

Redefining the Territorial Bases of Power: Peasants, Indians and Guerrilla Warfare in Chiapas, Mexico

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Abstract

This paper analyses the role that federal and local elites played in the transformation of a non-violent movement of peasant protest in Chiapas, Mexico, into a guerrilla movement that eventually embraced a programme of ethnoterritorial demands. It is argued that the contradictory government responses to initial peasant protest opened the door for the radicalization of indigenous mobilisation and demands. Claims for agrarian reform in the 1970s were met with piecemeal/clientelistic land redistribution and police repression. When demands shifted in the 1980s from land reform to the democratisation of local governance and respect for human rights, local elites insisted on clientelism and repression. This led to the Zapatista insurrection of 1994. Unsuccessful attempts by federal authorities to negotiate a peace settlement while clientelistic social reformism and military repression were underway led the Zapatistas into embracing a programme of ethnoterritorial demands and into the creation of de facto autonomous governments in the 1990s. This paper suggests that neither policies of carrots and sticks pursued under authoritarian rule nor limited multicultural reforms approved by democratic governments have provided any meaningful incentive to organised Indians in Chiapas to leave off the streets or to lay off arms.

0. Introduction

0.1. In the last thirty years indigenous populations in Mexico have undergone one of the most dramatic processes of social and political transformation since colonial times. One of the most significant outcomes of this process is the emergence of a national indigenous movement that demands the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples and therefore a radical reconstruction of Mexican political and territorial structures. Opposed to *indigenismo*, the official policy of the Mexican state for the assimilation of indigenous populations to the mestizo national mainstream, this movement embraces a political programme known as *indianismo*. Although claims for autonomy and self-determination are generally couched in terms of pre-Hispanic, primordial identities, the fact is that an Indianist programme demanding a territorial reorganisation of part of the country on ethnic grounds is a relatively new phenomenon.

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0.2. The emergence of an ethnoterritorial movement in Mexico has followed two parallel tracks. One advanced by indigenous peasant organisations engaged in a three-decade-long wave of mobilisation, demanding land reform and the democratisation of municipal authorities. And another one pursued by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a guerrilla group of Mayan peasants that declared war to the Mexican federal government back in 1994. Even though a programme calling for the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples had already been devised by local indigenous organisations in the 1980s, it was only after the EZLN insurrection that a window of opportunity opened for the national projection of an Indianist movement. In the emergence and consolidation of this movement the southern state of Chiapas played a prominent role.

0.3. The purpose of this article is to analyse the emergence of an ethnoterritorial movement in Chiapas and the political and policy responses of the Mexican federal and state governments. The paper is structured as follows. In the next section I outline some basic socio-economic and political features of Chiapas that help understand the circumstances under which an Indianist movement emerged. In Section 3, I discuss the main features of Chiapas's ethnoterritorial movement, particularly the emergence of de facto Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities and Pluri-ethnic Autonomous Regions. In Section 4, the article traces back the origins of this movement to a long wave of peasant protests that began in the 1970s. In Section 5, I analyse the different and contradictory responses that the Chiapas and Mexican governments gave to a peasant movement that eventually transformed itself into an ethnoterritorial movement. In the final section I draw some policy lessons from the Chiapas case.

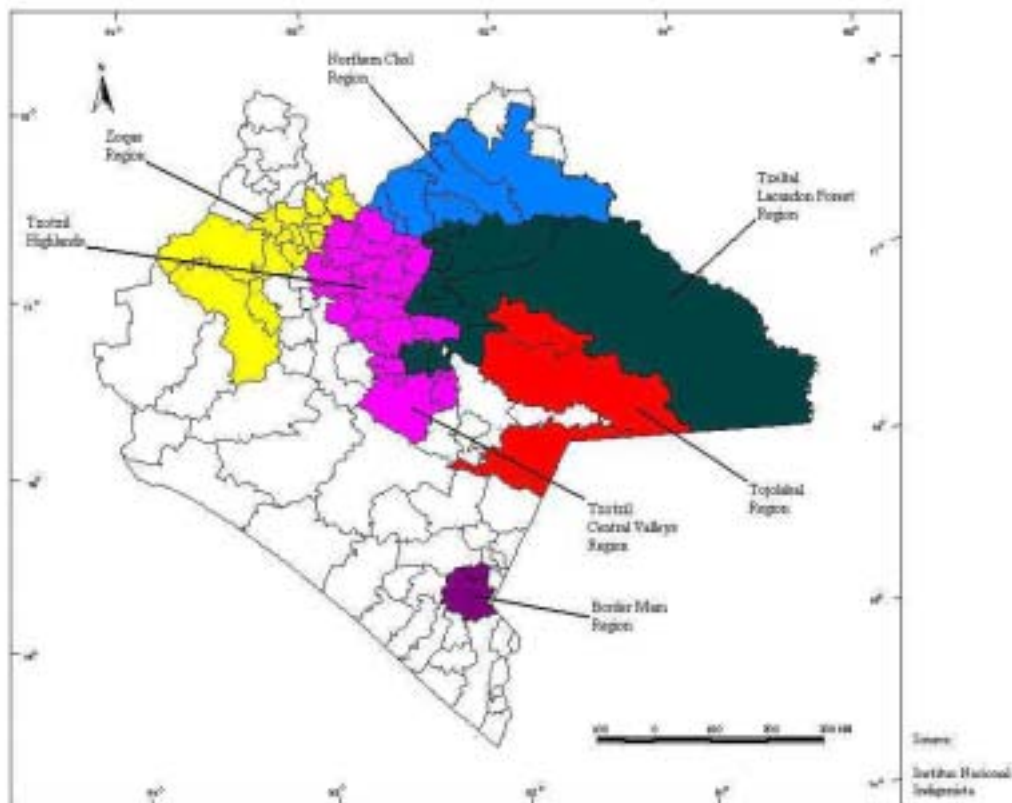
1. Chiapas in a Nutshell: The Changing Structural Background of Ethnoterritorial Disputes

1.1. Chiapas is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse states in the Mexican federation. According to census data, Spanish-speaking mestizos account for 75 per cent of the population and the other 25 per cent belong to an indigenous ethnic group (INEGI 1990). In fact, Chiapas is only the fourth state with the largest percentage of indigenous people in Mexico. Indigenous populations in the state mainly cluster into six ethnolinguistic groups: (1) the Tzeltals in the Lacandon jungle, east of Chiapas, and in the Highlands, (2) the Tzotzils in the Highlands, (3) the Chols in northern Chiapas, (4) the Tojolabals in eastern and southeastern Chiapas (5) the Zoques in the centre-west and northern part of the state and (6) the Mams on the southeastern border with Guatemala. As evidenced by the geographic concentration of these groups in a few areas, although indigenous populations represent only 25 per cent of Chiapas's population, almost 50 per cent of the municipalities in the state have a 25 per cent indigenous population. The most heavily indigenous areas include the Highlands, the northern Chol region and eastern Chiapas. One significant aspect of these ethnic groups is that while other Mexican indigenous groups live across different states, Chiapas's indigenous groups are confined within the state's boundaries.

1.2. Chiapas is a state of relatively young people who in the last 30 years experienced one of the most explosive rates of population growth in contemporary Mexican history. The 1980s were the most explosive period, as the state experienced an average annual rate of population growth of 4.3 per cent (INEGI 1990). The state's indigenous regions contributed with the largest share of

population growth. For example, the rate of population growth of the municipality of Ocosingo, one of the strongholds of the Zapatistas, surpassed an annual level of 6 per cent in the 1980s. Another factor that contributes to a rapidly growing population is the relatively low levels of out-state migration. Unlike the states of Guerrero, Puebla or Oaxaca, where indigenous populations have established migratory routes to the United States, indigenous populations in Chiapas for the most part remain within state boundaries. Chiapas is not only a net producer but also a net importer of people. (INI 1993).

Map 1. Indigenous Regions in Chiapas, Mexico



1.3. Since the 1970s Chiapas's indigenous regions have experienced a rapid process of demographic re-Indianisation (INI and UNDP 2000; Viqueira: 1995). Mestizos from the Highlands, the northern Ch'ol region and some parts of eastern Chiapas have left the heavily indigenous and rural municipalities, as they have moved away from plantation agriculture (1960s and 1970s) and from cattle raising (1980s) into the service sector in the state's urban centres. The largest cities in these regions, however, have also experienced a process of Indianisation. Cities like San Cristóbal, Teopisca, Yajalón and Las Margaritas have become home to thousands of Indian victims of religious expulsions (the Tzotzil municipalities of San Juan Chamula, Mitontic, Tenejapa or the Tojolabal region of Las Margaritas), political rivalries and intercommunal strife (the Tzotzil townships of Chenalhó and El Bosque or the Ch'ol/Tzeltal municipalities of Tila, Salto del Agua or Tumbalá) or conflicts between the EZLN and the Mexican Army (the Tzeltal/Tojolabal regions of Altamirano, Ocosingo or Las Margaritas).

1.4. In the last 30 years Chiapas has undergone a slow but unequivocal process of “peasantisation”(Villafuerte et.al. 1999; Reyes 1999; Van der Haar 1999). The structure of land tenure and the productive use of land have undergone dramatic transformations in the last 30 years. In roughly three decades Chiapas went from an economy dominated by landowners engaged in plantation agriculture (1930s–1960s) to cattle raising (1970s and 1980s) to an economy dominated by small-plot producers (*minifundios*) mainly engaged in subsistence agriculture. After three decades of peasant protest, land invasions and forced land reform, most ranches and farms previously owned by mestizos or foreigners in the Highlands and eastern Chiapas have been swept away, leaving most land in Indian hands. As we will describe below, the struggle for land against landowners of the 1970s and 1980s has turned into bitter inter and intracommunal conflicts after 2000.

