

THE CROSS IN THE POLLING
BOOTH:
Religion, Politics, and the Laity in Mexico*

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The Catholic clergy and the military have played crucial roles in Mexican history yet have been largely ignored in recent twentieth-century scholarship. The military received some attention in the early post-revolutionary period because it was intertwined with political leadership, but religious elites and the Catholic Church, which were separate from the state and suppressed by it, have not been analyzed.¹ As a rule, cohesive leadership groups in Mexico with values differing from politicians, strong institutional structures, and autonomy from the state have rarely been examined, especially in relationship to the state and politics in general. Conversely, the greater a group's ties to the Mexican political establishment, as measured by exchanges between leadership, the more scholars have learned about that group. Whereas intellectuals, entrepreneurs, military officers, and even opposition politicians share some ties with the state, the Catholic Church has no direct links, and its contemporary leaders, goals, and institutional structures remain relatively unknown and little understood.²

The Catholic Church deserves serious examination for various rea-

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1. See the classic work by Edwin Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968); and Roderic Ai Camp, *Generals in the Palacio: The Military in Modern Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

2. In fact, no monographs have been published in English analyzing the church's spiritual or pastoral role in Mexico. The two most comprehensive articles providing a context for recent church-state relations are Karl Schmitt, "Church and State in Mexico: A Corporatist Relationship," *The Americas* 40, no. 3 (Jan. 1984):349-76; and Claude Pomerleau, "The Changing Church in Mexico and Its Challenge to the State," *The Review of Politics* 43, no. 4 (Oct. 1981):540-59. George Grayson and Allan Metz have updated these works in Grayson, *The Church in Contemporary Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1981); and Metz, "Church-State Relations in Contemporary Mexico, 1968-1988," in *The Religious Challenge to the State*, edited by Matthew C. Moen and Lowell S. Gustafson (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1992), 102-28. The best work on the subject is Roberto Blancarte's *Historia de la iglesia católica en México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992).

sons: the clergy offers alternative views of Mexico's future to those of politicians; priests have the potential to affect citizen receptiveness to public policies; religious groups account for the largest number of social organizations in the country; and Catholic masses are perceived by many observers and politicians as observances with the potential to influence partisan political choices. As Kenneth Wald has argued, "[C]hurches do indeed promote distinctive political orientations. . . . [T]he extent of theological traditionalism prevailing in a congregation moves individual members to more conservative preferences on social issues and makes them more disposed to identify [themselves] as political conservatives."³ Priests' background, education, and experiences differ from those of politicians, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and the military.⁴ Such differences affect the clergy's ideology and also the methods its members would use to solve Mexico's problems.⁵ According to extensive interviews, members of the clergy have little desire to guide Mexico's political fortunes, but they do wish to see the average Mexican's goals fulfilled and the church's views openly discussed in the public-policy arena.⁶

Since Carlos Salinas was inaugurated as president of Mexico, the church's potential role has taken on much greater importance for several reasons. In the first place, the overall political environment in Mexico has become increasingly contentious, especially since the 1988 presidential elections. As the intensity of political opposition has increased, so has electoral fraud.⁷ Church leadership has been drawn directly into party conflicts as an institutional channel for criticizing regime fraud, especially in the northern, southern, and western regions, all of them strongholds of an activist church.⁸

3. See Kenneth D. Wald, Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel D. Hill, Jr., "Churches as Political Communities," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (June 1988):543-44.

4. Roderic Ai Camp, "Religious Elites in Mexico: Some Preliminary Observations," paper presented to the Latin American Studies Association, 4-6 Dec. 1989, Miami, Florida.

5. The most detailed examination of priests' political views in Mexico or Latin America is Enrique Luengo's "Percepción política de los párrocos en México," in *Religiosidad y política en México*, edited by Carlos Martínez Assad (Mexico City: Ibero-American University, 1992), 199-239. This work is part of a comprehensive survey project at the Ibero-American University.

6. Based on extensive interviews with Mexican bishops, 1987-1993, in the Federal District, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Chiapas, Puebla, Querétaro, and Guerrero. The present study is part of a larger examination of church-state relations and the political role of the Catholic Church in Mexico since 1970.

7. See, for example, the numerous essays in *Sucesión Presidencial: The 1988 Mexican Presidential Election*, edited by Edgar Butler and Jorge A. Bustamante (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991); and *Mexican Politics in Transition*, edited by Judith Gentleman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987).

8. See Oscar Aguilar and Ismael Martínez, "La iglesia católica mexicana como factor de riesgo para la estabilidad del sistema político mexicano," manuscript, 1987; Guillermo Correa, "Une a intelectuales e iglesia, la lucha contra la imposición electoral," *Proceso*, no. 513 (1 Sept. 1986), pp. 28-29; David Torres Mejía, "El regreso de la iglesia," in *Política y partidos en las elecciones federales de 1985* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987), 20-25; and Dennis Goulet, "The Mexican Church: Into the Public Arena," *América* 160, no. 13 (8 Apr. 1989):318-22.

Second, President Salinas himself, as part of his political modernization program, implied in public statements and actions that the legal constructs that severely limited religious autonomy in Mexico were outmoded, a carryover from the nineteenth century civil-religious conflict. Notable among those restrictions were constitutional prohibitions against priests and nuns voting and the church's lack of legal status in its relationship with the state.⁹ President Salinas underscored his interest in pursuing this matter when he appointed a personal representative to the Vatican in 1990.¹⁰ Two years later, the Mexican Congress revised the constitutional restrictions on the church by passing a new set of statutes to govern church-state relations.

