in its commission. They were sometimes right, and it would be one-sided to register the depoliticisation of violence as a tool of the dominant classes without simultaneously acknowledging the existence of the opposite procedure, the politicisation of apolitical violence by *los de abajo*. Homicides denounced as political by a protesting peasantry to a distant Gobernación could in fact be rooted in cantina quarrels, personal vendettas or ill-judged romance, and elite protestations of innocence could (at least occasionally) be worth the flimsy telegram

paper on which they were printed.⁵⁸ Yet most violence – whether committed by state or non-state actors – was profoundly political, and much of it was less a rupture with the state’s control than a foundation stone of what tenuous control existed.

The mainstay of rural repression and policing was the army, by far the most powerful violent agency, mustering some 55 000 men in four divisions, 47 infantry battalions and 21 cavalry regiments. It was a two-tier military. The divisions, containing the best troops, tanks and artillery, were reserved to defend the capital against disorder or military rebellion, while the inferior, often undermanned infantry and cavalry units were stretched thinly across the 33 provincial Military Zones. The cities housed regimental garrisons; strategic or conflictual *cabeceras* were garrisoned by companies or platoons; rural conflict zones were patrolled by flying columns.⁵⁹ It was customary for governors to include a catch-all acknowledgement of the military’s role in “maintaining public order” in their annual reports, which greatly underrepresented the omnipresence of soldiers in carrying out a broad range of police tasks.⁶⁰ In towns and cities the army controlled crowds, the press, gamblers, prostitutes, elections and even municipal governments.⁶¹ Soldiers investigated banditry, robbery and murder and arrested suspects; they sometimes guarded prisons into the bargain.⁶² Army commanders were critical determinants in the provincial balance of power: they frequently decided which faction to arm (with Mausers, as *defensas rurales*) and which to disarm (under the provisions of *despistolización*.)⁶³ And they committed violence themselves, in a confused world of half-formal policing missions and half-informal political manoeuvring.

Formally, routine rural work meant garrison duty, patrols and escorts, the mere presence of troops fulfilling a significant deterrent role. When deterrence failed, small detachments went to suppress gunfights and clear up village vendettas. Larger

conflicts – waves of cattle-rustling or banditry, intervillage feuding or the intensifying of local agrarian disputes that such phenomena reflected – drew larger responses: formations of several companies, sometimes reinforced with reservists, who embarked on regional sweeps that were often counter-insurgencies in all but name, complete with opponents who fought back. In 1944 a detachment escorting a federal treasury inspector was ambushed on Guerrero’s Costa Chica, losing four soldiers and the taxman; in the same year two more soldiers were killed while escorting an “Inspector de Alcoholes” on the Costa Grande; in September 1948 soldiers pursuing the killers of the Eureka Corporation’s accountant lost three men in a firefight in the hills outside Acapulco.⁶⁴ Officers facing a dangerous countryside and failing courts frequently made their own rough justice, and the *ley fuga* remained commonplace.⁶⁵ The protests which extrajudicial executions sparked make it clear, however, that some whom the army saw as criminals were seen by local societies as popular leaders. Even the *gente de orden* of the Costa Grande qualified their strong support for the army’s operations by calling their tactics “drastic”.⁶⁶ Extrajudicial killings could temporarily shore up the state’s drive for public order; they could also undermine the claims of both army and state to neutrality and legitimacy.

Sectors of the high command and federal politicians had tried since the 1920s to construct a professional, institutionally neutral military. Towards that end in the 1940s they purged older officers and tried to insist on the regular rotation of zone commanders, a key policy in centralising and depoliticising provincial command that dated back to the Porfiriato.⁶⁷ Everyday policing duties were inimical to that depoliticisation, fostering incestuous relations between local elites and soldiers and providing rich opportunities for corruption. Defensa Nacional consequently tried to strictly limit the army’s policing role. A January 1946 circular specified that

“...given that various groups and civil authorities of the Republic continually come requesting detachments of Federal Forces in order to obtain constitutional guarantees, it has been ordered that the said troops should not undertake police functions...”⁶⁸

Yet in the mid-1940s – as in the mid-1990s – the state proved incapable of managing public order without substantial army assistance. Heavily engaged in policing (and in a host of other nominally civilian functions) the army remained embroiled in the economic, political and criminal networks of local societies.

Crispín Aguilar’s career is a case study in that interpenetration. Veracruz was a wealthy state: the revolution had largely destroyed her rivals in sugar and livestock production (Morelos and Chihuahua) leaving Veracruzanos dominant in both industries.⁶⁹ Agraristas, however, exercised a powerful selective pressure on the state’s agrocaptalists; and so across the 1920s and 1930s a generation of hard-faced men who looked as though they had done well out of the revolution took over Porfirian haciendas and found new ways of making them profitable.⁷⁰ Manuel Parra was the most successful of those men, arriving in the state in 1929 and making the Hacienda Almolonga the headquarters of a petty empire. At its base was violence: Parra was backed by a paramilitary force, the *Mano Negra*, which Gobernación estimated at five hundred men, he imported arms from “his” coast and he enjoyed links with defence secretaries – one, Pablo Quiroga, became a business partner – and zone commanders.⁷¹ He was accused of thousands of killings of agraristas, ranging from smallholders to the 1936 governor-elect, Manlio Fabio Altamirano.⁷² Yet Parra was more than a simple hitman. He clearly enjoyed a certain mafioso-like legitimacy: the “*Corrido de Manuel Parra*” approvingly cites his tolerance of religion (in a powerfully anti-clerical state), his protection of small cattle ranchers from banditry and the discernment of his violence (“he only hits those who rob”).⁷³ At least two of

his local bosses were themselves agraristas, who considered Parra's organisation as "a sort of police force in the centre of the state, whose function was to maintain the order lost during the tejedista years".⁷⁴ Parra was also extremely well-connected at both national and regional levels. He was a reliable ally to national politicians seeking counterbalances to Veracruz's agrarian radicals, from Calles through Cárdenas to Avila Camacho.⁷⁵ His relations with state elites were horizontal and mutualist, not hierarchical and clientelist. Governor Miguel Alemán reportedly "didn't take any important step without first consulting Parra"; the zone commander, General Mange, maintained a "regular and frequent correspondence" with the head of the *Mano Negra*, whom he also armed.⁷⁶ Crispín Aguilar was Parra's lieutenant; a key player in this complex system of rural domination, which he joined after fighting the delahuertistas in the agrarista 86th Battalion.⁷⁷ By the late 1930s Aguilar was boss of the wealthy cane and cattle zone of Actopan, Parra's most reliable and used hitman and a *ganadero* of some standing in Xalapa society.⁷⁸