1.5. Agriculture remains the dominant economic activity in Chiapas today. By 1990 58 per cent of the state’s working population was employed in agricultural activities but agriculture contributed only with roughly 15 per cent of the state’s GDP (Villafuerte et.al. 1999). Most peasants are engaged in subsistence agriculture (corn) and the production of coffee and cattle for domestic and international markets. Illiterate, undercapitalised and with no access to credit or to new technologies, most overpopulated small-plot rural producers in Chiapas live under conditions of poverty or extreme poverty. Calculations based on census-reported income suggest that up to 90 per cent of the agricultural workforce in Chiapas live under the poverty line (Villafuerte et.al. 1999).

1.6. Whatever social indicator one may choose, Chiapas comes across as the most underdeveloped state in Mexico. In terms of the human development index, while northern Mexican states like Chihuahua or Baja California rank along with Hong Kong or Singapore, Chiapas ranks together with Guatemala or India (Trejo and Jones 1998). In terms of income inequality, Chiapas stands out as the Mexican province with the highest level of intra-state inequality (Hernández Valdéz 2000). While Mexico as a country ranks among the ten most unequal countries of the world, Chiapas’s Gini index nears that of Brazil – the world’s second most unequal country. In terms of educational opportunities, while in 1990 21.6 per cent of Chiapas’s mestizo population was illiterate, 54 per cent of the state’s indigenous population could neither read nor write (INEGI 1990).

1.7. Since the 1950s religious competition has been one of the main sources of cultural transformation in Chiapas. Chiapas is the single Mexican state with the largest Protestant and Evangelical population (16 per cent) and one of the states with the fewest Catholics (68 per cent). In the last five decades, the rate of growth of Protestantism in Chiapas has been five to ten times greater than that of Catholicism. Religious competition has been most intense in the northern Chol region, the Highlands and eastern Chiapas. Missionaries from the Presbyterian Church penetrated into Chiapas indigenous territory with the Bible in hand and subcontracted the Summer Institute of Linguistics to translate the scriptures into autochthonous languages (Esponda 1986). Presbyterians ran literacy groups and opened community health clinics and peasant cooperatives. This strategy resulted in large payoffs for the Presbyterian Church and also triggered a fascinating process of language revival and ethnic pride (Trejo 2001). In the 1960s and 1970s, conversions to Protestantism skyrocketed in Chiapas. A few years after his

appointment in 1959 Bishop Samuel Ruiz García launched a crusade to prevent a Protestant takeover in Chiapas and mirrored the strategy of language revival and communal organisation that had been initiated by the Presbyterian Church. Thus was born the Autochthonous Church in Chiapas.

1.8. Contrary to what modernisation theory would predict, Chiapas experiences today levels of multiparty competition that rival those of the most economically developed states in northern Mexico. Traditional PRI electoral hegemony in Chiapas broke down in the aftermath of the Zapatista insurrection (Sonnleitner 2001). Within a six-year period, from 1994 to 2000, Chiapas went from being PRI's most traditional bastion in the country to a highly competitive party system in which PRI-PAN competition prevailed in the urban centres and PRI-PRD in rural areas. Indeed, in the 2000 gubernatorial election, Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía, a former PRI Senator running under an opposition coalition including the centre-right PAN and the centre-left PRD was able to defeat the PRI. The PRI, however, maintained control over two-thirds of the state's municipal presidencies and a majority in Congress. Although the opposition coalition did not survive the 2000 election and most political parties are in disarray, like many other states in the country Chiapas experiences today the nuts and bolts of divided government.

2. Is there a territorially based ethnic movement in Chiapas?

2.1. The right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples has been on the political agenda of Chiapas at least since the late 1980s. The two main actors in the consolidation of an Indianist programme of ethnoterritorial demands have been the independent peasant indigenous movement that emerged in Chiapas in the 1970s and the EZLN. Following parallel paths, both actors have consolidated this ethnoterritorial programme by means of local and national ideological persuasion and establishing by force de facto autonomous arrangements in the state. Neither the peasant indigenous movement nor the EZLN originally espoused an ethnic discourse and only strategically raised the ethnic banner after economic and political options for the advancement of a peasant-based programme had been cancelled.

The framing of an ethnic discourse

2.2. A programme for the right to autonomy and self-determination of indigenous peoples was originally devised in the late 1980s by organisations gathered under the Frente Independiente de Pueblos Indios (Indigenous Peoples' Independent Front – FIPI), an umbrella organisation founded by Tojolabal Indians from the southeastern municipality of Las Margaritas, Chiapas. In the context of the international campaign against the 500 years of the conquest of the Americas, and as the Mexican government announced the liberalisation of land tenure, a small group of indigenous organisations rapidly transformed peasant demands into a language of ethnic rights, following the programme of indigenous rights granted by Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation. In no other Mexican state was this identity shift more evident than in Chiapas (see below). Peasant community leaders raising the ethnic banner were for the most part community leaders that had been trained by the Catholic or Protestant Church or by the state itself in their battles to wrest political and ideological control over indigenous communities (Trejo 2001). Yet these young indigenous leaders did not have the power within the already consolidated local peasant indigenous movement to push for the ethnification of demands.

2.3. The right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples became the leading ethnic demand of Mexico's and Chiapas's indigenous movement only when the EZLN made it its number-one priority in the second round of peace negotiations with the federal government in 1996. Originally espousing the traditional economic programme of other Latin American Marxist-Leninist guerrillas, between 1995 and 1996 the EZLN underwent a dramatic strategic shift by embracing an ethnoterritorial programme. While the main issue in the first round of peace negotiations in 1994 was the allocation of federal funds to indigenous communities, in the second round in 1996 the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples became the dominant theme.

2.4. Such a radical shift by the Zapatistas, from class to ethnicity, was made possible by a long-term and a short-term factor. The long-term factor is that ethnic pride and language already existed at the communal level, mainly as the unintended outcome the processes of religious and political competition between Catholic and Protestant Churches and the state in the 1970s and 1980s. The short-term factor is that a group of social scientists and intellectuals who served as Zapatista advisers in the second round of peace negotiations helped the EZLN frame that communal ethnic pride into a political programme of ethnoterritorial demands. Indeed, without the long-term process of ethnic renaissance the Zapatistas could not have undertaken a radical identity shift, even with the best advisers. But without the advisers, communal ethnic pride would have remained, as in the past, buried under the peasant hat. Since 1996 the EZLN tied up the result of peace negotiations to a constitutional reform that guaranteed the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples in the whole country. The peace negotiations between the Mexican federal government and the EZLN has gone into successive stalemates since then.

Establishing autonomy arrangements by means of civil disobedience and force

2.5. De facto autonomy arrangements were established by means of civil disobedience or violence in Chiapas between 1994 and 1997. These de facto governments represent the most advanced form of ethnoterritorial dispute in Mexico and for all practical purposes exemplify a situation of multiple sovereignties (Tilly 1979). Autonomy arrangements come in four types, depending on the organisation sponsoring it (the EZLN or independent peasant indigenous organisations) and on the territorial space on which they claim jurisdiction (municipal or regional). The EZLN claims that Zapatista base communities have created at least 38 *Municipios Autónomos Zapatistas* (Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities – MAZ) and two *Regiones Autónomas Zapatistas* (Zapatista Autonomous Regions – RAZ). Independent organisations, on the other hand, claim six *Regiones Autónomas Pluriétnicas* (Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions – RAP) but no autonomous municipalities (Burguete 1998). Although these autonomy arrangements in principle would involve 40 per cent of Chiapas's municipalities, in fact only some of these autonomy governments fully operate, while many others exist only as “imagined autonomies”.

Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities and Regions: MAZ and RAZ

2.6. MAZ are de facto local governments that claim legitimate jurisdiction over newly defined territories within constitutionally specified municipal boundaries. Rebel authorities and council members deny any legitimate authority to constitutionally elected mayors, governors and the President of Mexico and declare themselves only accountable to their Zapatista base communities and to the EZLN commanders in chief (Burguete 1998). Therefore MAZ authorities deny access to their territory to any local, state or federal authority, police or member of the Mexican army and have closed all agencies, schools, and hospitals under the jurisdiction of constitutionally elected authorities. MAZ community members refuse to pay taxes, to participate in any electoral competition, to pay electricity or water bills and decline to receive any government programmes or subsidies. Local governments of MAZ are charged with collecting taxes and with the administration of communal resources, the administration of civil and penal justice, public security, and with the provision of public goods, educational and health services for their communities. For autonomy advocates, regional Zapatista governments (RAZ) are a superior stage from MAZ, only to the extent that the territorial jurisdiction of the RAZ governments is greater than the rebel municipal authorities (Burguete 1998). RAZ governments are charged with similar financial, judicial, security and public policy responsibilities as MAZ.

2.7. Contrary to many other ethnoterritorial movements around the world, Zapatista rebel authorities have always emphatically declared that autonomy, whether municipal or regional will never lead them into secession. In their view, autonomy arrangements are only the means by which they aspire to change the terms of their insertion in the Mexican state and nation. As the authorities of the autonomous municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en put it: "We have decided to rule ourselves under autonomous municipalities as part of the Mexican Republic. We do not want to secede from Mexico, nor do we aspire to be part of any other country. We are only exercising our rights as Mexicans. And Mexicans we are and will always be."¹ Half a century without a single secessionist movement in the whole of Latin America lends some credibility to their claim.