A third factor in increased church influence has been the success of the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) in the North and its victory in the hard-fought 1989 gubernatorial election of Baja California (the first election at this level with officially recognized opposition in some sixty years) and another in Chihuahua in 1992. Both victories have special relevance for the church. As several analysts have suggested, PAN has manifested some ideological influence from Catholic thought and papal encyclicals.¹¹ PAN electoral victories were also important to the church because its platform for 1988–1994 called for numerous constitutional changes in the church-state relationship, changes that were specified in earlier party platforms.¹²

Finally, the church itself, from the point of view of its constituencies and its own leadership, is in the midst of redefining its role.¹³ Most Catholics in Mexico believe that the church responds well to spiritual necessities, moral problems, and family conflict, but only a minority (29 percent) believe that the church responds to social and economic problems.¹⁴ Younger parishioners are the ones who think that this role is not

9. Marjorie Miller, "Mexico Church-State Relations: Stepping Out from the Shadows," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Apr. 1990; and "Iglesia y estado: los puntos del conflicto," *Nexos*, no. 141 (Sept. 1989):19–23.

10. For background on this period, see Allan Metz, "Mexican Church-State Relations under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari," *Journal of Church and State* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1992):111–30; Roberto Blancarte, *El poder salinismo e iglesia católica: ¿una nueva convivencia?* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1991); and George Grayson, "The Church in Contemporary Mexico."

11. Joseph Klesner, "Changing Patterns of Electoral Participation and Official Party Support in Mexico," in Gentleman, *Mexican Politics in Transition*, 102; Donald Mabry, *Mexico's Acción Nacional, A Catholic Alternative to Revolution* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 99–103; and Franz A. von Sauer, *The Alienated "Loyal" Opposition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 13–40.

12. See *Relaciones iglesia estado: cambios necesarios, tesis del Partido Acción Nacional*, edited by María Elena Álvarez de Vicencio (Mexico City: Epessa, 1990), 20–21.

13. Adolfo Suárez Rivera, "Instrucción pastoral sobre la dimensión política de la fe," in-house document, Archdiocese of Monterrey, Nuevo León, March 1987, 6.

14. Luis Narro Rodríguez, "¿Qué valorán los mexicanos hoy?" in *Como somos los mexicanos*, edited by Alberto Hernández Medina and Narro Rodríguez (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Educativos, 1987), 36.

adequately fulfilled.¹⁵ Among the Mexican clergy, a group of younger priests influenced by South American liberation theologians have pushed for a more activist social and economic role for the church via base community groups, which often function as grass-roots pressure groups.¹⁶

In the eyes of the average Mexican citizen, no institutional structure is more admirable or more legitimate than the Catholic Church. On a scale from 1 to 10 measuring respect for institutions, Mexicans ranked the church 7, making it the most highly esteemed institution along with the public school system. The military scored 5, and the public bureaucracy, a poor 3.¹⁷ Historically, however, the Mexican clergy formed symbiotic linkages with the state, much like entrepreneurs. Beginning in the colonial period, the church was the state's willing ally in the conquest and the development of New Spain. Throughout this period, however, the relationship between civil and religious elites crackled with tensions over colonial policy, and conflicts also abounded within church institutions.¹⁸

As an institutional structure, the Catholic Church offers some special strengths shared by neither elite entrepreneurs nor intellectuals. Of the three groups, intellectuals are the most dependent on the state, directly or indirectly, for employment. Although the Mexican Church has had limited resources since the 1920s, it is not economically dependent on the state. Its financial security and autonomy thus give religious leaders considerable independence. More important, church leaders do not perceive themselves as being dependent on the state's largesse, unlike Mexican entrepreneurs and intellectuals.

Politically, however, the church suffers from the same adverse circumstances as the Mexican private sector. After the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), the government sought to stimulate and strengthen the private sector in order to encourage the country's economic development.¹⁹ To this end, it created interest-group organizations to represent and channel private-sector demands. The state also employed the Constitution of 1917 to define its relationship to the private sector.²⁰ The relationship as defined

15. Alberto Hernández Medina, "Religión y moral," in Hernández Medina and Narro Rodríguez, *Como somos los mexicanos*, 126.

16. Martín de la Rosa, "Iglesia y sociedad en el México de hoy," in *Religión and política en México*, edited by Martín de la Rosa and Charles A. Reilly (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1985), 268–92.

17. Luis Narro Rodríguez, "Qué valorán los mexicanos hoy?," 22. Every national public-opinion survey using accepted methodological techniques has reconfirmed these same basic rankings during the last five years.

18. John Lloyd Mechem, *Church and State in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

19. Blanca Heredia, "Profits, Politics, and Size: The Political Transformation of Mexican Business," in *The Right and Democracy in Latin America*, edited by Douglas A. Chalmers (New York: Praeger, 1992), 277.

20. For background on these developments, see Camp, *Entrepreneurs and Politics in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

in that document is contradictory, but the state's stance toward the church has been unequivocal: for reasons of historical experience, ideology, and a desire to monopolize the state apparatus, Mexican political elites have severely restricted the secular activities of the Catholic Church.²¹

The clergy and some lay leaders fiercely resisted state suppression of the church and Catholic culture, as evidenced by widespread violence in the 1920s.²² But as the state gradually expanded its authority, the church's political legitimacy and influence waned. Since 1968, however, when the state itself faced severe questions of legitimacy and its fortunes began to decline, the church's influence has increased correspondingly.²³ Thus as Mexico enters the last decade of the twentieth century, the state finds itself coping with severe economic and political problems, conditions that encourage an activist church role and legitimize a redefinition of church activities.²⁴

The church's potential for influencing Mexican life more broadly in nonspiritual ways, particularly in relation to politics, can be examined from various perspectives.²⁵ As recent studies of the church in Latin America have suggested, comprehensive analyses must examine the perspectives of the hierarchy, the priests, lay organizations, and the laity itself. Although most projects have examined the institutional church and its leadership, others undertaken since the 1970s have explored the impact of liberation theology and the influence of *comunidades de base* (base communities).²⁶ Strangely, the area most neglected in Latin American and Mexican analyses is the laity,²⁷ even though church analysts consider changes affecting the laity to be the most significant, especially in terms of effects on politics and society.²⁸ Hence, little is known about the

21. See especially article nos. 130, 27, and 3, *Constitution of the United Mexican States* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1964).

22. Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

23. For many insights into these changes, see Soledad Loaeza, "La iglesia y la democracia en México," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 47, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1985):161–68; and Loaeza, "La Iglesia Católica mexicana y el reformismo autoritario," *Foro Internacional* 25, no. 2 (Oct.–Dec. 1984):138–65.