Crispín Aguilar's power continued to grow across the first half of the 1940s. He killed scores of village and state-level agraristas, including the *presidentes municipales* of Villa Cardel, Ursulo Galván and Actopan (inheriting the latter job himself); he colonised the village governments, police forces and *defensas rurales* of both the coast and the foothills to the north and west of the port of Veracruz.⁷⁹ He also planned joint enterprises with other members of Parra's network, such as the Cuban emigré Antonio Eguía and Ernesto Pardo, Parra's doctor.⁸⁰ But Dr. Pardo's preventive medicine did not match his political acumen, and in 1943 Manuel Parra died unexpectedly of a heart attack. His death sparked a *pistolero* civil war over the succession. General Mange tried to stop hostilities: in April 1945 he summoned Aguilar and the other leaders – Manuel Viveros from Almolonga, Rafael Cornejo

Armenta, the Campomanes brothers from Ursulo Galván – to a meeting in his headquarters. The zone commander complained that their feuding had given General Reyes Esquivel in Martínez de la Torre “a very bad impression” of them, and told them to visit Reyes and explain themselves. They went to Xalapa, rented a Flecha Roja bus and travelled together to meet the General in Perote. At the subsequent summit in Reyes’ barracks they explained “that they were slandered in the sense that they were killers and bandits but that that was not true” and that they were unified and prepared to pacify the countryside. The *pistoleros* then returned to Xalapa, accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Sebastián Contreras Barreras, and tried to report their meeting to General Josué Benignos, the chief of state police.⁸¹ It was an impressive display of the normalisation of their role as one more violent agency, capable of quiet negotiations with military and police commanders. Yet any peace was a hiatus; the uncertainty and opportunity afforded by the death of Parra, the change of governor and the presidential election all fostered continuing violent competition as *pistoleros* fought with each other and with agraristas to redraw the boundaries of their territories.⁸² These were Hobbesian times, in which Parra’s network degenerated into a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, fuelled by “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death...because [they could not] assure the power and means to live well...without the acquisition of more.”⁸³ The ensuing state of nature lasted for five years as *pistolero* killed *pistolero*. Popular opinion enjoyed the show of self-destruction: “they did away with themselves” crowed one corrido.⁸⁴ In reality, however, the mass extinction of the Veracruz *pistoleros* was less suicide than state achievement.

On a federal level, President Miguel Alemán’s administration forced General Mange to abandon his former allies, while in Veracruz Governor Adolfo Ruiz

Cortines reformed the state police – providing them with new arms, jeeps and commanders – and sent them against the *pistoleros*.⁸⁵ In 1947 the state’s new mounted police began to arrest low-ranking gunmen in regional sweeps that captured 220 wanted men in the first eight months of the year.⁸⁶ In December they arrested Crispín Aguilar himself, who was sentenced to eight years in jail.⁸⁷ While Aguilar was in prison in Allende, Ver., his colleagues and rivals continued to kill each other. In March 1949 Aguilar gunmen shot Pardo and Eguía, once business partners, now enemies who had testified against him, on a bus in Villa Cardel.⁸⁸ Meanwhile an energetic judicial campaign was supplemented with high-level extrajudicial killings. Marciano Armenta was subjected to the *ley fuga* by federal agents on the road to México DF; José Aguilar, Crispín’s brother, was killed by men dressed as state police.⁸⁹ In early 1950 Aguilar was released into a changed world, where his former gunmen were rumoured to have turned against him, and where he was not expected to last long. On 6 April he returned to Actopan, where on the 8th he left his house for the drinking, cockfights and horse races of the *sábado de gloria*. He began drinking with two bodyguards in the main square, defiant, singing “traigo mi .45” and firing shots in the air. The local garrison arrested him and, after a struggle, let him go with neither pistol nor bodyguards. Aguilar went back to drinking; in the early evening he set off down the Calle de San Francisco with his fourteen-year old son Gonzalo and Eleuterio López. The streetlights went out and the municipal police – led by his former clients, the López brothers – opened fire. Gonzalo Aguilar was killed almost instantly, by mistake they claimed. Crispín Aguilar was hit in the chest and stomach and stumbled as far as the door of his house, where he died.⁹⁰

The López brothers made full confessions: they had plotted to kill Crispín Aguilar before he killed them and their father, manager of the electricity plant, had

turned off the streetlighting to aid the ambush. It was notable, however, that soldiers disarmed “el patrón” and patrolled the street where he was shot immediately before the ambush.⁹¹ Unquestionably the state seized Aguilar’s death as an opportunity to retake lost territory. Army units immediately flooded into Actopan, and the following months saw the disintegration of the rest of the Aguilar network in shootings and arrests.⁹² Two years later Aguilar’s great rival, Rafael Cornejo Armenta, was similarly murdered in his hometown, his network dismantled by the state police.⁹³ These deaths were turning points in regional history. They also exemplified three tangible changes in the quality and quantity of violence in Mexico between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s. State violence became more selective and institutionalized, and somewhat less militarised; entrepreneurial violence was decentralised; and across much, but not all, of the countryside, violence began to fall.⁹⁴

Changing modes and quanta of violence

The demilitarisation of state violence was due in part to a hard-won increase in civilian control over both the regular army and its anarchic reserves. The Mexican Army has managed memory with enduring success, promoting – like their Brazilian counterparts – a resilient image of early institutional unity and professionalisation over an alternative, grassroots narrative of corruption, factionalism and commercialised violence.⁹⁵ The army version of history, sustained by tight archival control, bled into subsequent scholarly analyses that concurred with the military’s projection of a decorous withdrawal from politics in the early 1940s.⁹⁶ Yet the Alemán sexenio was in reality a time of bitter struggle between different army factions, pitting loyal PRIísta officers against two hardline groups which aspired to an intensification and formalisation of military power. This struggle had three main

battlefields: army attempts to stop Alemán's candidacy in 1945, the mooted military takeover of 1948 and the henriquista campaign of 1951-1952. From the government's viewpoint it was a close run thing; in August 1948 a trusted informant offered the US embassy odds of six to four on a revolt.⁹⁷ The line was held by measures including three sweeping reshuffles, among them the dissolution of the General Staff in November 1948; by the systematic bribery of zone commanders with money from the unaudited president's discretionary fund; by land grants, houses, full pay retirements, life insurance and soft loans to serving officers and veterans alike; and by tight presidential control over the army's elite units in Mexico City.⁹⁸ The 1952 repression of the henriquistas (factions of whom advocated agrarian rebellion or *coup d'état*) provided a further opportunity to purge dissident officers, and to finalise a *modus vivendi* that left the generals with considerable regional and institutional autonomy in exchange for national submission.⁹⁹ Yet this same submissiveness had some trickle down effect on the Military Zones, whose commanders lost power in the late 1940s. In Guerrero none of General Castrejón's immediate successors enjoyed his independence or his powerful regional economic and political interests. And in Veracruz General Mange's *cacicazgo* endured until 1959; he preserved his business interests, and even expanded his territorial reach; but he never regained his extraordinary powers of the early 1940s, when, in alliance with the *pistoleros*, he ruled much of the state.