2.8. Rather than secessionist ambitions, Zapatista rebels suggest that the main objective of de facto autonomous governments is to create truly representative and accountable local authorities, unlike the experience of almost a century of PRI hegemonic control. Echoing both a severe critique against local PRI authorities and a romanticised view of community authority structures, Zapatista community members of the autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad of Las Margaritas declared that "in these territories our autonomous authorities rule and will continue to do so because we need them, because they respect us, because we know them, because they obey us and because we know how to obey them."²

2.9. De facto Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities were first established at the end of 1994. On 19 December 1994, Zapatista support bases and militants launched a "silent" take over of 38 municipal palaces in Northern, Central (Highlands and Central Valley) and Eastern Chiapas, breaking the military siege that had been imposed in the so-called Zapatista conflict zone earlier in January of that year. Although the EZLN claims to have 38 autonomous municipal

¹ Cited in Burguete 1998. My translation.

² Cited in Burguete, 1999. My translation.

governments in all these regions, students of autonomy governments suggest that the most consolidated Zapatista autonomous municipalities operate (or have operated) in the Highlands (Consejo Autónomo de Polhó in Chenalhó, San Andrés Sacamch'en in San Andrés Larrainzar and Santa Catarina in Pantelhó and Sitalá), North (San Juan la Libertad in El Bosque), and in Eastern Chiapas (Tierra y Libertad in Las Margaritas). Other less-developed autonomous municipalities operate in Eastern Chiapas in Ocosingo (Ricardo Flores Magón, Moisés Gandhi and Ché Guevara), Altamirano (17 de Noviembre) and Las Margaritas (San Pedro Michoacán and Tierra y Libertad) in Eastern Chiapas (Ebert 2000; Leyva Solano 2000; Mattiace 2000; Burguete 1999; and *La Jornada*). Some of the most consolidated MAZ, like the Autonomous Council of Polhó, exercises strict military, political, judicial and administrative jurisdiction over a territorial space that accounts for almost one fourth of the municipality of Chenalhó.

2.10. Zapatista Autonomous Regions evolved out of the municipal experiences. The most advanced regional form of government is represented by the Región Autónoma Tierra y Libertad, a regional government that was built around the MAZ Tierra y Libertad in southeastern Chiapas. The RAZ Tierra y Libertad comprises mainly six municipalities in the region and at least two indigenous ethnic groups: the Tojolabals and the Mams. At one point in time, this RAZ had its own government buildings where the president, the regional council members and the judicial authorities operated. RAZ authorities served civil duties such as issuing birth certificates and adjudicated penal conflicts. RAZ authorities were evicted from their government buildings in 1998. (Burguete 1999). The other RAZ government claimed by the Zapatistas is the Totz-Choj government, operating in the Tzeltal/Tojolabal area of eastern Chiapas. Comprising around seven municipalities, this RAZ only operates judicial and conflict-resolution activities.

Pluri-ethnic Autonomous Regions: The RAP project

2.11. RAPs are de facto regional governments that bring together a plurality of ethnic groups and municipalities which, according to their advocates, represent a “a fourth level of government” between the state and the municipality (Ruiz 1999; Mattiace 2000). RAPs were the first de facto autonomy arrangement declared in Chiapas by independent peasant indigenous organisations.³ Like the Zapatistas, RAP members denied legitimate authority to state and municipal authorities. Yet, unlike the EZLN, RAP advocates suggest that as a fourth level of government, RAP authorities should negotiate with different government authorities, regardless of party affiliation. In fact, RAP members have not declined to participate in electoral competition, nor do they close their doors to federal resources. Like the MAZ, RAP authorities are charged with administrative, judicial and policy responsibilities. Yet, unlike the Zapatistas, RAP authorities only partially exercise these duties because the idea is to coordinate these actions with other local authorities. The original RAP plan included a legislative regional structure – an Indian parliament – composed by community members of RAP municipalities. Like many of the declared RAPs, this Indian parliament only operated for a very brief period of time.

2.12. On October 12 1994, a host of indigenous organisations gathered under the Indianist wing of the Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas de Chiapas (State Council of Chiapas's Indigenous and Peasant Organisations – CEOIC), a short-lived umbrella organisation that gathered most of the state's peasant and indigenous organisations after the Zapatista

³ *La Jornada*, 20, 21 and 27 October 1994.

insurrection, declared the existence of eight RAPs.⁴ FIPI and the Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants – CIOAC) from the Tojolabal region of Las Margaritas were the most enthusiastic promoters of indigenous autonomy. When CEOIC was dissolved, in 1995, some of the most radical and Indianist organisations gathered under the Asamblea Estatal Democrática del Pueblo Chiapaneco (State Democratic Assembly of the Chiapan People – AEDPCH) showed strong support for the RAP project. Figure 1 summarises these organisations by region.

2.13. Despite the initial support expressed by these organisations, the RAP project has only partially taken root in a few regions in Chiapas. Two are the most visible RAP experiences from the six cases claimed by RAP leaders. The first one, the Región Autónoma Norte (Northern Autonomous Region – RAN), encompassing eight municipalities from the Tzotzil-Zoque-Chol area, north of the Highlands, was found in 1994 by CIOAC supporters.⁵ RAN was found on the accumulated experience of land protest from municipalities like Simojovel, Huituipan and Soyaló. As members of CIOAC, Tzotzil peasants from Simojovel displayed one of the most intense struggles for land in Mexico in the 1980s. Disputes over the control of municipal power also brought Tzotzil peasants into violent disputes with PRI-supporters. In the aftermath of the Zapatista insurrection and as members of the RAN, CIOAC supporters in the region escalated levels of land invasion and by the late 1990s they had practically swept away the nearly 720 farms that existed in the region (González and Quintanar 1999). As members of the RAN indigenous peasants from the regions also escalated the intensity and violence of disputes over municipal power from PRI peasants and caciques. In terms of administrative, judicial and policy tasks that RAPs are supposed to operate, the RAN adjudicates conflicts among their members following internal CIOAC procedures, but, unlike the most developed Zapatista municipalities or regions it does not undertake any administrative, civil or policy functions.

Figure 1: Peasant and Indigenous Organisations Supporting Autonomy Arrangements by Region in Chiapas, 1994

<i>North</i>	<i>Highlands</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Southeastern</i>
CIOAC	CRIACH	ORCAO	OPEZ
FIPI	Tres Nudos	ARIC-Indep.	OCEZ
Xi-Nich	OIMI	COAO	ISMAM
Abu-Xu	Muctawinik	MOCRI	
COLPULMALI	SCOPNUR	CIOAC	
CNPI	Movimiento Democrático de Chalchihuitán	FIPI	

Source: La Jornada (various issues) and Gómez (1999)

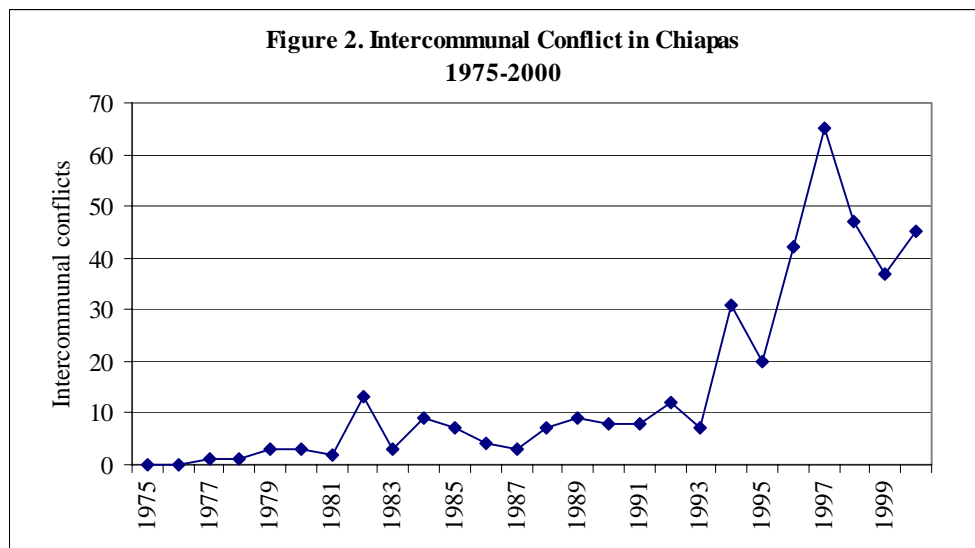
⁴ *La Jornada*, 13 October 1994.

⁵ *La Jornada*, 20 and 21 October 1994.

Violence and negotiation: the difficult coexistence of constitutional and autonomous authorities

2.14. Intercommunal conflict in Chiapas has skyrocketed since 1994. Figure 2 shows all intercommunal conflicts reported in seven national newspapers in all municipalities in Chiapas between 1970 and 2000 had at least 10 per cent indigenous population (N = 55 or half the municipalities in the state). Figure 2 captures all actions undertaken by organised groups or by individual communal members against their adversaries, including physical harassment, physical attacks, destruction of homes and property, kidnapping, political and religious expulsions, ambushes, individual assassinations, collective assassinations and mass murders.⁶ The largest share of intercommunal conflict in Chiapas involves personal attacks and the invasion or destruction of property, followed by religious and political expulsions. Most intercommunal conflict is stimulated by disputes over land or federal resources, political rivalries and religious differences. Intercommunal conflict involves very high levels of violence: in average, every time there is intercommunal strife, one person dies.