24. For a summary of some of these new activities, see George Grayson, "The Church in Contemporary Mexico," 49–63.

25. For problems of general theory building, see Robert Wuthnow, "Understanding Religion and Politics," *Daedalus* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1991):1–19.

26. Daniel H. Levine, *Church and Politics in Latin America* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1980); and *Religion and Conflict in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

27. The work on the laity tends to focus on base community members. For example, see Thomas C. Bruneau and W. E. Hewitt, "Patterns of Church Influence in Brazil's Political Transition," *Comparative Politics* 22, no. 1 (Oct. 1989):39–61.

28. Edward L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), 126. As Hannah Stewart-Gambino has argued, survey research "could raise important questions for researchers, who have tended to concentrate primarily on attitudes and beliefs of church officials or on church-state relations rather than on the far more complex relationships between church and society or church and individual. This

religiosity of the Mexican people, the importance of religion in their daily lives, the degree to which they are active Christians, and the effects of religious intensity on political and social attitudes, voting, and partisan politics.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this essay is to explore for the first time some empirical data on national Mexican religious values and their potential impact on the church's political influence. Such comprehensive data have become available only recently. In 1988 I commissioned the Centro de Estudios de Opinión Pública (CEOP), a leading independent firm associated with WAPOR (World Association of Public Opinion Research) and the Roper representative in Mexico (directed by Miguel Basáñez) to include several religious questions in a series of national polls. Taken between 1988 and 1992, all these polls meet international standards of polling methodologies.²⁹ Because numerous polls will be cited, detailed information about the methodology, sample size, and margin of error will be omitted from the text. Unless otherwise noted, all polling data come from these polls.³⁰

Three additional national surveys employing the same methodological rigor were made available to me in their entirety. The first of these polls, referred to as the World Values Survey poll (taken in 1990 under the direction of Ronald Inglehart), is available from the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan.³¹ The Mexican poll for this large international study was carried out by CEOP. The other two polls, sponsored by the economic studies division of the Banco Nacional de México under the direction of Enrique Alduncin, also meet similar international meth-

development could be especially significant for studies analyzing the church's potential role in achieving such desirable sociopolitical goals as (re)democratization, social justice, and equitable distribution policies in Latin America." See Stewart-Gambino, "New Approaches to Studying the Role of Religion in Latin America," *LARR* 24, no. 3 (1989):187-99, 195.

29. I am deeply indebted to Miguel Basáñez, who included these questions in other surveys for reasons of intellectual curiosity and friendship. The questions in combination with many other political, economic, and social variables made cross-tabulations possible. They were: What religion are you, how frequently do you attend church, and should the church participate in politics?

30. "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," July 1988, of 4,414 respondents; "Encuesta nacional," *Los Angeles Times*, August 1989, 1,487 respondents, available from UCLA or the Roper Center, partial results and methodology published in the *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Nov. 1989; and "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," April 1990, 3,606 respondents, partial results published in *Excelsior*, 6 May 1990.

31. Some of the data from this extraordinarily detailed international survey are analyzed by Ronald Inglehart, Neil Nevitte, and Miguel Basáñez, who compare the United States, Canada, and Mexico in their forthcoming book, *Convergence in North America: Closer Economic, Political, and Cultural Ties between the United States and Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press).

odological standards.³² In both cases, most of the data on religion in these two studies had not been cross-tabulated and published.

As one Mexican analyst has suggested, it is fair to assume that the Catholic Church is an institution that could influence public opinion, given the fact that a sizable body of Mexicans of voting age make up its audiences from one Sunday to the next. Furthermore, the World Values Survey revealed that although only 34 percent of Mexicans thought politics were very important, among the 11 percent who considered religion very important, 55 percent rated politics as significant. It is necessary to examine Mexican religious values more closely, however, before accepting the notion that the church influences its parishioners on political matters.³³

Examining the relationship between religion and political behavior raises three central questions in the Mexican case. It has been argued that Catholicism is declining in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America and that few Mexicans are practicing Catholics. Moreover, until 1992 the Mexican Catholic Church was operating in a constitutional and cultural environment that deprecated its institutional prestige. By implication, then, many Mexicans would be unlikely to hold the church in high esteem, would not be personally religious, and would not attend church regularly. This article will argue that contrary to this expectation, Mexicans *are* religious, do attend church regularly, and place substantial confidence in the church, all of which establishes the potential for church influence in general.

Second, it has been argued that certain parties have elicited the partisan support of the Mexican Catholic Church and that the church can direct its parishioners' votes. Plenty of evidence supports religious partisanship in other Catholic countries, especially Italy, where religious practices, feelings of religiosity, and sympathy for the clergy were found to be "powerful predictors of partisan preference in general."³⁴ Frequent allegations have been made concerning the links between PAN and the Catholic Church. It will be argued here that despite the fact that some of PAN's ideological tenants are drawn from Catholic lay theologians, no partisan

32. I am indebted to Enrique Alduncin for cross-tabulating the raw data for this study. His first project, based on a national survey taken in December 1981, included 3,543 respondents. Some of the data in a detailed methodological section were published in his *Los valores de los mexicanos: México entre la tradición y la modernidad* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1986). The second study, completed in December 1987, included 3,750 respondents. Alduncin provides an excellent overview of national value surveys in Mexico as well as the data and methodology of this second national survey in *Los valores de los mexicanos*, vol. 2, *México en tiempos de cambio* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1991).

33. Enrique Garza Ramírez, *Nuevo León, 1985* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1985), 105.

34. Giacomo Sani, "The Political Culture of Italy: Continuity and Change," in *The Civic Culture Revisited*, edited by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1980), 293.

ties, as measured by party sympathy or voting, exist between Catholics and political parties in Mexico.