Military power could not have been reduced without the simultaneous construction of a viable alternative source of state violence, namely police forces, functioning courts and penitentiary systems. This could be seen in unlikely places, such as San Luis Potosí, where Gonzalo N. Santos reformed the state police and warned judges against "amiguismo".¹⁰⁰ Even at a municipal level frequent

denunciations of brutal incompetence and politicisation were interspersed with indicators of an embryonic professionalisation. In Ixcateopan the poorest townsmen refused in 1948 to continue with the customary amateur policing of the *ronda*; similar protests in Jamiltepec, Oax., led to the establishment of a paid police force.¹⁰¹ In 1951 Governor Gómez Maganda reorganised Guerrero's state police to provide nearly six hundred better-paid, better-equipped policemen who covered some thirty of the state's *municipios* and reported directly to the governor.¹⁰² The governments of both Guerrero and Veracruz deployed increasing numbers of rural flying columns in the second half of the 1940s, taking over some of the army's former policing roles. Such state police forces grew significantly in size and sophistication during the Alemán sexenio, underpinned by significant increases in funding. Veracruz's programme of police reform between 1945 and 1953 encompassed new commanders, expanded recruitment, training, salaries and pensions, the provision of Mausers, sub-machine guns, trucks and jeeps to the policemen and the creation of an elite detective force. The new force under General Antioco Lara Salazar had notable successes: a round up of outstanding arrest warrants led to a series of large-scale police operations that yielded 452 arrests in 1948 and 840 in 1949. The rate of arrest warrant completion trebled. The courts in both states processed increasing numbers of cases; meanwhile the construction of new jails such as Perote's San Carlos penitentiary and the improvement of existing buildings made custodial sentencing more effective than in the early 1940s.¹⁰³ (When escape was an easy way out, as evinced by 114 trials for jailbreak in Veracruz in 1943 alone.)¹⁰⁴ This shift should not be overstated. Even in Veracruz the new police were far from omnipresent; the flying columns were overwhelmingly concentrated in the centre of the state.¹⁰⁵ In Guerrero, which lagged far behind, even the main cities continued to lack effective full-time police coverage:

in 1952 the DFS noted that booming Acapulco was policed by 17 officers and 36 men, making it “completely impossible to provide effective security to society and repress criminality”.¹⁰⁶ The army remained critical to provincial order: in the early 1950s small, platoon-sized garrisons remained in some 20% of the country’s municipios.¹⁰⁷ But for all the caveats there had been a leap in civilian police capacities which enabled a move towards the Porfirian division of labour, with strategic centres under civilian police control while state peripheries remained largely militarised. The comparison was made explicit in recurrent proposals to resurrect the *rurales*, complete with *charro* uniforms.¹⁰⁸ With presidents and governors able to control at least some of the countryside without recourse to the army, the generals’ bargaining power and the autonomy it once bought were correspondingly reduced.

A younger generation of more educated and urban provincial politicians, less hardbitten and with better police than their predecessors, simultaneously severed some of the traditional links between *políticos* and *pistoleros*. The police, courts, military, intelligence and hired assassins were all used by the new men against the old guard of gunmen. When local governors proved recalcitrant in abandoning such useful allies they were pressured by the centre. In 1952 DFS agents forced Gómez Maganda to fire the *pistoleros* whom he had recruited for Acapulco’s police force, then arrested and *ley fuga*’d the most prominent.¹⁰⁹ In Veracruz the result was the mass extinction of the leading violent entrepreneurs; in Guerrero a curtailing of their formal political careers. Alfredo Córdoba Lara, for example, was forced by General Sánchez Taboada to resign his candidacy for Acapulco’s deputyship due to his implication in the murder of union leader Pillo Rosales; yet he led the state’s branch of the CTM until his death in 1962.¹¹⁰ Many gunmen continued their work inside the broad church of the state security services; as the “*Corrido a la trágica muerte de*

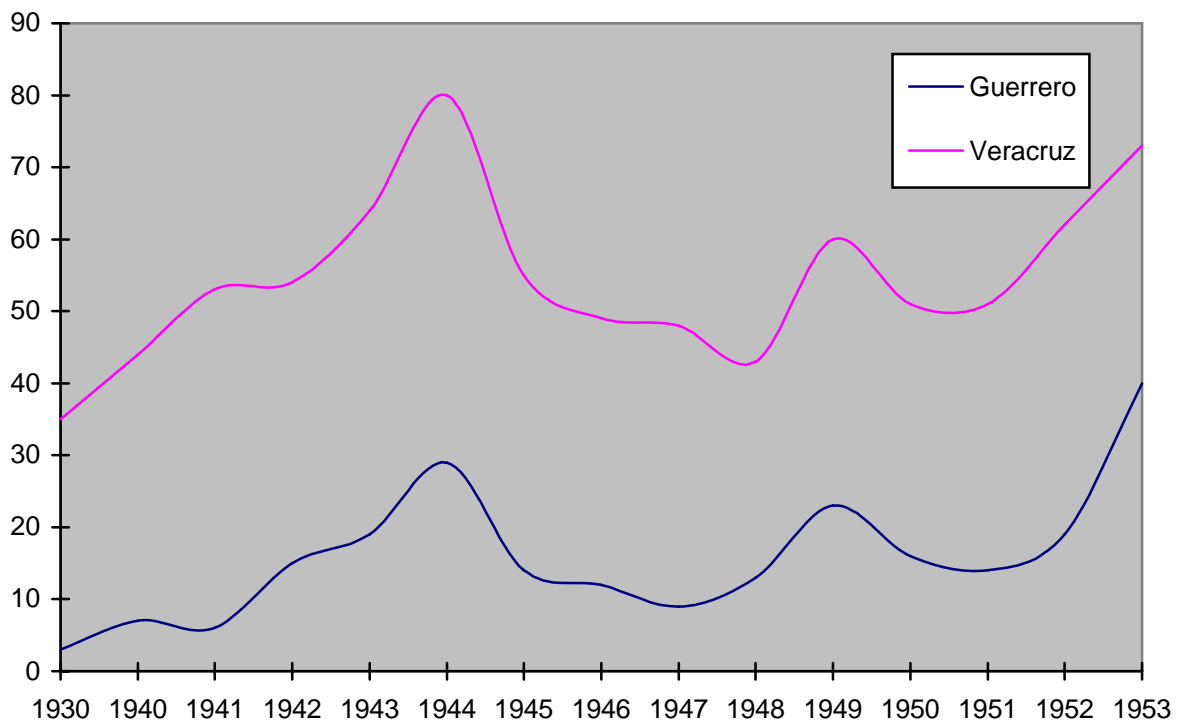


Figure 1.3. *Successful prosecutions per annum, Guerrero and Veracruz, 1930-1953.*

Source: Pablo Piccato, “Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001”.