Figure 2: Intercommunal Conflict in Chiapas



Source: Trejo 2002b.

2.15. Although Chiapas, together with Oaxaca and Puebla have traditionally contributed with almost 90 per cent of all intercommunal conflict reported by the national press in Mexico, since 1994 intercommunal conflict has risen to unprecedented levels in Chiapas. Figure 2 illustrates a first significant peak in 1994, following the Zapatista insurrection, but the highest levels of intercommunal strife were reached between 1997 and 1998. By region, the highest per capita levels of intercommunal conflict are reported in the Central Valleys (Venustiano Carranza), in

⁶ Religious expulsions from the municipality of San Juan Chamula are not coded as intercommunal conflict because local PRI authorities have traditionally sponsored such expulsions. The first expulsions of Protestant or Catholic liberationists were first reported in the late 1960s and continue to this day. Preliminary reports suggest that more than 40,000 Chamulas have been violently expelled from their communities by PRI municipal presidents and local *caciques*.

the Highlands (El Bosque, Chenalhó, Simojovel and San Juan Chamula), in the Northern Chol and Tzeltal municipalities (Tila, Tumbalá and Salto del Agua) and in Eastern Chiapas (Altamirano, Ocosingo, Chilón, Palenque and Las Margaritas). Two-thirds of all intercommunal aggressions involve groups linked to the PRI and one third involve aggressions by Zapatistas and indigenous peasant organisations linked to the left. Although PRI militants are victims of intercommunal strife, the vast majority of victims are either Zapatistas or members of the left.

2.16. A strong association exists between those municipalities that experience the most severe and violent levels of intercommunal conflict and those in which a Zapatista Autonomous Municipality or Region has been established. Situations involving multiple sovereignties generally result in violent conflict. On the one hand, the Zapatista communities are supported by the EZLN to defend their newly defined territories. On the other, however, PRI governors, mayors, local deputies and members of state and local police forces have sponsored armed civilian groups (often referred to as paramilitary groups) in those regions where autonomous governments have been established. Some aided, others only tolerated, by the Mexican military, these armed civilian groups have been engaged in violent conflicts with the Zapatista support bases over the control of land, territory and people.

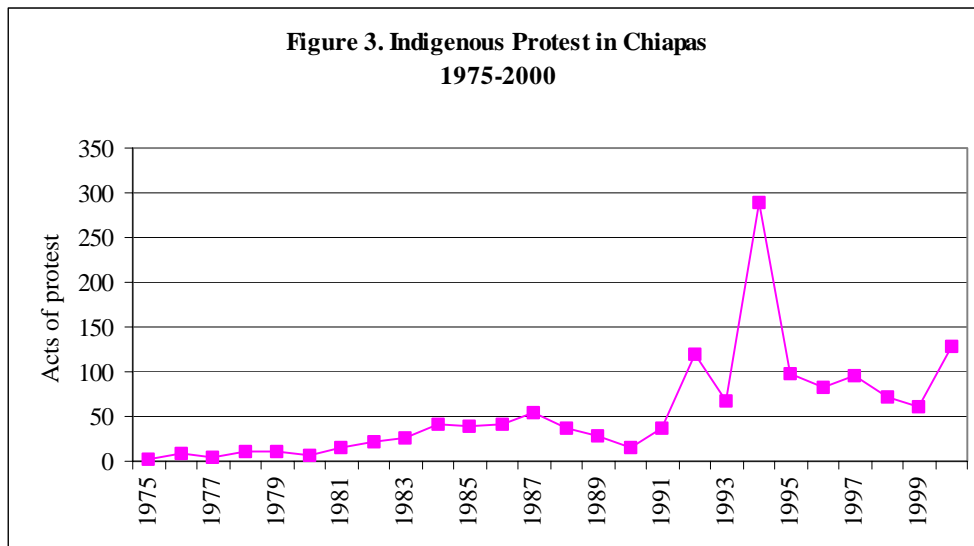
2.17. The Highland municipalities of Chenalhó and El Bosque represent two of the most severe cases of government-sponsored intercommunal conflict. The mass murder of 45 Tzotzils in Acteal, Chenalhó, in 1997, was the last stage of six months of communal strife between pro-Zapatista forces, the PRI municipal authorities and a group of PRI-affiliated armed civilians known as *Máscara Roja* (Red Mask). In the Northern Chol region, pro-Zapatista forces have been engaged in a small civil war against the PRI-affiliated group of armed civilians known as *Paz y Justicia* (Peace and Justice). In the highest point of the conflict, in 1997, thousands of families were displaced from the Chol region. Similar conflicts have been underway for almost a decade in Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas where PRI militants and pro-Zapatistas continue to threaten each other.

2.18. Although Zapatistas and PRI militants have learned to coexist in some municipalities where autonomous and constitutionally elected authorities live side-by-side (San Andrés Larrainzar), and PRI and RAP supporters have succeeded in sharing power (Ocosingo), for the most part this has not been the case (Viqueira 2001; Hernández Cruz 1999). In those municipalities in which Zapatistas and PRI militants are engaged in a severe conflict over land, territory and people, a pro/anti-Zapatista cleavage is taking deep roots. In at least 25 municipalities in the state, most social and political cleavages are increasingly converging toward a Zapatista/anti-Zapatista divide. In a context of enormous religious diversity, perhaps the most dangerous overlap would be with religion. In some parts of the state, this Zapatista/anti-Zapatista divide has already overlapped with a Protestant/Catholic cleavage (i.e. Ocosingo and Las Margaritas in Eastern Chiapas). In most parts, however, Protestants and Catholics still partake on both sides of the divide (i.e. the Highlands and the Northern Chol region) (Leyva 2000; Ebert 2000).

3. The origins of the movement: Peasants into Indians

3.1. Chiapas's territorially based ethnic movements (the Zapatista and the RAP) are to a large extent an outcome of a long wave of peasant indigenous protest that began in the mid 1970s and which continues to this day. Figure 3 illustrates the long stretch of this wave throughout the whole process of democratic transition in Mexico (1977–2000). The figure captures all acts of protest in all municipalities with at least 10 per cent indigenous population between 1970 and 2000 (N = 55). Acts of protest range from public denunciations, marches, meetings, hunger strikes, land invasions, the takeover of government buildings, the kidnapping and lynching of authorities, the invasion of municipalities, the establishment of rebel autonomous territories to guerrilla attacks. Most acts of protest include actions near the non-violent edge: public denunciations, marches and public meetings, land invasions and the takeover of municipal palaces.

Figure 3: Indigenous Protest in Chiapas 1975-2000



Source: Trejo 2002b.

3.2. Average levels of protest increasingly grow from one decade to another: in the 1970s there was one act of protest every two weeks, in the 1980s every week and in the 1990s every other day. Although public demonstrations took a first important hike under the administration of General Absalón Castellanos (1982–88), the most dramatic peaks took place in 1992 and 1994 under the administration of Patrocinio González (1988–94). Levels of protest after the Zapatista uprising have remained at the level reached under the administration of González. Nationwide Chiapas indigenous peasant protest plays a dominant role in Mexico. Although the state accounts for less than 10 per cent of the country's indigenous population, since 1992 – two years before the Zapatista insurrection – Chiapas has systematically accounted for more than 50 per cent of the country's indigenous contentious action year after year.

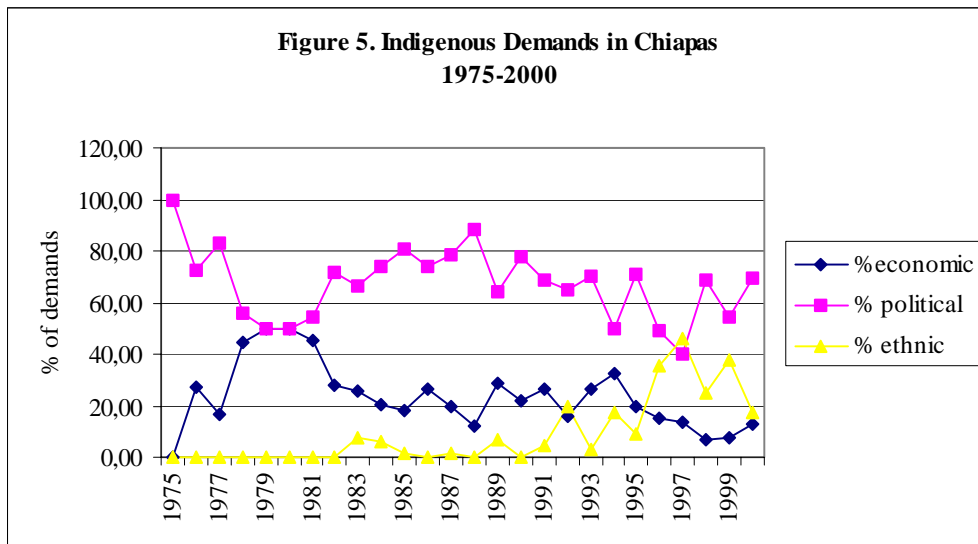
3.3. On a per capita basis, most acts of indigenous peasant protest have mainly concentrated in key municipalities in the Central Valleys (Venustiano Carranza), the Highlands (Simojovel, El Bosque, San Andrés Larrainzar, Bochil, Chenalhó, San Juan Chamula and San Cristóbal de las Casas), and Eastern Chiapas (Altamirano, Ocosingo, Palenque, Chilón and Las Margaritas). The most contentious indigenous organisations include the EZLN, which operates across regions in at least 25 municipalities; CIOAC, which mainly operates in the Northern and Eastern region, with Simojovel and Las Margaritas as CIOAC bastions; the Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organisation – OCEZ), which has operated in Ocosingo (East) and Venustiano Carranza (Sierra); ARIC-UU, ORCAO and COAO in Palenque, Chilón, Altamirano, Ocosingo and Las Margaritas (East); Xi-Nich and CNPI, which operate in Tila, Tumbalá, Salta del Agua, Palenque and Yajalón (North); and CRIACH and ORIACH, protestant-led indigenous organisations from the Highlands.