Third, it has been suggested that the intensity of an individual's religious beliefs (usually measured by frequency of church attendance) affects political behavior in terms of political sympathies and voting patterns.³⁵ Although church attendance alone is not the best variable for measuring the relationship between religion and political attitudes, a statistically significant relationship between the two has been found in other studies.³⁶ It will be argued here that the vast majority of practicing Catholics who attend mass regularly cannot be distinguished from those who attend church infrequently on the basis of partisan political preferences. It will be shown instead that intense religious beliefs and atheism (views limited to small numbers of Mexicans) are the only religious variables that are linked to political behavior.³⁷

MEXICAN RELIGIOSITY

A variable that might affect positively the church's position in any society is the importance of organized religion in that culture's system of values. Mexicans value religion highly. According to the World Values Survey, the average Mexican ranks family, work, and religion as most important in his or her life and considers religion far more significant than politics. Seven out of ten Mexicans regard themselves as religious, and 85 percent claimed that they had received a religious education in their homes.³⁸ When asked the importance of religion without comparing it with other values, 84 percent of Mexican respondents considered it very important or important, while only 3 percent believed it had no significance in their lives.³⁹ Mexicans also expressed an overwhelming belief in a Christian god. In a 1982 study in which 92 percent of all

35. Most analyses of U.S. politics distinguish among various religious faiths (usually Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish) rather than between differences in intensity of religious beliefs and voting behavior. In a culture dominated by a single religion, this approach is not very useful. Differences in intensity between Protestant and Catholics, as measured by church attendance, do have a bearing on partisanship, as was found to be true during the U.S. presidential contest between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon in 1960. See William Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 7th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1991), 76–77.

36. David Leege, M. R. Welch, and T. A. Trozzolo identified a low but statistically significant relationship between the religion and political attitudes. See Leege et al., "Religiosity, Church Social Teachings, and Socio-Political Attitudes," *Review of Religious Research* 28 (1986):118–28.

37. Many myths associated with U.S. Catholics have been debunked by Andrew M. Greeley in *Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics* (New York: Collier, 1991).

38. Centro de Estudios de Opinión Pública, "World Values Survey, Mexico" (May 1990). The World Values Survey project conducted by Ronald Inglehart provides comprehensive data on changing attitudes in forty countries, replicating a study done in 1980–81.

39. Enrique Alduncin Abitia, cross-tabulations of his December 1987 survey, which can be compared with his 1981 survey.

Mexicans claimed to believe in a religion, an even higher percentage (97 percent) believed in God, and nine out of ten considered God important in their lives. The degree of significance of God to each Mexican varied from one region to another, however, with Mexicans living in the central and northern regions finding God most important and those in the Federal District, least important.⁴⁰

Yet strong religious beliefs provide only a receptive environment for active commitment to organized religion.⁴¹ Traditionally, Mexicans have been overwhelmingly Christian and Catholic.⁴² In 1900 Catholics accounted for nearly 99 percent of the population. By 1980 that figure had declined slightly to 95 percent of the population.⁴³ In the last decade, however, the level of Catholicism declined further to somewhere between 81 and 88 percent. Not surprisingly, the level of Catholicism is stronger in rural Mexico than in metropolitan centers.⁴⁴ Contrary to common beliefs, more younger Mexicans are Catholic than older people, although by only a slight margin.⁴⁵ This finding contradicts the often-repeated suggestion that older people are more Catholic and that Protestant sects are making inroads among the young in Mexico.⁴⁶

40. Narro Rodríguez, "Qué valorán los mexicanos hoy?," 36–37; and Hernández Medina, "Religión y moral," 120. The latter work, a comprehensive national survey, interviewed 1,837 individuals based on a questionnaire and field study design by Gallup of London. The methodology is discussed fully and comparatively with other surveys in Enrique Alduncin Abitia, *Los valores de los mexicanos*, 2:9–14 and 19.

41. It is the "underlying religious worldview" that explains variation in political ideologies, but unfortunately, these data are mostly unavailable for Mexican respondents. See Michael Welch and David Leege, "Religious Predictors of Catholic Parishioners' Socio-Political Attitudes: Devotional Style, Closeness to God, Imagery, and Agentic/Communal Religious Identity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27 (Dec. 1988):538.

42. Mexican Catholic beliefs differ from those found in the United States, at least among the young. Mexican students placed more emphasis on the moral and affective content of religion than did their U.S. counterparts. See Rogelio Díaz Guerrero and Lorand B. Szalay, *Understanding Mexicans and Americans: Cultural Perspectives in Conflict* (New York: Plenum, 1991), 111.

43. David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 487.

44. "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 20–29 Apr. 1990, based on 3,606 individual interviews in ninety-seven locales. Some of these results were published in *Excelsior*, 6 May 1990, p. A1. As Carol Ann Drogus has suggested, designating oneself as Catholic does not necessarily indicate the level of a person's religious beliefs nor his or her contact with the church. Other studies note that rural residents display greater religiosity than their urban counterparts and that rural religious beliefs tend to have a more conservative tone. See Paul H. Chalfant and Peter L. Heller, "Rural/Urban versus Regional Differences in Religiosity," *Review of Religious Research* 33, no. 1 (Sept. 1991):76.

45. One explanation for this ranking and a feature that may distinguish Mexico from some European countries and the United States is that the older generation were youngsters during the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the state carried out its most repressive measures against the Catholic Church. Andrew Weigert and Darwin Thomas also discovered that Mexican students had stronger beliefs about Biblical miracles and Jesus as the Son of God than did Catholics in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Germany. See Weigert and Thomas, "Secularization and Religiosity: A Cross-National Study of Catholic Adolescents in Five Societies," *Sociological Analysis* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1974):6.

46. "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988, 6–17 June, based on 4,414 interviews, some results of which appeared in *La Jornada* on 5 July 1988.