Crispín Aguilar” had it, “*pa’ los toros del Jaral, los caballos de allá mismo.*”¹¹¹ The Armenta brothers were killed by men working for central government; a rash of Presidential Guard credentials protected *pistoleros* from the south of Veracruz to the Costa Grande; and Miguel Alemán was guarded by men such as Miguel Portilla, his driver, whose nickname in Xalapa was “*el asesino*”.¹¹² But Alemanista politicians were more sensitive to public opinion than their predecessors: they increased press and public relations spending and achieved a far greater distance in their relations with grassroots violence, “trying out”, one journalist observed, “new methods of elimination that were not our classic “preventive killings”.¹¹³ Their search for deniability was exemplified in the changing fashions of assassination. When

Governor Berber tried to kill the agrarista Nabor Ojeda in 1941 he had his car machine-gunned; when union leader Pillo Rosales was killed he was hit over the head and his car driven into a ravine, in a failed attempt to feign accidental death.¹¹⁴ Obvious murders were slowly superseded by suspicious suicides and contrived car crashes.¹¹⁵ There was, furthermore, a clear difference between the *modus operandi* of late 1940s governors such as Leyva Mancilla or Muñoz and their predecessors such as Berber or Cerdán; the former were never directly linked to political assassinations. This change was in part a genuine decentralisation of informal state violence, encouraged by Alemán when he fired the governor of Tamaulipas for conniving at the killing of the newspaper editor Villasana.¹¹⁶ It quite possibly also represented a substitution of suggestion for former, explicit command; a case of “*mátalos en caliente*” being paraphrased by “will no one rid me of this turbulent PRIísta?”

Conclusion

Crispín Aguilar was killed in the midst of a bloody campaign of extermination of Veracruz’s violent entrepreneurs; while ex-clients pulled the trigger, the state set him up. He died at the end of a decade less violent, on most indicators, than the later 1930s, but considerably more violent than the “national unity” propaganda of Avila Camacho and the early PRI let on. In 1950, the year Aguilar died, the regional homicide rate rose; thereafter it dropped sharply. This closes a neat narrative for the history of violence and order in Veracruz, whereby gunmen capitalists are critical in first containing and then destroying radical agrarismo, and are then discarded by the first generation of PRIístas, who manage to rule a weary countryside with less bloodshed than their predecessors. It is too neat to be representative of the entire

country. Across Mexico the evidence for the tenacious continuity of violent practices by rulers and ruled between 1940 and 1955 outweighs that suggesting any sudden rupture. *Pistoleros* endured, remaining central to state control in regions like Oaxaca.¹¹⁷ Mario Colonna, a major Veracruz hitman, was not killed until the 1960s; *el Animal*, a legendary Guerrerense gunman, survived and was wheeled out to a place of honour when PRIístas came to the coast on campaign; Aristeo Prado, dubbed Michoacán's "last *valiente*", survived until the early 1980s.¹¹⁸ Reformed police forces and courts fluctuated in their effectiveness: *vox populi* in the 1960s had the *procurador* and a commander of state police running the Veracruz drug trade.¹¹⁹ Soldiers, meanwhile, remained essential to provincial schemes of order, and a moderated military caciquismo persisted. The army's early 1940s role in policing and counter-insurgency endured in many regions. Its significance rebounded – particularly in Chihuahua, Yucatán and Guerrero – in the 1960s, as open guerrilla warfare spread in selected regions. As a 1967 CIA appraisal summarised it,

“Rural unrest is frequently manifested in violent outbreaks...Peace is maintained by the Mexican Army, which is both brutally effective and politically astute. The army has dispatched units to scenes of unrest where, after publicizing an imminent “training maneuver”, they have used a hillside for massive firing practice, blasting all standing objects to rubble.”¹²⁰

Across the Mexican countryside actual violence, the possibility of violence and the decisive memory of violence past all continued to shape everyday lives.

Yet the late 1940s were nonetheless pivotal. The incidence of violence in the three states sampled may have been broadly comparable to all but the most violent Colombian departments. But the political management of violence in the two countries differed markedly. As the *violencia* gathered momentum the Colombian

government deprofessionalised the police, replacing Liberals with conservative peasant recruits, the *chulavitas*; encouraged the formation of paramilitaries, the *contrachusmas*, and the work of political assassins, the *pájaros*; and militarised the countryside.¹²¹ The net effect was to create a vigorous free market of violence. In Mexico the first generation of PRIístas pursued different policies: they created professional police forces, engineered the moderation of *pistolero* violence and tried at least to curtail the army's provincial autonomy. By the mid-1950s, as a result, markedly fewer Mexicans were using violence as an everyday political or business tool, and the free market of violence that earlier obtained was being narrowed by state regulation. Violence in Mexico decreased while violence in Colombia increased. These phenomena clearly varied from region to region: in Guerrero the homicide rate rose in the 1940s, dropped in the 1950s and rebounded in the 1960s. Close study of Morelos across the period substantiates Tanalís Padilla's conclusion that the *pax PRIísta* never existed.¹²² While urban violence became politically unfeasible, rural violence was acceptable if sufficiently well-masked.¹²³ As Renan observed, though, "*la vérité consiste dans les nuances*": despite its continuing conflicts, Mexico under the PRI was substantially more peaceful than Mexico before 1950 or after 2006.¹²⁴ A long term national decline in violence began in the 1950s and continued across the twentieth century. State violence was critical in establishing what rule the PRI enjoyed across a disorderly countryside. The PRIístas' subsequent, selective and generally adroit management of both state and non-state violence was central to that rule's endurance.