Figure 4: Leading Peasant and Indigenous Organisations in Chiapas, 1975–2000

<i>Sierra</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Highlands</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Border</i>
OCEZ	EZLN	EZLN	EZLN	OPEZ
CNPA	CIOAC	CRIACH	ORCAO	OCEZ
	Xi-Nich	ORIACH	ARIC-UU	EZLN
	CNPI	Las Abjeas	COAO	
	Abu Xu	Tres Nudos	MOCRI	
	COLPULMALI		CIOAC	

3.4. Indigenous demands and identities have undergone important transformations along this wave of social protest. Figure 5 shows the evolution of indigenous public demands, 1975–2000, as expressed in all acts of contention described in Figure 3. Economic demands are mostly *outcome oriented*: requests for public services, anti-poverty and agricultural programmes and land reform. Political demands are mainly *regime oriented*: denunciations against local public authorities for corruption or fraud; petitions of removal of municipal presidents; accusation of repression by *caciques*, local, state and federal police, the military, and paramilitary forces; and pleas for the liberation of political prisoners. And ethnic demands are *community oriented*: demands of public services to ethnically differentiated populations; the recognition of indigenous peoples' customary laws and traditions to select their local authorities and to administer justice; the right to municipal or regional autonomy and self-determination; and demands for secession.

Figure 5: Indigenous Demands in Chiapas 1975-2000



Source: Trejo 2002b.

3.5. Although economic or outcome-oriented demands were dominant in the 1970s, in the late 1990s they were reduced to only a 10 per cent overall level. Economic demands in Chiapas have boiled down to one issue – land. 77 per cent of all economic or output-oriented demands involve petitions for land reform and only 21 per cent involve requests for anti-poverty programmes or programmes of agricultural support. As illustrated in Figure 5, demands for land reform exploded in the late 1970s and represented almost half of all indigenous demands between 1978 and 1981. Between 1982 and 1993, claims for land reform systematically amounted to 20 per cent of all indigenous demands. In 1994, following the Zapatista uprising, the state of Chiapas experienced one of the most dramatic rural insurrections since the 1910 Mexican Revolution: more than 1,000 plots were invaded that year by peasants and Indians affiliated to independent organisations and to the PRI. During 1994, 30 per cent of all public demands included issues related to land redistribution. Two years after the liberalisation of land tenure and the official announcement by the federal government that the post-revolutionary land reform was over, the Chiapas peasantry exploded. Yet, as the federal and the state governments launched successive

programmes of land reform between 1994 and 1998, economic demands have systematically declined to a 10 per cent level.

3.6. Political or system demands have dominated the agenda of peasant indigenous organisations in Chiapas over the last 25 years. More specifically, the democratisation of municipal power and the end of government repression and human rights violations have been the highest priorities of Chiapas's indigenous movement. 30 per cent of all political demands involve issues of democratisation of decision-making power of municipal authorities and 60 per cent involve demands for an end of repression of local, state and federal police forces and the military, as well as demands for the release of political prisoners. The Zapatista rebellion also opened the door for an indigenous civil insurrection against municipal authorities. During 1994, almost 50 per cent of all demands involved demands for punishing or displacing mayors. Local Congress removed 30 per cent of Chiapas's municipal presidents that year. Between 1982 and 1993 demands for local democratisation and respect for human rights systematically scored about 75 per cent of all demands in the state. After 1994, however, political demands have slowed down to around 50 per cent.

3.7. Contrary to primordialist theories of ethnic identity formation that trace indigenous ethnic identification from time immemorial, Figure 5 shows that ethnic or community-oriented public demands are of recent coinage in Chiapas. 70 per cent of all ethnic demands in the state involve local decision-making power: the capacity to elect their own authorities according to customary laws and traditions and demands for local or regional autonomy and self-determination. Almost 30 per cent of all ethnic demands include requests for the constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples. The first significant peak of ethnic demands took place during the 1992 campaign to condemn 500 years of the Conquest of the Americas. Ethnic demands then only included the constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples. More radical ethnic demands, including the right to autonomy and self-determination became dominant demands and occupied up to 43 per cent of all demands in the state in 1996. Ethnoterritorial demands have not displaced demands for land and local democratisation; rather, indigenous organisations now increasingly raise territorial demands (instead of land reform) and demands for self-government (instead of denouncing wrongdoings by municipal presidents). It should be pointed out that in 25 years of active collective dissent, Chiapas's indigenous organisations have only made one demand for secession (the PRListas of San Juan Chamula).

3.8. Practically all peasant indigenous organisations displayed in Figure 4 played a key role in the transformation of peasant demands into an ethnic programme. Yet the ethnification of peasant demands has varied across organisations and regions. For example, the EZLN made a radical identity shift between 1995 and 1997, as it embraced the autonomy programme during the second phase of peace negotiations in San Andrés Larráinzar. As illustrated by the geography of the MAZA, RAZ and RAPs and by publicly expressed demands, the most radical levels of ethnification of demands have been experienced in the Highlands (Chenalhó, Larrainzar, Chamula and Zinacantán) and Eastern Chiapas (Altamirano, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Oxchuc, San Juan Cancuc, Huixtán and Chanal) in the north-of-the Highlands (El Bosque, Bochil, Huituipán, Ixtapa and Jitotol) have experienced the most radical levels of ethnification. Organisations like CIOAC and FIPI have played a key role in the slow process of ethnification of Las Margaritas and La Trinitaria and the north-of-the-Highlands region around Simojovel and

Huituipan. Finally, the Central Valleys (Venustiano Carranza) and the Chol region (Sabanilla, Tila, Tumbalá and Salto del Agua) have experienced intermediate and low levels of ethnification in the past 5 years, respectively.

4. State Responses in Historical Perspective: Co-optation, Repression and Negotiation

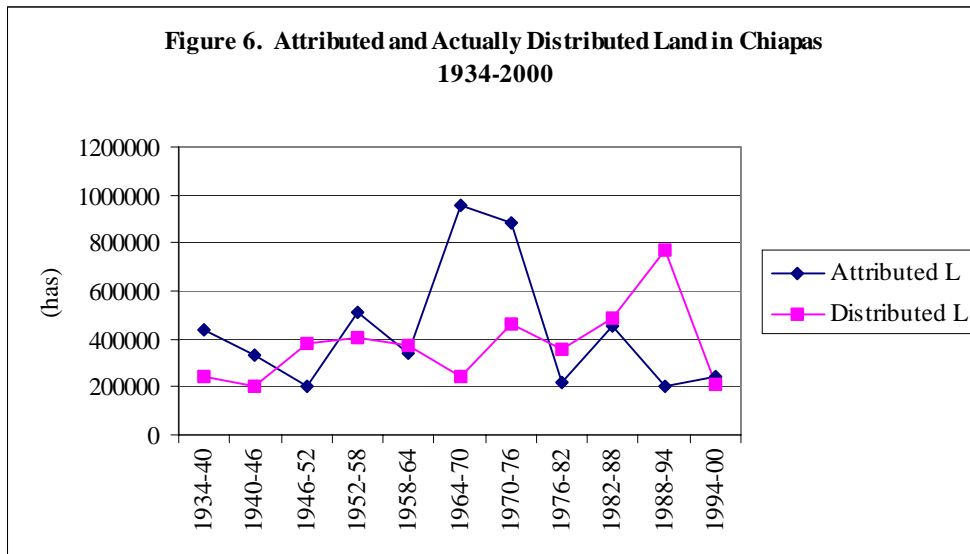
4.1. Two elements are essential to understand the different strategic responses undertaken by the Mexican and the Chiapas governments. The first one is Mexico's dual transition to democracy and to a market-oriented economy in the 1982–2000 period. And the second one is the concurrent nature of federal and state elections in Mexico and Chiapas and the overlapping six-year terms of presidents and governors. State responses to peasant and indigenous protest may thus be divided according to the government actor that undertakes the response (federal or state governments) and depending on the sphere of government action that is involved in such a response (constitutional reforms, political-institutional changes and policy reforms).

4.2. State responses to peasants and Indians in Chiapas can be divided into five historical periods – (1) Between 1975 and 1993, PRI local authorities combined piecemeal land reform with increasing levels of police repression. (2) In 1994, after the Zapatista insurrection, the federal government tried to negotiate a peace agreement via radical social policy reforms while local police forces – now joined by the military – escalated repression levels. (3) In 1996, the federal government tried again to negotiate a peace agreement, now via a constitutional reform granting some ethnocultural rights to indigenous communities. (4) Between 1997 and 2000, the federal and state governments practised well-orchestrated division of labour. The federal government concentrated on focalised anti-poverty programmes targeted at the “conflict zone” and pushed for the militarisation of this area. Also the state government introduced important reforms to the state constitution to grant limited ethnocultural rights to indigenous communities; launched a programme of remunicipalisation; and resumed high levels of police repression combined with government-sponsored intercommunal strife. (5) In 2001, under democratic rule, while the federal government tried to go back to the negotiation table with the Zapatistas via a constitutional reform granting the rights to autonomy and self-determination to indigenous peoples, the opposition-led state government launched a programme of inter- and intracommunal reconciliation.