Because the young form such a large proportion of the Mexican population, their interest in religion is likely to make them more receptive to church influence.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, many individuals draw a distinction between their religious beliefs and the institution that represents those beliefs. As Larissa Lomnitz has argued in her study of one successful Mexican entrepreneurial extended clan, "family members never fail to make a clear distinction between the Eternal Religion on the one hand and the church as a temporal institution on the other. . . . Such attitudes are not uncommon among other Catholic groups."⁴⁸ In a rare poll question in which an interviewer asked respondents whether or not they should obey certain institutions (asked in Ciudad Juárez, one of Mexico's largest cities located across the border from El Paso, Texas), 52 percent answered affirmatively about the presidency, and 49 percent about the Catholic Church. The same population evaluated the church as a good or very good institution, ranking it slightly below family in prestige. This finding led author Marco Antonio Bernal to conclude that "the level of acceptance that an institution enjoys is not an indicator of its symbolic force and its capacity to mobilize; this signifies that a rational-legal element plays a determinant role in political behavior."⁴⁹ While many Mexicans make such a distinction, Bernal's data suggest that a sizable percentage would be generally inclined to follow some church leadership.

To what extent do Mexicans universally praise the church as an institution? In the 1990 World Values Survey, 46 percent of all Mexicans interviewed expressed great confidence in the church, followed by 30 percent who had some confidence in the institution; only 9 percent of Mexicans placed no confidence in the church. Of all Mexican institutions, secular and nonsecular, none matched the church in esteem. Expressed in a comparative context, 37 percent of Mexicans believed the church more than they believed the government, 26 percent found both institutions equally credible, and only 8 percent were inclined to take the government's word over the church. About one out of four Mexicans doubted the word of both institutions.⁵⁰

47. Mexicans may also be more interested in religion and the church because of their perception of moral values in society. In Alduncin's second national opinion survey, he found that three-quarters of all Mexicans agreed that a decline in moral values is one of the gravest problems facing Mexico. See his "Los valores de los mexicanos, crisis, modernidad y enajenación: perfil sociopsicológico de los mexicanos en 1987," paper presented to the "Primera Reunión Nacional sobre las Raíces Culturales del México Actual," San Miguel de Allende, 5 Oct. 1989, 17.

48. Larissa Adler Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez-Lizaur, *A Mexican Elite Family, 1820–1980* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 209.

49. Marco Antonio Bernal, "Ciudad Juárez, 1983 y 1985: las dificultades de la democracia," in *La vida política mexicana en la crisis*, edited by Soledad Loaeza and Rafael Segovia (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 165–66.

50. "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

Some idea of the importance of religion in the average Mexican's general value system is suggested by the degree to which typical parents want their child to have a religious education. Nationally, more than two-thirds of all respondents in a 1990 survey said they desired such an education, and only 17 percent rejected it. The responses varied somewhat geographically, with much higher favorable responses in Guadalajara (in western Mexico) and in Monterrey (in the North).⁵¹ Religious vows are also taken more seriously in marriage than might be expected given constitutional prohibitions on the legal validity of religious sacraments and the percentage of Mexicans living in common-law relationships.⁵² One study in Mexico City found that seven out of ten marriages in the Federal District had religious approval.⁵³

Because Mexicans typically evaluate institutions according to their representatives, it can be argued that Mexicans' level of respect for various institutions in their social, political, and religious cultures stems largely from their attitudes toward the organization's representative. Priests and teachers are highly respected in Mexican culture, ranking after parents at the top of the list. In contrast, politicians and military officers rank at the bottom.⁵⁴ In a recent poll, priests scored higher than teachers in prestige.⁵⁵ These data suggest the probability that priests, as distinct from the institution they represent, may have considerable influence on society. Conversely, given Mexicans' acceptance of the separation of church and state, many might reject any attempt by priests to exercise broad social and political influence. Also, religious authority is probably transferable only for certain kinds of Catholics, typically the most traditional or "sacramental." The data nevertheless suggest why the government might feel threatened by the church and its clergy. The legitimacy of both groups is considered much higher by Mexicans than that of secular political institutions and their representatives.⁵⁶

51. See *Examen* 1, no. 8 (15 Jan. 1990), p. 6.

52. James Wilkie found no change in the proportion of church-sanctioned marriages at the high point of the Cristero movement in 1930 when compared with the succeeding thirty years. The figures revealed that two-thirds of all marriages were church-sanctioned over the three decades. See Wilkie, "Statistical Indicators of the Impact of National Revolution on the Catholic Church in Mexico, 1910–1967," *Journal of Church and State* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1970):95.

53. Oscar Aguilar and Enrique Luengo G., "Iglesia y gobierno en el D.F.," in *D.F.: gobierno y sociedad civil*, edited by Pablo González Casanova (Mexico City: El Caballito, 1987), 197–215.

54. Alduncin Abitia, *Los valores de los mexicanos*, 175.

55. "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

56. Interestingly, the only political figure in recent years who is rated at a comparable level is President Carlos Salinas. Although researchers have not asked Mexicans specifically about the presidency, most observers believe its legitimacy has declined precipitously since 1968. Mexicans, however, appear to make a distinction among the presidency, the administration, and the individual president and have consistently given Salinas high marks since taking office.

DETERMINANTS OF RELIGIOUS INTENSITY

Citizen attitudes toward religion, the church, and lower-level clergy suggest that Mexicans might be receptive to church guidance on some issues. As is well known, however, it is one thing to describe oneself as religious (in this case, as Christian) but another to practice one's faith to the letter. Students of Latin American religion have always pointed out that the decline of the Catholic Church's influence throughout the 1960s was accompanied by a decline in church attendance.⁵⁷ Consequently, statistics on church attendance have been used as a practical measure of the level of contact between parish priests or religious communities and their secular constituency. Many assertions have been made about the profile of those who attend church: that they are female, young or old, and disproportionately from certain social strata.