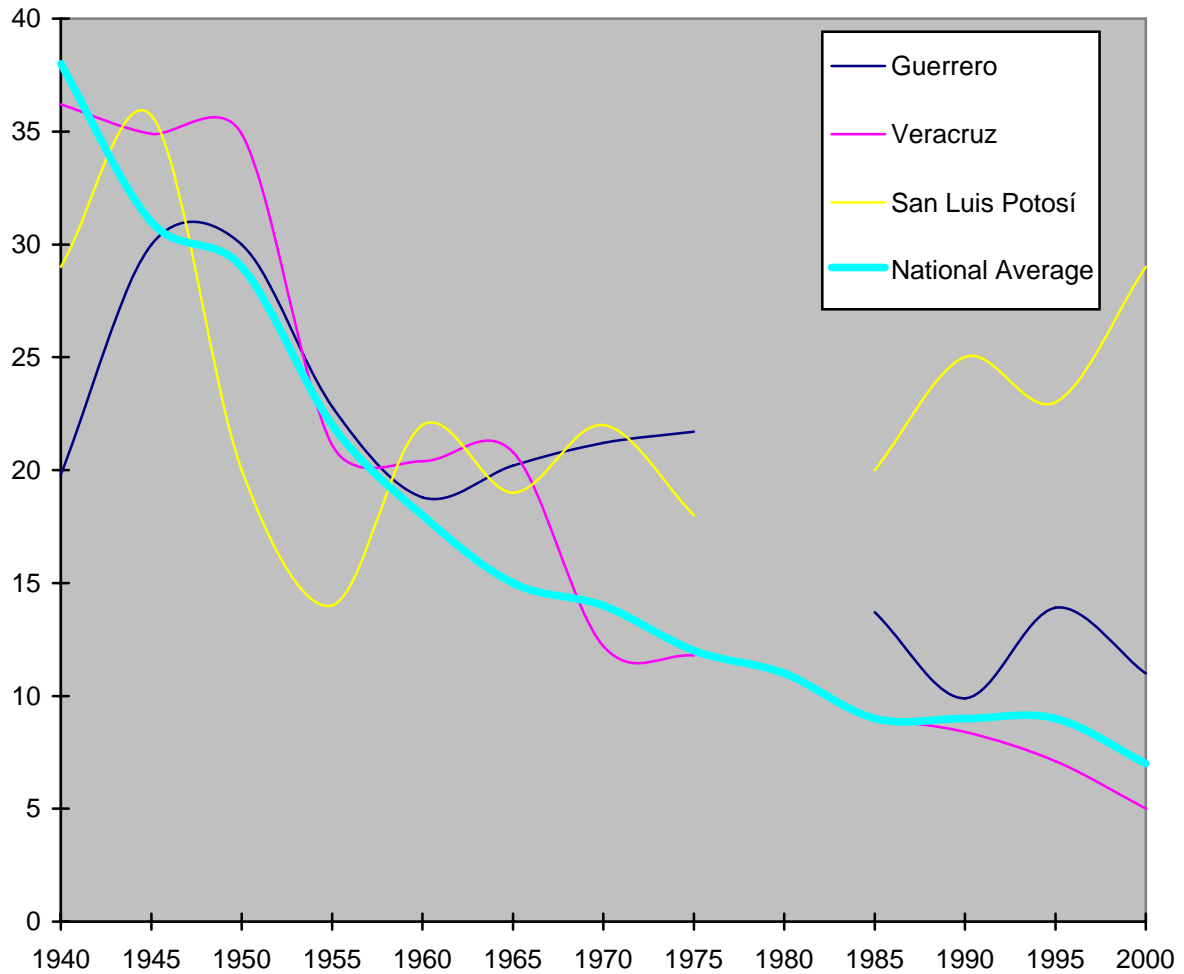


Figure 1.4. *Reported homicides per 100 000 population, 1940-2000.*

Sources: Piccato, "Estadísticas del crimen en México", INEGI, *Estadísticas históricas de México CD-ROM* (México DF, 2000)

¹ "Lista incompleta de crímenes cometidos...por Crispín Aguilar", AGN/DGIPS-787/2-1/45/282, *Diario de Xalapa* 1/i, 14/iv1950.

² Processes David Skerritt and Antonio Santoyo have analysed for the same region during the 1930s. David Skerritt, *Rancheros sobre tierra fértil* (Xalapa, 1993), David Skerritt, "¿Qué es la mano negra?" in *Anuario del Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Universidad Veracruzana III* (Xalapa, 1980), Antonio Santoyo, *La Mano Negra: Poder regional y Estado en México (Veracruz, 1928-1943)* (México DF, 1995)

³ Roberto Blanco Moheno, *Memorias de un reportero* (México DF, 1965), p.89, Migoni to Gobernación, 26/vii/1945, AGN/DGIPS-787/2-1/45/282, PS-1 & PS-18 to Gobernación, 2/v/945, AGN/DGIPS-88/Carlos Saavedra.

⁴ Representations that clash with Aguilar's self-presentation as a maligned peasant leader, reluctantly lured, Cincinnatus-like, into local politics by the will of the pueblo. Felipe Moreno Irazabal, "Los señores feudales del estado de Veracruz", *Excélsior*, 1/xi/1947, letter, Crispín Aguilar to President Avila Camacho, 23/viii/1942, AGN/DGG 2/317.4 (26)/24/64.

⁵ *Diario de Xalapa* 9, 11, 13, 14/iv/1950.

⁶ Ricardo Corzo Ramírez, José González Sierra & David Skerritt, *...nunca un desleal: Cándido Aguilar (1889-1960)* (México DF, 1986), pp.293-4.

⁷ PS-1 & PS-18 to Gobernación, 2/v/1945, AGN/DGIPS-88/Carlos Saavedra, *Diario de Xalapa* 1, 2, 3/vii/1945, 20/i/1948.

⁸ Nicolás Parra to Cárdenas, 16/ii/1940, AGN/LCR-555.1/149, Tejeda to Cárdenas, 30/iv/1940, AGN/LCR-542.1/211, comisariado ejidal Axochio to Avila Camacho, 9/xi/1942, AGN/MAC-540.1/2, Pánuco Unión de Comerciantes y Industriales en Pequeño to Avila Camacho, 8/vii/1942, SDN-1-356/VII.

⁹ In terms of total deaths. Libro de defunciones, 1950, Ometepec Registro Civil (henceforth ORC), Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953* (Duke, 2002), pp.5, 299.

¹⁰ Gonzalo Sánchez, "The Violence: An Interpretative Synthesis", in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez (eds.), *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, Delaware, 1992), p.76.

¹¹ Mary Roldán attacks the essentialisation of Colombia as inherently violent, and stresses how "selective and concentrated" acts of violence were in Antioquia during the *Violencia*. Malcolm Deas compares the weight of "violent traditions" in Western Europe and Colombia to counter the same canard; Noel Malcolm directs a similar critique against the "ancient ethnic hatreds" interpretation of the Bosnian wars of the 1990s. Roldán, *Blood and Fire*, pp.5, 9-10, Malcolm Deas, *Intercambios violentos* (Bogotá, 1999), pp.15, 21, 26-29, 44-46, Noel Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London, 2002).