Local policy responses to peasant protest: Piecemeal land reform and police repression

4.3. Between 1975 and 1993 the federal government delegated in the hands of Chiapas's governors the capacity to respond to peasant indigenous demands. State authorities tried to persuade local peasants to contain mobilisation in exchange of piecemeal land reform or else face severe police repression.

Figure 6: Attributed and Actually Distributed Land in Chiapas 1934-2000



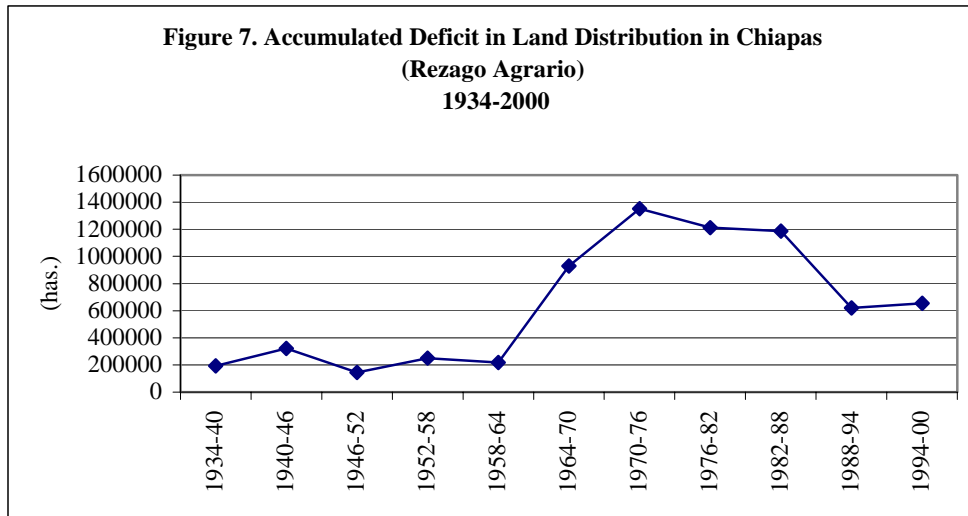
Source: Registro Agrario Nacional, taken from Villafuerto et al. 1999.

4.4. In 1976 President José López Portillo (1976–82) announced the end of land reform in Mexico. In principle, his administration would not distribute more land and would instead concentrate on anti-poverty and productivity-enhancing rural-support programmes. As shown in Figure 6, the president’s predecessors (1964–70 and 1970–76) had attributed the largest number of hectares for Chiapas’s peasantry in post-revolutionary Mexican history, thereby pushing the accumulated deficit in land distribution (see Figure 7) to its highest historical level in 1976. Peasant expectations were high when López Portillo announced the end of land reform. After the Indian National Congress in San Cristóbal de las Casas 1974, peasant and indigenous communities from the Highlands (Simojovel and Huituipan), the Central Valleys (Venustiano Carranza) and Eastern and Southeastern Chiapas (Chilón, Ocosingo and Las Margaritas) initiated a wave of peaceful protest to demand land redistribution.

4.5. Although the interim administration of Governor Juan Sabines (1979–82) ended up distributing as much land as many of his predecessors, Chiapas’s ruling élites reacted with great fear to initial peasant indigenous mobilisation. 70 per cent of all acts of protest in the 1978–82 period were matched by subsequent acts of police repression against independent peasant organisations. Fuelled by historical myths of an Indian insurrection or a caste war in the state, local élites in Chiapas reacted violently to peasant indigenous mobilisation throughout the 1980s. Figure 8 summarises all acts of government repression against Chiapas’s indigenous peasant populations between 1975 and 2000.⁷

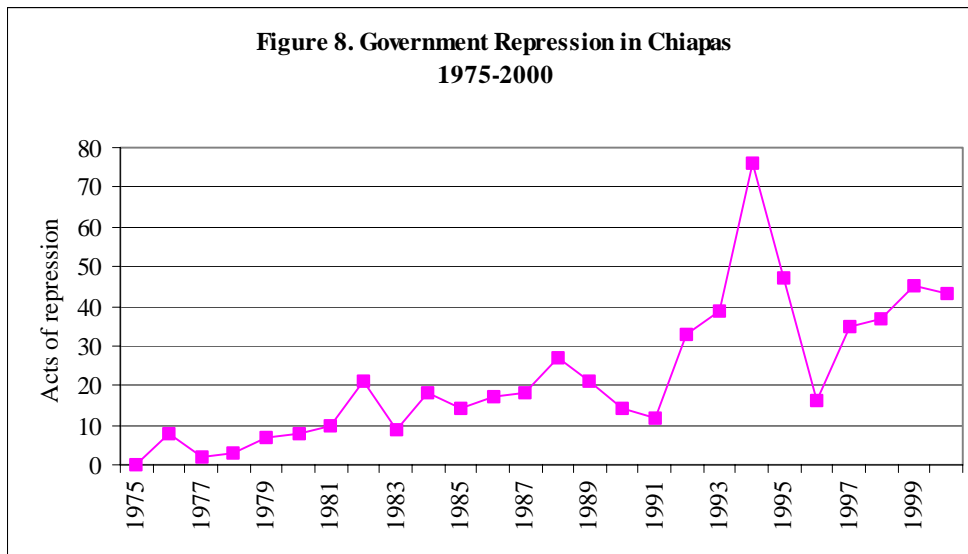
⁷ Government repression includes personal harassment, physical attacks, destruction or invasion of land and private houses, destruction of an organization’s offices, ambushes, illegal detentions, rapes, individual assassinations, collective assassinations and massacres undertaken by local, state or federal police and the army.

Figure 7: Accumulated Deficit in Land Distribution in Chiapas 1934-2000.



Source: Registro Agrario Nacional, taken from Villafuerto et al. 1999.

Figure 8: Government Repression in Chiapas



Source: Trejo 2002b.

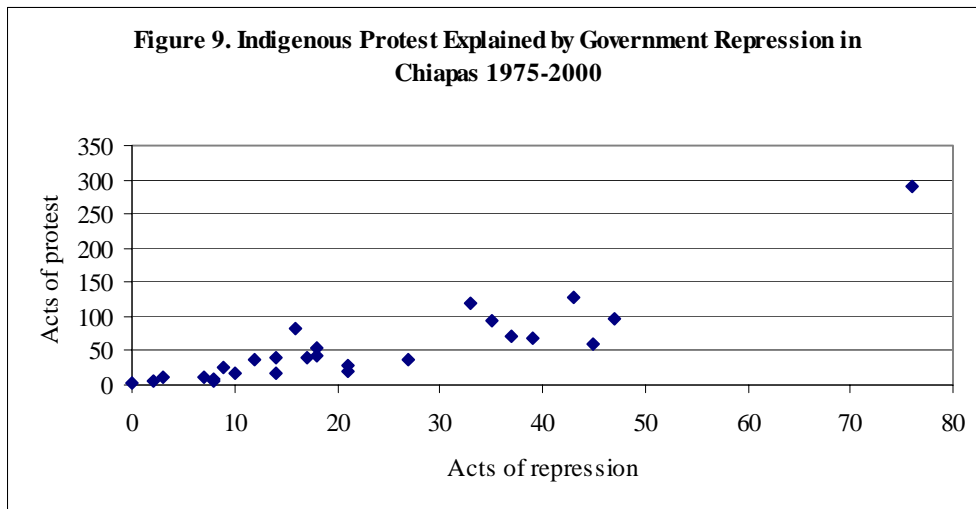
4.6. With peasant mobilisations underway, the administration of General Absalón Castellanos (1982–88), charged by President Miguel de la Madrid with the task of preventing any possible contagion from the Central American civil wars on to Mexican soil, resorted to the strategies of his predecessor: land reform and police repression. As evidenced in Figure 6, General Castellanos distributed more land than any of his predecessors but also engaged in police repression more than any of his precursors (see Figure 8). General Castellanos inaugurated what

eventually became Chiapas-style land reformism, by which governors would buy land from landowners and distribute it to the *campesinos*. Scholars of peasant politics in Chiapas suggest that Chiapas's authorities generally overcompensated landowners by paying a "political" rather than market price for the land (Reyes 1999). And, also, that up to 84 per cent of the land distributed would end up in the hands of PRI-affiliated peasants (Villafuerte et.al 1999). Land overpopulation and the accumulated deficit in land distribution sent many opposition peasants into protest. A vicious cycle of protest, repression and protest initiated under the administration of General Castellanos, particularly in Simojovel, Huituipan, Venustiano Carranza, Chilón, Ocosingo and Las Margaritas.

4.7. Governor Patrocinio González (1988–94) took power amid a highly mobilised peasantry demanding land reform, the democratisation of municipal power, and an end to government repression in the state. Although González openly criticised the rural policies of his predecessor, under his administration more land was distributed than under any other administration. Some of this land was, once again, bought from local landowners and distributed to PRI and opposition peasant organisations. After the reform of Article 27 and the liberalisation of land tenure in 1992, González announced the end of land reform in the state. To avoid local and international condemnations, the federal administration of Carlos Salinas pursued a double-track compensatory strategy. On the one hand, Salinas introduced a constitutional reform by which Mexican indigenous peoples would receive constitutional recognition and, on the other, his administration launched a massive anti-poverty programme: PRONASOL, the National Solidarity Programme. The land reform and the compensation measures had unintended effects for the regime. The liberalisation of land tenure dramatically increased the levels of peasant protest in Chiapas and the constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples provided a very strong incentive for Indian peasants to take up the ethnic banner. The Solidarity programme contributed to internal discontent mainly because most funds were distributed via traditional PRI-corporatist channels. As Figure 8 suggests, as land distribution and social policy did not discourage social mobilisation, after 1991 the González administration resorted to increasing levels of police repression and human-rights violations.