The chronology of church attendance in Mexico over time, even when limited to recent decades, follows the expected pattern. According to David Barrett, in 1959, 70 percent of Mexican Catholics were attending church weekly.⁵⁸ But by 1982, another study found that only 54 percent partook of mass at least once a week, with another 21 percent claiming monthly attendance.⁵⁹ In 1988, 44 percent were attending once or more each week and 9 percent twice a month.⁶⁰ Most recently, two different surveys found that 44 or 45 percent of Mexicans attended church weekly or more often, 14 to 19 percent monthly, 26 to 32 percent rarely, and 9 to 11 percent not at all. Only a small fraction of Catholics attended church daily (3 percent).⁶¹

The profile of those attending mass and their reasons for going also reflect religious attitudes and secular values. Michael Fleet and Brian Smith, careful students of Latin American religion and politics, concluded that three types of rank-and-file Catholics exist in the region. They argue convincingly that "a full understanding of the different elements within the Catholic community requires closer attention to their divergence in religious and socio-political views, and to the factors contributing to these divergences."⁶² Fleet and Smith describe these types of Catholics: organizational Catholics who actively participate in one or more church-sponsored groups (a majority of whom also attend mass regu-

57. John Considine, *The Church in the New Latin America* (New Orleans, La.: Fides, 1964). On Mexico specifically, see Manuel González Ramírez, *La iglesia mexicana en cifras* (Mexico City: n.p., 1969).

58. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 187.

59. Luis Narro Rodríguez, "¿Qué valorarán los mexicanos hoy?," 37.

60. "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988.

61. "World Values Survey," 1990; and "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

62. See Michael Fleet and Brian Smith, "Rethinking Catholicism and Politics in Latin America," paper presented to the Latin American Studies Association, 4–6 Dec. 1989, Miami, Florida, p. 3.

larly); sacramental Catholics who attend church fairly regularly but do not participate in other activities; and cultural Catholics who are not involved religiously or organizationally with the church but possess and acknowledge Catholic values.

Unfortunately, survey data on Mexican Catholics are not available according to these categories, but certain characteristics of those who attend church regularly and those who do not can be ascertained. If one assumes an association between an individual's strength or intensity of religious beliefs and frequency of church attendance (a measure commonly used by religious pollsters), certain attributes become clearer.⁶³ For example, older Mexicans (age thirty-five to seventy-two) are more religious than younger Mexicans (nineteen to thirty-four), but differences between the two groups are insignificant.⁶⁴

Another common assumption is that gender is related to religiosity (as measured by attendance). Women account for two-thirds of the small percentage of Mexicans who attend church more than once a week, and more women than men attend on a weekly basis. Conversely, men are more likely than women not to attend church at all. Several explanations can be provided for the greater frequency of female church attendance.⁶⁵ A salient one is that more Mexican women find consolation in religion (51 percent) than Mexican men (36 percent).⁶⁶

Not surprisingly, education is significantly related to religiosity and church attendance in Mexico, as elsewhere in the world. Care must be taken, however, to distinguish between the effects of education on Mexican religious beliefs generally and among acknowledged Catholics. Among Mexicans who have preparatory or higher education, those who avow Catholicism drop from 90 to 82 percent. Among Mexicans with postgraduate education, only 62 percent consider themselves Catholics. Educational levels are also inversely related to religious intensity, with church attendance declining as educational levels rise. For example, among the most intensely religious Mexicans (those who attend church more than once a week), one-third have only a primary education and one-fifth

63. As Charles Davis has argued, "Research shows that political behavior and attitudes tend to be affected more by active involvement in an organized religion than by simply an identification with a religion or agreement with a particular religious point of view." See Davis, "Religion and Partisan Loyalty: The Case of Catholic Workers in Mexico," *Western Political Quarterly* 45 (Mar. 1992):275-97.

64. Hernández Medina, "Religión y moral," 122.

65. Noelle Montiel, "Las mujeres, instrumento de la iglesia institucional para mantener las estructuras de dominación," in de la Rosa and Reilly, *Religión y política*, 160-63.

66. Data for gender come from Alduncin Abitia, "Los valores de los mexicanos," 1987; "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990; and "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988; and Hernández Medina, "Religión y moral," 144. Carol Ann Drogus has suggested that traditional Catholics tend to view religion as a source of solace but are generally not interested in applying this set of beliefs to broad social issues. Letter to the author dated 3 May 1992.

no formal education at all. Thus more than half of the intensely religious minority have little or no formal education. Religion becomes somewhat less important among Catholics as educational levels increase, but differences are not significant from secondary levels upward.⁶⁷

Income and occupational data relating to church attendance and religious intensity offer somewhat contradictory conclusions. But when researchers apply what is known about gender and education, the importance of occupation and income makes more sense. First, the small number of Mexicans who attend church more than once a week are heavily dominated by marginal persons (unemployed and underemployed with minimal incomes) and housewives. Among the latter, nearly two-thirds attend mass at least weekly. Yet one study reported that Mexicans with the highest incomes (at least seven times the minimum wage) attended mass weekly more regularly than other citizens.⁶⁸ Although this study is not as comprehensive as the surveys by Enrique Alduncin Abitia, Alberto Hernández Medina, and Miguel Basáñez, Alduncin found in his 1987 survey that among all occupational groups, company owners gave the greatest importance to religion, significantly above the national average. Blue-collar workers, in contrast, expressed a level of religious interest well below the national average. This measure may help explain why a significantly lower percentage of workers attend church weekly than other occupational groups. Basáñez's survey results confirmed Alduncin's findings. Moreover, atheists are found most commonly among journalists, writers, artists, students, professionals, and teachers—that is, among the best-educated and most intellectual groups.

Finally, urbanization and geography also play roles in the pattern of Mexican religious beliefs. The connection between religion and regionalism interests political analysts because it may explain differences within the voting population for parties with religious associations. Such relationships are highlighted by the fact that in industrialized societies, "the best single predictor[s] of party vote are the religious affiliation and religious activities of the citizen."⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that Mexico, with its long, turbulent history of regionalism affecting political leadership and behavior well into the twentieth century, does not manifest a significant connection between broad regions and religious intensity. Attendance figures are fairly unified geographically, although in more than one survey the central region scores highest. But if researchers con-

67. Data on education and church attendance come from "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988 and from Alduncin Abitia, "Los valores de los mexicanos," 1987.