¹² The recent work of Tanalís Padilla is a notable exception. Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax PRIista* (Duke, 2008). See also a bibliography of studies on caciquismo in Alan Knight and Wil Pansters (eds.), *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (London, 2005).

¹³ Although several journalists were on the DGIPS payroll, most notably Jesús González Valencia, editor of the sensationalist magazine *Todo*. JGV to Gobernación, 30/ix/1951, AGN/DGIPS-24/10/"Partido Constitucionalista Mexicano".

¹⁴ *Excélsior* 23, 24/ix/1947. Compare this to the detailed coverage of Iguala's *El Suriano*.

¹⁵ Causing once-excellent local coverage to give way to stories on the rift between Stalin and Tito and the latest achievements of British engineering.

¹⁶ Bateman to Bevin, 11/iv/1947, FO371/60940/AN1478.

¹⁷ Laurence Whitehead, "State Organization in Latin America since 1930" in Leslie Bethell, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (X vols., Cambridge, 1994), v.VI pp.46-48.

¹⁸ Between 1943 and 1948. Departmental budgets in AGN/DGIPS-44/2.

¹⁹ Manuel Rios Thivol to DGIPS, 26/iii/1947, AGN/DGIPS-84/2-1/131/655/vol. III.

²⁰ Personnel files various, AGN/DGIPS-45 through -105; "Relación de los inspectores de la DGIPS comisionados ... para observar el desarrollo de las elecciones", June 1952, AGN/DGIPS-814/2-1/52/70.

²¹ Leyva Mancilla report 1950, Archivo Paucic, Chipancingo (henceforth AP), 175/352.072.073ETN, ORC "libro de defunciones 1950", INEGI, *Censo del estado de Guerrero 1950* (México DF, 1953).

²² Such problems were not confined to Mexico. Colombians were unaware of the scale of the *Violencia* until it was almost over because "so much of the killing took place in remote rural areas that it was impossible to gain a clear picture of what was going on there." James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violencia in Tolima* (University of Alabama, 1985), p.2.

²³ SDN preliminary catalogue of documents for release (2002), Thom Rath, pers. com.

²⁴ See, for example, General Raúl Garate, 19a zona militar, Tuxpan, Ver., to SEDENA, 31/iii/1946, AHEV/1360/166/1(179).

²⁵ Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría* (Tucson, 1991), pp.9-12.

²⁶ *The New York Times* 27/ii/2006.

²⁷ Sleeping in Parra's deserted hacienda, Santoyo was woken in the dead of night by Parra's ghostly boots on the veranda. Antonio Santoyo, *La Mano Negra: Poder regional y Estado en México (Veracruz, 1928-1943)* (México DF, 1995), introduction.

- ²⁸ Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Cuijla: esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro* (México DF, 1995 [1958]), Friedrich, *The Princes of Naranja*, p.194, Marcos Muñoz, “Mixteca-Nahua-Tlapaneca” in *Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista* vol. IX (México DF, 1963).
- ²⁹ Pablo Piccato, “Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001”, <http://www.columbia.edu/estadisticascrimen/EstadisticasSigloXX.htm>.
- ³⁰ Aguirre Beltrán, *Cuijla*, pp.85-87, Véronique Flanet, *Viviré si Dios quiere* (México DF, 1990), pp.126-131.
- ³¹ Anonymous to editor *La Verdad*, 1948, AGN/DGIPS-799/2-1/48/431.
- ³² Acting *presidente municipal* Tepetlán to Cárdenas, 11/viii/1939, AGN/LCR 541/2152.
- ³³ Leyva Mancilla report 1950, AP-175/352.072.073ETN.
- ³⁴ As the probability of reprisal increased and trust in the police decreased. Such was the case in Jamiltepec, Oax. Flanet, *Viviré si Dios quiere*, pp.126-131.
- ³⁵ Moisés de la Peña, *Guerrero Económico* (2 vols, México DF, 1949), v.I p.358.
- ³⁶ John Brewer, Bill Lockhart, Paula Rodgers, “Crime in Ireland Since the Second World War” in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 27:3 (1996), pp.136-137. For a sceptical look at contemporary Nicaraguan homicide rates, see Dennis Rodgers, “Living in the Shadow of Death: Gangs, Violence and Social Order in Urban Nicaragua, 1996-2002” in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38:2 (May 2006), p.270.
- ³⁷ 29 per 100 000 compared to 61 per 100 000. Mary Roldán stresses the problems of accurate quantification of violence in Colombia, pointing out that there are motives for both under- and over-reporting. Cited in Henderson, *When Colombia Bled*, p.254, Roldán, *Blood and Fire*, pp.299, 315.
- ³⁸ Donald Campbell in E.S Overman, (ed.), *Methodology and Epistemology for Social Sciences: Selected Papers* (Chicago, 1988), p.360.
- ³⁹ L. Roberts, R. Lafta, R. Garfield, J. Khudhairi & G. Burnham, “Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey” in *The Lancet* 364:9448 (2006), pp.1857-1864.
- ⁴⁰ Variable degrees of “stateness” is J.P. Nettl’s concept, cited in Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, 1988), p.18.
- ⁴¹ Although qualitative and quantitative accounts of trends in violence since the 1990s are complicated by the increase in absolute violence in some regions, such as San Luis Potosí, and by the perception of steadily increasing violence and insecurity in Mexico City.
- ⁴² Namely Caldas, Huila, Santander, Norte Santander, Tolima and Valle.
- ⁴³ Muñoz, “Mixteca-Nahua-Tlapaneca”, pp.34, 146, Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Duke, 2010), pp.264-266. As Marcelo Bergman points out, homicide rates per 100 000 are easily distorted in small communities, making single-year snapshots less informative than a long-term, “grassroots statistics” approach to multiple sites.
- ⁴⁴ Emilia Vázquez, “De la intermediación política a la construcción local del Estado: distintos abordajes teóricos en el análisis de procesos políticos en una región del Istmo veracruzano” (paper presented at the coloquio internacional CIESAS-IRD, Xalapa, November 2006), p.50.
- ⁴⁵ General Ramos Santos, “Informe sobre la situación que prevalece en esta Entidad”, 30/ix/1945, SDN-1-228/VIII, Martínez to SEDENA, 13/vi/1950, SDN-1-398/IX, Migoni to Gobernación, 4/08/1945, AGN/DGIPS-787/2-1/45/282.
- ⁴⁶ A conclusion that connects with recent regional studies of cardenismo, which stress the absence of a stabilising social compact between peasants and state. John Gledhill, *Casi Nada: A Study of Agrarian Reform in the Homeland of Cardenismo* (Austin, 1991), chs. 2 & 4, Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, 2001), pp.163-164, Adrian Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked On Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora and the Mexican Revolution* (Delaware, 1998), pp.219-224.
- ⁴⁷ Paul Gillingham, “Force and Consent in Mexican Provincial Politics: Guerrero and Veracruz, 1945-1953” (D.Phil, Oxford, 2005), pp.56-61, Elisa Servín, “Hacia el Levantamiento Armado: Del henriquismo a los federacionistas leales en los años cincuenta”, in Verónica Oikión Solano & Marta Eugenia García Ugarte, *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX* (3 vols., Colegio de Michoacán/CIESAS, 2008), pp.321-324.
- ⁴⁸ Morales Camacho & Rios Thivol to Gobernación, 4/ix/1947, AGN/DGIPS-84/2-1/131/655. That lynching was marked by performative violence and mutilation. This chapter does not examine the cultural norms of violence so much as its incidence, structure, function and evolution between 1940 and 1955. It is worth noting, though, that a) at a general level Mexican violence seems less routinely performative than that of Colombia; b) this does not mean that torture and mutilation were wholly absent; c) modes of violence were regionally determined; thus in Naranja, Mich., opponents were generally shot without fuss, whereas in central Veracruz burying alive was reported. Friedrich, *The*