4.8. Throughout the 1980s, organised peasant indigenous populations in Chiapas were victims of the classic response to social mobilisation by a post-revolutionary authoritarian regime: the carrot and the stick. For national and local élites, peasant protest was a question of buying off conflict with peacemeal land reform and anti-poverty programmes. If these solutions did not pay off, police repression was the most obvious last-resort solution. While opposition parties had made initial important inroads in northern and central states, by the early 1990s they failed to minimally penetrate most regions in Chiapas. Facing no real competition, local élites faced scant incentives to undertake insitutional changes that would open Chiapas's political system to more pluralistic contestation. As depicted in Figure 9, protest led to repression and repression, in turn, to further protest. This spiral of contention revealed the incapacity of the state's political system and actors to provide institutional channels for conflict resolution to an increasingly impoverished, pluralistic, participatory and divided society.

Figure 9: Indigenous Protest Explained by Government Repression in Chiapas 1975-2000



Source: Trejo 2002b.

Federal response to a peasant rebellion: Negotiating peace through traditional policy channels

4.9. The insurrection of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation marked a turning point in Chiapas’s contemporary history. As argued above, the Zapatista rebellion revealed a deep crisis in Chiapas’s economic structure as well as a structural crisis in the state’s political arrangement. After ten days of open combat between the Mexican Army and the EZLN, President Carlos Salinas called for a ceasefire. A few weeks later, the federal government would initiate peace negotiations with the rebels. Manuel Camacho, the Peace Commissioner, and Subcommander Marcos, the guerrilla military strategists and spokesman, came very close to signing a peace agreement in March 1994. The essence of the agreement consisted of massive fiscal transfers and social programmes to indigenous communities in Chiapas. Although Zapatista commanders always disliked the federal government’s inflexible position of reducing the rebellion to a local phenomenon, which called for a local solution, they were nonetheless close to signing the peace agreement, had it not been for the assassination of the PRI presidential candidate in March 1994. The political crisis and the elite fragmentation that was made evident by the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio opened a window of opportunities for the Zapatistas to sit and wait for a more ambitious peace agreement. By the same token, the rural and civil insurrection underway in Chiapas also revealed the deep crisis in the local political system and the unparalleled social momentum that the Zapatista rebellion had opened up. The Zapatistas thus decided to explore their electoral potential and threw all their moral and political capital behind the PRD candidate, Amado Avendaño.

4.10. With peace negotiations between the federal government and the EZLN at a stalemate, local politics took over. The 1994 massive wave of land invasions was met with a combination of renewed land reform and with government repression. The 1994 electoral challenge in the gubernatorial race was met with a combination of fraud and selective police repression against dissident leaders. And the 1994 civil insurrection against municipal presidents that reached its highest levels after the electoral fraud in the gubernatorial elections was met with a combination

of negotiation and repression. Figure 8 illustrates that 1994 was the year with the most severe levels of repression in Chiapas's contemporary history. This old combination of protest (now insurrection) and repression would provide incentives for rebels and independent indigenous organisations to take a more radical turn: ethnicity.

Federal response to an Indian civil uprising: Negotiating peace through piecemeal constitutional reformism

4.11. Disenchanted by the electoral fraud in the gubernatorial race, in December 1994 the Zapatistas took over 38 municipal palaces and established rebel municipal territories. President Ernesto Zedillo's (1994–2000) reaction was to order the military to capture Subcommander Marcos and the top Zapatista commanders-in-chief. A domestic and international civil campaign again brought military action to a halt and opposition parties in Mexico pushed for a constitutional reform by which rebels would be given amnesty. All parties called for a second phase of peace negotiations, which would take place in 1996.

4.12. The federal government and the rebels convened to a negotiation scheme involving four consecutive negotiation panels. The first one would deal with the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples, the second one with reforms to Mexico's system of representative democracy, the third one with economic (land) issues and the last one with women's rights. Unlike the first phase of peace negotiations in which economic demands were at centre stage, ethnocultural rights became the centrepiece in the second round. To the surprise of everyone, the Peace Commissioner and the Zapatistas signed an agreement (the San Andrés Accords), which obliged the Mexican President to push through Congress the constitutional reforms agreed on in the Accords. Convinced that if that agreement were pushed through Congress Mexico would follow the "Balkanisation" path, however, President Zedillo never sent the Accords to Congress and negotiations broke down.

4.13. While the federal government and the EZLN negotiated the San Andrés Accords, a series of interim governors in Chiapas tried to cope with the massive wave of land invasions. Under different schemes and programme names, the government of Chiapas resorted again to the old policy of buying land from landowners to distribute it to the *campesinos*. Between 1995 and 1998 the Mexican and the Chiapas governments distributed as much land as General Lázaro Cárdenas, the father of Mexico's agrarian reform, had done back in 1934. Yet, once again, up to 60 per cent of the land benefited PRI-affiliated peasant organisations, when 70 per cent of all invaded plots were in the hands of anti-PRI independent organisations such as CIOAC, OPEZ, OCEZ, CNPA, CNPI and ORCAO (Villafuerte, et.al. 1999). As we will see in the next section, one of the unintended short-term effects of this PRI-biased distribution of small plots was that the government set the structural conditions for intercommunal strife between PRI and anti-PRI forces.

Federal response to stalemate: Local constitutional reformism and the privatisation of repression

4.14. With the peace negotiation process at a new stalemate, the Zedillo administration followed the good old recipe of combining social policy with government repression. This time the federal

government launched a series of focalised anti-poverty programmes in the Zapatista-dominated “conflict zone”. The most prominent of all these programmes was the “Programa Cañadas”, a comprehensive targeted plan, which included a series of programmes of physical infrastructure (water, electrification, housing and the construction of communal roads) and productivity-enhancing agricultural actions. Pro-Zapatista forces denounced the programme as a new strategy to buy-off Zapatista supporters. Together with these programmes, the federal government promoted a new wave of militarisation of the “conflict zone”.

4.15. Amid the national stalemate, reformism shifted from the federal to the local government. Interim governor Roberto Albores (1997–2000) followed a three-track strategy, combining constitutional reforms, institutional changes and the privatisation of government repression by sponsoring or protecting armed civilians in their growing strife against Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities.

4.16. The constitutional reform track included a reform in Chiapas’s constitution that introduced substantive changes to an otherwise ethnic-blind constitution –

(1) Chiapas was constitutionally recognised as a pluricultural state and the constitution specifies the nine indigenous ethnic groups that the state should protect. (2) The constitution specified that the government should protect and promote indigenous customary laws and traditions. The state’s Electoral Code was reformed to encourage political parties to name indigenous candidates to compete in those municipalities and electoral districts of indigenous majority. (3) The constitution established penal sanctions on racial discrimination. (4) The constitution also demanded that the state guarantee equal access to judicial courts for indigenous populations, providing them with translators and lawyers sensitive to their customary laws and traditions. And (5) the state was obliged to provide bilingual education wherever necessary. Many of these changes placed Chiapas, together with Oaxaca, at the forefront of pro-Indian state constitutions. For most indigenous organisations in Chiapas, these changes came at least a decade late. With an eye set on more fundamental reforms to the national constitution, these changes passed unnoticed.

4.17. Governor Albores promoted a long-requested programme of remunicipalisation and created eight new municipalities. As suggested by local observers, however, the new municipalities were all established next to Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities mainly to manage the resources that the Zapatistas rejected (Leyva 2000). In fact, confronting the Zapatista-controlled territories had been one of the key objectives of the Albores administration. The governor ordered the dismantling of at least half-a-dozen ZAPs.⁸ The state government also promoted or permitted, together with PRI municipal authorities, local deputies and the military, the emergence of government-sponsored anti-Zapatista armed civilians (the so-called paramilitaries). The result was an unprecedented increase in intercommunal conflict, particularly in the Highlands, the Northern Chol region and Eastern Chiapas between 1997 and 1999.⁹ During these years some regions of Chiapas practically slipped into small civil wars in which hundreds of families were displaced from their communities and mass murders like Acteal took place.

⁸ See *La Jornada*, in 1997: 11, 16 and 20 March; in 1998: 8 April, 2 May, 11 June; in 1999: 8, 9, 10 and 15 April and 7 and 11 June.

⁹ See *La Jornada*, in 1997: 23, 24 and 26 December; in 1998: 14 May, 27, 3 and 30 June, 25 October and 2 December; in 1999: 5 February; and in 2000: December, various issues.

Federal and local responses to an Indianist movement: Can majority rule solve ethnominority problems?

4.18. On 2 July 2000, with the electoral victory of the opposition candidate Vicente Fox, Mexico's protracted transition to democracy came to an end. A month later, on 20 August, a former PRI Senator, Pablo Salazar, became the first opposition candidate to defeat the PRI in a gubernatorial race. In his inaugural speech, President Fox announced that his first government action would be to send to Congress the COCOPA law initiative – a legal translation of the San Andrés Accords, drafted by a multi-party congressional commission, and approved by the EZLN. By sending the law initiative to the Senate, the President hoped to resume peace negotiations with the Zapatista rebels. In Chiapas, in his inaugural speech, Governor Salazar announced that “reconciliation” would be the main policy objective of his administration. To that purpose he created a Commission for Reconciliation charged with the difficult task of rebuilding social relations in those municipalities in which pro- and anti-Zapatista forces were engaged in fierce disputes over land, territory and populations. The key problem for the President and the Governor was that neither of them had a majority in their respective congresses. Moreover, to pass his constitutional reform initiative Fox had to strike important deals with 19 PRI governors (out of 32 states). To make his programme of reconciliation come true, Salazar also had to strike important deals with PRI mayors who dominated two-thirds of the municipal presidencies in the state.