68. See *Examen* 1, no. 8, 15 Jan. 1990, p. 6.

69. Kenneth Wald, Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel D. Hill, Jr., "Political Cohesion in Churches," *Journal of Politics* 52, no. 1 (Feb. 1990):197, citing Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: Systems, Process, and Policy* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1978), 92.

trol for cities as distinct from regions, then significant anomalies appear.⁷⁰ The data on cities suggest that capitals are the most atypical.⁷¹ Mexico City, the most cosmopolitan center of intellectual and economic activity, is one of the least religious locales. In the 1980s, three different surveys reported that only slightly more than a third of all Catholics living in Mexico City attended church regularly.⁷² The city with the lowest attendance record of those surveyed was Tijuana, which borders San Diego along the California frontier.

Cities with significantly higher church attendance than average included León, Guanajuato (center-west), Guadalajara, Jalisco (west), and Oaxaca (south). The first two rankings might be explained by the Catholic Church's strong colonial presence, the location of major Catholic seminaries in both cities, and their support for the religiously motivated Cristero Rebellion in the 1920s against the Mexican government. Oaxaca's large Indian population also attracted a strong colonial presence, and religion remains important to contemporary residents. Although significant differences can be found from one city to another, no major variations appear among attendance records for Catholics in all cities of more than twenty-five hundred residents.⁷³

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF RELIGIOSITY

These data provide a clear sense of the level of religiosity in Mexico, the accessibility of clergy to Mexicans, and the type and location of Mexicans most receptive to the church. Central to this study are the questions about the extent to which religious beliefs affect Mexican perceptions of various social and political issues, issues related directly to church and state, the political role of the church, and partisan politics.

Different variables in association with religion may exert more influence over political and social values. Yet Fleet and Smith's recent

70. Even more significant comparisons could be made among parishes. Unfortunately, no such survey data on Mexico are available. As David Leege notes, "[D]ifferences from parish to parish, often within the same region, suggest that 'the Catholic viewpoint' is not well tapped by descriptions that rely on national survey data alone. Instead of 'the Catholic viewpoint' there are many Catholic viewpoints, and these differ often by the parish one calls home." See David C. Leege and Joseph Gremillion, *The People, Their Pastors, and the Church: Viewpoints on Church Policies and Positions*, Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life Report no. 7 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1986), 10.

71. Enrique Luengo found in his dissertation research among Ibero-American University students in four cities that 19 to 30 percent said their religious beliefs affected their party preferences. See Luengo, "Tendencias actuales y perspectivas futuras de la religión en México," Ph.D. diss., Ibero-American University, 1992.

72. In addition to the data from the Hernández study and the raw data in "Los valores de los mexicanos" for 1987, the unpublished data from the "Encuesta nacional" of 1989 is revealing.

73. Unpublished data from a poll for the *New York Times* taken 28 Oct. through 4 Nov. 1986, which involved a sample of 1,875 respondents. Some of the results of that survey were published in the *Times* on 16 Nov. 1986, pp. 1, 16; and on 17 Nov. 1986, p. A8.

study in South America found that even such significant determinants of values as class may be independent of religion in shaping personal attitudes. As they suggest, it is important to distinguish among Catholics with varying kinds of exposure to Catholic values and culture and then to focus on qualities like type of leadership and level of political mobilization in the local church and community.⁷⁴

Religiosity as defined by church attendance has certain measurable effects on other Catholic values. For example, the more often an individual attends mass, the higher is his or her esteem for the priest. Attendance alone might make an individual more receptive to a priest's views because a self-selection process occurs to some degree among Mexicans who attend church regularly. Equally important, those who attend church daily (fewer than 5 percent of all Mexicans) are significantly more intolerant of other religions when compared with other Catholics (table 1).

The most dramatic findings in the collective survey data concerning the effects of religiosity on political values relate to the question of change. First of all, an individual's Catholicism is not linked to membership in political organizations. More important, a 1988 poll revealed that Mexicans with the most intense religious beliefs identify least with the current political system (see table 1). These individuals are also the most critical of Mexico's leadership, twice the norm in proportion. Intense Catholics do not fit a conservative stereotype but strongly support radical political change. Hence while they may well be traditional socially or morally, in political matters, they do not favor maintaining the status quo. This group's potential for political influence, however, is severely moderated by several factors: their limited membership, lower levels of education, relative ignorance of politics, and lower turnout in elections.⁷⁵

When specific issues focusing on church and state in contrast with general political attitudes are identified, distinct citizen views emerge. Between 1989 and 1992, two major church-state issues were debated openly on the public agenda: a general redefinition of church-state relations involving legal recognition of the Catholic Church and diplomatic recognition of the Vatican; and the right of priests and nuns to vote, which had been constitutionally prohibited since 1917. Both in school and at home, Mexicans typically have been raised in a contradictory social milieu that indoctrinates young people in nineteenth-century Mexican liberalism while providing them with moral points of reference within the dominant Catholic-Latin culture.

Despite high levels of religiosity and Catholicism among Mexi-

74. Fleet and Smith, "Rethinking Catholicism and Politics in Latin America," 25.

75. Data for the effects of religiosity on general values are from the "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990 and "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988; and from two state-level polls conducted by CEOP, published as "Encuesta electoral sobre Michoacán y Baja California" in *La Jornada*, 18 Sept. 1989.

TABLE 1 *Social and Political Views of Intense Catholics in Mexico, 1988–1990*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Intense Catholics^a</i> (%)	<i>Moderate Catholics^b</i> (%)
Religious intolerance ^c	46.9	29.5
Political change ^d	31.5	21.4
Poor leadership ^e	14.0	8.1

Sources: The data on religious intolerance were taken from "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990; the data for political change and poor leadership came from "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988.

^aThose attending church more than once a week.

^bThose attending church weekly, monthly, or rarely.

^cRespondents who agreed with the statement, "Some people believe that in Mexico . . . we should accept only the Catholic religion."

^dRespondents who answered affirmatively this question, "In your opinion, should we change things completely?"