Princes of Naranja, pp.146, 271-275, Liga to Avila Camacho, 31 August 1942, AGN/MAC/540.1/2, *Diario de Xalapa* 15 April 1950. For Colombian modes of violence, see Gerard Martin, "The "Tradition" of Violence" in Colombia" in Göran Aijmer & Jon Abbink, *Meanings of Violence* (Oxford, 2000), p.171.

⁴⁹ Ellen Brennan-Galvin, "Crime and Violence in an Urbanizing World", *Journal of International Affairs* 56:1 (Fall 2002), pp.123-145.

⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge, 1977), pp.178-181.

⁵¹ Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: the use of force in the making of Russian capitalism* (Cornell, 2002), p.27.

⁵² De la Peña, *Veracruz Económico*, v.II pp.503.507, De la Peña, *Guerrero Económico*, v.II p.622.

⁵³ Leyva Mancilla report 1946, AP-175/352.072.073ETN.

⁵⁴ PS-7 to Gobernación, 10/v/1940, AGN/DGIPS-140/9.

⁵⁵ Cited in Bettina E. Schmidt & Ingo W. Schröder, (eds.), *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (London, 1995), p.5.

⁵⁶ *La Verdad* 13/iii/1949.

⁵⁷ PS-12 to Gobernación, 16/ii/1945, AGN/DGIPS-788/2-1/45/374.

⁵⁸ Gillingham, "Force and Consent", pp.34-35.

⁵⁹ "Relación de las Grandes Unidades del Ejército", 1/ix/1948, AGN/MAV-550/19, reports on the Mexican Army, 1951, 1953, FO-371/97547 & FO-371/109037.

⁶⁰ And development programs, such as providing drinking water. Carvajal report 1949, in Carmen Blázquez Domínguez, *Estado de Veracruz: informes de sus gobernadores, 1826-1986* (20 volumes, Xalapa, 1986), v.XIV p.7743, Garate to SEDENA, 31/iii/1946, AHEV/1360/166/1(179).

⁶¹ *La Verdad* 7/v/1949, Alvarado to Martínez, 15/v/1941, AGN/MAC-542.1/269, PS-31, 34, 43 to Gobernación, 28/iv/1949, AGN/DGIPS-84/MRT, *Presidente municipal Acapulco* to SEDENA, 21/vi/1950, SDN-1-398/XVI, Flores to Gobernación, 6/xii/1952, AGN/DGG-2.311M(9)155/2B.

⁶² Carvajal to Mange, 4/viii/1949, AHEV-1640/166/1, Coquet to Gobernación, 22/vi/1950, AGN/DGIPS-800/2-1/49/444.

⁶³ Under the terms of the 1943 *ley de portación de armas de fuego* firearms could be carried by the army, reserves, police, teachers and bureaucrats; all others needed permits from the Secretaria de Defensa Nacional or became liable to on the spot confiscation and arrest. Circular, Ramos to *defensas rurales*, 5/xi/1943, AGN/MAC 542.1/579.

⁶⁴ Ramos to Avila Camacho, 28/ix/1944, AGN/MAC-542.1/579, *Trópico, semanario independiente de información* (Acapulco) 1/x/1944, *Excelsior* 28/ix/1948.

⁶⁵ Author's interview, Vicente Ramírez Sandoval, Ometepepec, 9/iv/2003, Guzmán Carriles to Avila Camacho, 12/xii/1942, AGN/DGG-2/311P(26)2/107, *La Verdad* 25/iii/1949.

⁶⁶ Coquet to Gobernación, 22/vi/1950, AGN/DGIPS-800/2-1/49/444.

⁶⁷ Mónica Serrano, "The Armed Branch of the State: Civil-Military Relations in Mexico" in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27:2 (May 1995), pp.431-432.

⁶⁸ Mange to Ruiz Cortines, 25/ii/1946, AHEV-1360/166/2.

⁶⁹ A. Peñafiel, *Anuario Estadística de la República Mexicana 1907* (México DF, 1912), Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, *Anuario Estadístico 1923-1924* (México DF, 1925), Secretaria de la Economía Nacional Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos 1940* (México DF, 1942).

⁷⁰ Santoyo, *La Mano Negra*, María Cristina Núñez Madrazo, "Entre patronos, caciques y líderes. Procesos políticos locales en una comunidad cañera del centro del estado de Veracruz" in *Sotavento* 5/2000, pp.67-105.

⁷¹ Arriola to Crescenciano Campos Gómez, 11/vi/1940, PS-50 to Gobernación, 26/vi/1940, AGN/DGIPS-87/2, Maldonado to Cárdenas, 4/xii/1934, AGN/DGG/2/012.2(26)143/68/41, Santoyo, *La mano negra*, p.152.

⁷² Blanco Moheno, *Memorias*, pp.93, 242.

⁷³ Georgina Trigos, *El corrido veracruzano (una antología)* (Xalapa, 1990), pp.65-67.

⁷⁴ Interview with Estanislau Arroyo Zapata, in Skerritt, "¿Qué es la mano negra?", pp.134-135.