4.19. The COCOPA law initiative, which essentially recognised the right to autonomy and self-determination to indigenous peoples, was supported by President Fox, the Zapatistas and by more than 70 per cent of public opinion. Both Fox and the Zapatistas assumed that the real battle to push the constitutional reform through Congress would be played out in the media and not in the legislative halls.

4.20. To lobby in favour of the law initiative, the Zapatistas organised an “epic” two-week march that took the commanders in chief of the EZLN and Subcommander Marcos from Chiapas to Mexico City and then to Congress. Yet, the Zapatistas never bothered to approach personally federal and state legislators from all political parties to lobby for the reform. Following authoritarian logic, the EZLN assumed that once the President threw his support behind the COCOPA law initiative, Congress would automatically approve it, as in the golden years of PRI hegemony. On his side, President Fox launched a massive media campaign to show his support for the COCOPA law initiative and his commitment to the Indian cause, but he never organised a serious lobby campaign to secure a majority in Congress. Following a plebiscitarian logic, the President assumed that his enormous first-year popularity and media campaign would corner all legislators in approving his reform. Legislators from the President's right-of-centre National Action Party (PAN) and the PRI drafted and passed an Indian law that turned out to be substantially different from the COCOPA law initiative.

4.21. The Indian law approved mainly by PAN and PRI legislators introduced the right to autonomy and self-determination to indigenous peoples in the constitution but left its legal implementation in the hands of state legislatures and governments. In fact, the law was

substantive on federal social provision but weak on political transformation. The Zapatistas condemned the law immediately and prospects for peace negotiation soon collapsed.

4.22. Why did the Zapatistas reject an Indian law that, though limited, opened many doors for negotiating far-reaching reforms at the state level? Three reasons can be offered. First, since 1998 the EZLN made its dominant strategy to condition any peace agreement to the constitutional approval of the COCOPA law initiative. This all-or-nothing strategy was the Zapatistas' reaction to President Zedillo's decision not to honour what his Peace Commissioner had signed back in 1997. In the view of the Zapatistas, accepting an Indian law different from the COCOPA law initiative was tantamount to opening the door for the government to fail to honor its word in future negotiations. Second, one of the main objectives of the Zapatista march on Mexico City in 2001 was to push for the emergence of a national indigenous movement for the first time in Mexican history, by bringing together a host of local indigenous organisations under the banner of the Zapatista-supported Indigenous National Congress (CNI). A law initiative that opened the door for different local autonomy arrangements would counter the Zapatista goal of creating a pan-Indian movement of all Mexican Indians. And, third, since 1996/97 Subcommander Marcos has embraced the goal of becoming the Indians' Martin Luther King. To signal his true commitment to an Indianist programme and to wipe out his Marxist-Leninist past, he has radically embraced a primordialist discourse that accepts nothing short of an autonomy regime, as embodied in the COCOPA law initiative, for all Mexican Indians.

4.23. Reconciliation in Chiapas has turned into a complicated mission in the post-PRI era. With the Zapatistas back in the jungle and the PRI out of government, the bipolar structure of intercommunal conflict (PRI versus anti-PRI) has given way to a multipolar structure that pits Zapatistas against their former comrades of the left as well as against PRI-affiliated organisations. While the Commission for Reconciliation has somehow unsuccessfully tried to bring to terms historical PRI and anti-PRI enemies, little has been done to reform the judicial system to adjudicate effectively and impartially future multipolar conflicts.

5. Does Chiapas provide any policy lessons?

5.1. Within the short time-span of three decades, indigenous populations in Chiapas went from organising a non-violent peasant movement demanding land reform to becoming the main engine in the emergence of a guerrilla-backed national Indianist movement demanding the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples. Although the state's socio-economic conditions may help explain such radical shift in strategies of dissent and demands, it is the dynamic process of strategic interaction between the peasant indigenous movement and the federal and state governments that provides a better explanation.

5.2. Initial responses to the wave of peasant indigenous protests that began in the 1970s involved mainly state government action in two domains: land reform and police repression. This contradictory logic of combining land reformism with police repression was a direct result of the pathological nature of Mexico's agrarian reform. Although Mexican presidents attributed hundreds of hectares to landless peasants, it was up to the *campesinos* themselves to actually obtain the land. This inevitably led to a wave of peasant indigenous protest. As the case of Chiapas exemplifies, governors played a key role in the bargaining over the actual distribution of

land. The main problem was that land reform followed an incremental and clientelistic logic, in which PRI-affiliated peasants and Indians received the greatest shares. The Chiapas story suggests that under conditions of increasing land overpopulation and a bipolar structure of conflict (i.e. PRI versus anti-PRI forces), land reform, if systematically biased towards one group, creates the structural conditions for further protest and for intercommunal strife.

5.3. When land reform failed as a disincentive to social turmoil, local élites in Chiapas resorted to police repression. As scholars of repression have analytically demonstrated, such contradictory policies of inviting and repressing land invasion at once, opens the door for the radicalisation of dissent (Lichbach 1987). Indeed, as police repression increased, peasant indigenous organisations in Chiapas added to their outcome-oriented demands, new system demands: the democratisation of local power structures and an end to human-rights violations. Chiapas's local élites reacted to this universalistic language of democracy and human rights with more land reform and police repression. In other words, rather than opening the Chiapan political system to greater multiparty contestation, local élites insisted on the traditional corporatist recipe of the carrot and the stick.

5.4. In a context of one-party dominance, in which peasant indigenous dissenters had no institutional channels to respond through by peaceful means, peasant indigenous protest eventually scaled up into rebellion. And, in the aftermath of the 1992 liberalisation of land tenure, universalist demands for land, democracy and respect for human rights gave way to a language of group-specific ethnocultural rights. Caught by historic fears of an Indian uprising or a caste war, and unlike local élites elsewhere in the country (i.e. Hidalgo and Oaxaca), élites in Chiapas did not show the boldness of introducing *timely reforms* which would open up the state's social, economic and political arenas for greater participation by peasant indigenous populations.

5.5. The insurrection of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation marked a turning point in the history of Chiapas and in the evolution of the state's indigenous peasant movement. Since 1994 the federal government took charge of indigenous peasant dissent in Chiapas and, together with the state government, tried all sorts of contradictory solutions, including peace negotiations, constitutional and institutional reforms, more land reformism and more police and military repression. Peace negotiations included ambitious social policy reforms and initial attempts at constitutional reforms to introduce the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples. However, negotiations failed in 1994 because a dramatic change of political circumstances after the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio opened a window of opportunity for the EZLN to transcend a package of social policy reforms. Two years later negotiations failed again simply because the President failed to honour the agreement his negotiators had previously reached with the Zapatistas. Two lessons can be learned from the 1996 round of peace negotiations. One is that authoritarian governments seldom keep their word in peace negotiations if there is no international third-party involvement. And, second, that it often backfires when a guerrilla group relies on authoritarian solutions, such as assuming that a President would push constitutional reform by authoritarian fiat.

5.6. When negotiations at the national level failed in 1997, the Zedillo administration opened the door to an intense period of local constitutional reformism allied with severe police and military

repression. Once again, the ambitious constitutional reforms introduced in these years show local élites in Chiapas reacting a decade late. Had these reforms been implemented in the late 1980s, neither indigenous peasant protest would have scaled up into rebellion, nor the movement demands been transformed into a radical programme of ethnoterritorial demands.

5.7. The simultaneous opposition victory in the 2000 national election and in the gubernatorial race in Chiapas also marks a turning-point in the history of indigenous peasant protest. The strategy of newly elected President Fox to combine constitutional reforms with peace negotiations was in principle a step never taken under authoritarian rule. The peace negotiation never took off, mainly because the constitutional reform to grant the right to autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples was only partially accepted by Congress. The lessons to be learned from the constitutional reform experience of the Indian law is that ethnoterritorial reforms are not symbolic changes, but comprehensive reforms that redefine the territorial bases of power in a polity. Hence, plebiscitarian appeals to the public like the ones made by Fox and the Zapatistas are not the most effective means towards passing such ambitious reforms. By the same token, the experience of the Indian law reveals that under conditions of high political pluralism and in a system operating under majority rule, minority groups should not simply rely on all-or-nothing strategies of persuasion.

5.8. After the defeat of the COCOPA law initiative in Congress, one of the greatest challenges ahead for Mexican democratic institutions and élites is to persuade the Indianist movement that Indians will no longer be permanent losers under the new democratic arrangement. For the Indianist movement, the challenge ahead is to show that they have the flexibility to transform incrementally the territorial bases of the Mexican state. It should be pointed out that, unlike minority groups in other world regions, neither the civilian Indianist movement nor the Zapatistas are demanding the redefinition of the country's external borders (secessionism) but, rather, the redrawing of its internal political boundaries: state, district and municipal frontiers. If democracy proves dysfunctional to the Indian movement in this objective of redefining the territorial bases of power and if the movement fails to pursue this change under increasingly pluralistic conditions, protest, intercommunal strife and government repression will most likely continue to be as intense as under authoritarian rule.

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