⁷⁵ David A. Skerritt, "Peasant Organisation in Veracruz, Mexico: 1920 to the Present" (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1996), pp.289-290, PS-50 to Gobernación, 26/vi/1940, AGN/DGIPS-87/2.

⁷⁶ Blanco Moheno, *Memorias*, p.89, "Actividades reaccionarias en el estado de Veracruz", 4/x/1939, AGN/DGIPS-140/9.

⁷⁷ Skerritt, "¿Qué es la mano negra?", p.134.

⁷⁸ "Lista incompleta de crímenes cometidos...por Crispín Aguilar", AGN/DGIPS-787/2-1/45/282, *Diario de Xalapa* 29/xii/1947.

- ⁷⁹ “Lista incompleta de crímenes cometidos...por Crispín Aguilar”, AGN/DGIPS-787/2-1/45/282, Aguilar to Avila Camacho, 23/viii/1942, AGN/DGG-2/317.4 (26)/24/64, *Excélsior* 1/xi/1947, Liga Villa Cardel to CNC, 1/xii/1947, AGN/MAV-541/218.
- ⁸⁰ Mange to Rodrigo de Llano, *Excélsior*, 3/xi/1947.
- ⁸¹ PS-1 & PS-18 to Gobernación, 2/v/1945, AGN/DGIPS-88/Carlos Saavedra.
- ⁸² The *Diario de Xalapa* March-July 1945 is rich in details, as are Migoni’s Gobernación reports, AGN/DGIPS-787/2-1/45/282.
- ⁸³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1987), chapter 11.
- ⁸⁴ Trigos, *El corrido veracruzano*, p.36.
- ⁸⁵ *Diario de Xalapa* 24/xii/1947, 9/v/1950, *Excélsior* 2/xi/1947, Mange to de Llano, *Excélsior*, 3/xi/1947, SDN-1-356 v X.
- ⁸⁶ *Diario de Xalapa* 11, 14/v, 13/viii/1947, Ruiz Cortines 1947 report, in Blázquez Domínguez, *Informes*, v.XIII p.7529.
- ⁸⁷ *Diario de Xalapa* 23/ix/1949, 9/iv/1950.
- ⁸⁸ *Diario de Xalapa* 23, 25/iii/1949.
- ⁸⁹ Pablo Piccato, “Pistoleros, *ley fuga* and uncertainty in public debates about murder in twentieth-century Mexico”, in Paul Gillingham & Ben Smith, (eds.), *Soft Authoritarianism in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Duke, forthcoming), ch.14, *Diario de Xalapa* 1/ix/1949.
- ⁹⁰ *Diario de Xalapa* 9-15/iv/1950.
- ⁹¹ *Diario de Xalapa* 9, 14/iv/1950.
- ⁹² *Diario de Xalapa* 15/iv, 13, 22/v/1950.
- ⁹³ *Diario de Xalapa* 1-4, 16-23/vii/1952.
- ⁹⁴ By decentralisation I mean that executive figures (governors and presidents) had less overt, direct involvement in acts of informal state violence than their predecessors.
- ⁹⁵ Shawn C. Smallman, *Fear & Memory in the Brazilian Army and Society, 1889-1954* (Chapel Hill, 2002), pp.3-5.
- ⁹⁶ Pablo González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico* (New York, 1970), pp.36-39, Edwin Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism* (Albuquerque, 1968), p.145.
- ⁹⁷ Thurston to State Department, 20/viii/1948, NARG-812.00/8-2048.
- ⁹⁸ PS-19 to Gobernación, 3/viii/1945, AGN/DGIPS-132/2-1/302.4(0.11)/2, *Diario Oficial* 20/i/1949, *El Universal* 19/vi/1951, Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, p.169, *La Verdad* 2/vi/1949, *El Nacional* 19/vi/1951, *Diario de Xalapa* 21/vi/1952.
- ⁹⁹ Servín, “Hacia el levantamiento”, pp.314-317.
- ¹⁰⁰ PS-31 to DGIPS, 7/x, 1/xi/1943, AGN/DGIPS-94/2-1/131/802.
- ¹⁰¹ Petition to ayuntamiento Ixcateopan, 10/xii/1948, Archivo Municipal de Ixcateopan-1948, Flanet, *Viviré si Dios quiere*, p.42.
- ¹⁰² Gómez Maganda report 1952, AP-173/352.072.073ETN.
- ¹⁰³ Governors’ reports Veracruz 1945-1953, Blázquez Domínguez, *Informes*, vols. XIII-XV, pp.7529, 7613, 7744, 7750, 8017-8019, 8200.
- ¹⁰⁴ De la Peña, *Veracruz Económico*, v.I p.252.
- ¹⁰⁵ Muñoz report 1950-1953, Blázquez Domínguez, *Informes*, v.XV p.8018.
- ¹⁰⁶ Torres to de la Selva, 2/x/1952, AGN/MAV-742/39535.
- ¹⁰⁷ Thomas Rath, “Army, State and Nation in Mexico, 1920-1958” (PhD. Diss., Columbia, 2009). p.95.
- ¹⁰⁸ Finley to State, 21/xii/1942, NARG-812.00/32086, *Diario de Xalapa* 5/vi/1950.
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- ¹¹¹ Trigos, *El corrido veracruzano*, p.76.
- ¹¹² Speaks to ambassador, 3/viii/1948, NARG-812.00/8-548, Estado Mayor Presidencial to Gobernación, 24/xii/1952, AGN/DGG-2.311M(9)155/2, *Diario de Xalapa* 15/viii/1948.
- ¹¹³ De la Peña, *Guerrero Económico*, v.II p.622, Paucic notes on Leyva Mancilla, AP-108/320.32PER, Blanco Moheno, *Memorias*, p.242.
- ¹¹⁴ Ojeda to Avila Camacho, 10/vii/1941, AGN/MAC-541/269, *La Verdad* 23/ii/1949.
- ¹¹⁵ Such as the deaths of the Hacienda bureaucrat Inigo Noriega and the journalist Natalio Burnstein. *Excélsior* 9/xii/1949, 6/iv/1950.
- ¹¹⁶ Bateman to Bevin, 11/iv/1947, FO371/60940/AN1478.
- ¹¹⁷ Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Nebraska, 2009), pp.184-192, 405.

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¹²⁰ CIA report, "Mexico: The Problems of Progress", 20/x/1967, p.2,

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¹²¹ Sánchez, "The Violence", pp.79-91, Roldán, *Blood and Fire*, pp.41-43.

¹²² Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*, pp.12, 139-160.

¹²³ Servín charts the secretive, often night-time deployments of substantial army forces in the repression of henriquismo. Servín, "Hacia el levantamiento", pp.311-314.

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