^eRespondents who answered the question "What is your opinion of the government of Miguel de la Madrid?" by choosing the response "Very bad."

cans, religion seems not to have altered contemporary Mexican views of church-state history. As empirical survey data make clear, two-thirds of all Mexicans interviewed favored liberal President Benito Juárez's controversial decision to break relations with the Catholic Church in the mid-nineteenth century (only 15 percent thought it a bad policy). To reduce church influence, liberal leaders eliminated its control over birth registration and marriages via the constitution, a provision that remains in effect. Although most Mexicans want their marriages sanctified by the Catholic Church, they are unwilling (by a rate of 55 to 29 percent) to return those decisions to the church.⁷⁶ The liberals, determined to replace clerical influence with a secular and positivist educational philosophy, severely attacked the church's educational role. Mexicans still oppose the idea of the church reviving its educational role, although about one in five said it depended on the circumstances. But when asked about the acceptability of other laws or common practices regarding the church, Mexicans responded differently. For example, announcements over the airwaves about Pope John Paul's visit in 1990, which were legally prohibited but ignored by the government, were viewed favorably.

The issue of church-state relations most critical to the Catholic Church was reestablishing formal relations between church and state. Editorial opinion among a wide range of Mexican dailies favored new church-state relations by a wide margin.⁷⁷ Although the majority of Mexicans were not sure about the actual state of the relationship (whether it had been severed or not), most polls found the public evenly divided

76. "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

77. From a survey of major Mexico City papers, published in *Estrategias Actuales* 1, no. 31 (Mar. 1990):1.

over reestablishing relations. The majority also favored President Salinas's decision to appoint his own personal representative to the Vatican.⁷⁸ As might be expected, intensely religious Mexicans favored new relations most strongly, and those who rarely attended church were most opposed. One government poll also found that 80 percent of Mexicans favored constitutional changes permitting a legal status for the church (previously prohibited by the constitution).⁷⁹ The one institutional issue involving church and state that showed no correlation with intensity of religious beliefs was the issue of whether church and state should be separate.

When moving from the plane of institutional relationships to the more personal level of individual rights, Mexican perceptions diverge considerably. On asking whether priests should have the right to vote, three polls in 1990 revealed a range of 55 to 68 percent favoring such a constitutional change.⁸⁰ It appears that Mexicans were much more inclined to give priests the right to vote because they could relate personally to this denial of a basic human right. In the same polls, many Mexican voters indicated that their own rights have been violated via state-sponsored electoral fraud. The fact that most priests who wanted to vote actually did so despite the law indicates that custom had replaced the law as the norm.

Of all the specific issues tied to the relationship between church and state, the most significant one for Mexicans is the role of the Catholic Church in secular affairs, particularly in politics. One difficulty in assessing citizen attitudes toward the church's role in politics is evaluating the meaning of the standard polling question, "Should the church participate in politics?" To many individuals, it signifies a direct political role for the church and priests, including supporting parties and holding office. When asked in the context of political participation whether Catholics would support priests playing nonreligious roles, the head of the Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano replied, "No, they wouldn't support it. It isn't that we have done a survey. . . . My opinion is based on the following fact: they and all of us have been shaped by years and years of a liberal mentality, and for many this has become normal."⁸¹

The bishop understood his flock rather well. In a series of surveys taken between 1983 and 1990, two-thirds to three-quarters of Mexicans said the church should not participate in politics. In 1983 nearly 24 percent thought the church should participate either at all times, sometimes,

78. Even the government's own poll, financed by the official newspaper *El Nacional*, agreed with these results. See the section entitled "Política," 5 July 1990, p. 13.

79. *El Nacional*, 25 Mar. 1990, p. 15.

80. For these figures, see *El Nacional*, "Política," 10 May 1990, p. 13; George Grayson, "Courting the Church in Mexico," *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 May 1990, p. 19; and "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

81. Oscar Hinojosa, "La misión evangélica ordena dejar la sacristía, afirma Obeso Rivera," *Proceso*, 8 Sept. 1986, p. 13.

or occasionally. By 1990 that figure had dropped to 16 percent.⁸² Even Catholics who attended mass regularly firmly rejected church political participation. Although the least educated Mexicans and those attending church more than once a week expressed stronger feelings on this issue, their responses did not differ regarding church participation. In 1989, for example, 74 percent of all Mexicans believed the church should refrain from political activity (compared with 67 percent among intense Catholics and 86 percent among weak Catholics). Seventy-two percent of atheists agreed with this position. When asked more specifically if priests should hold public office, 72 percent of all Mexicans responded negatively. The lack of significant variation among various groups according to religious intensity suggests a firmly held principle on this issue, despite some variation according to region, party preference, occupation, and level of social activism.⁸³

Not surprisingly, Mexicans who support church political participation most are the members of the Partido Democrático Mexicano (PDM), which grew out of the Sinarquista movement, a fanatically pro-religious organization dating back to the 1930s. Four times as many Mexicans who identified themselves as PDM partisans (16 percent) favored church participation in politics, in comparison with only 4 percent of all Mexican respondents. Yet despite their greater sympathy for church political involvement, only a small percentage of this conservative pro-Catholic party actually favored such a role. An unexpected finding was that respondents who sympathized with small, leftist parties (prior to the founding of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático or PRD) in 1989 also favored church political involvement strongly. It could be that in the early 1980s, leftist opposition parties viewed the church as a potential ally in breaking the political stranglehold of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and were therefore more willing to see it actively involved in the electoral arena.

Except in regard to respondents from Mexico City, geography plays little role in Mexicans' evaluations of church political involvement. One variable that stands out among other possible influences is membership in an independent organization. Such affiliations suggest, as Fleet and Smith have argued, that an activist social posture (measured in terms of organizational involvement) may affect attitudes toward religion and church. For example, Fleet and Smith discovered in Chile that wealthier Catholics who participated regularly in masses or church organizations were not opposed to a socially committed church.⁸⁴ The other group that

82. See Miguel Basáñez, "Elections and Political Culture in Mexico," in *Mexican Politics in Transition*, edited by Judith Gentleman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), 184; and Basáñez, "Política," *El Nacional*, 10 May 1990, p. 13.

83. Data are from "Encuesta nacional," 1989.

84. Fleet and Smith, "Rethinking Catholicism and Politics in Latin America," 25.

stands out from the norm in Mexico were Mexicans indicating a strong preference for the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), an opposition party associated in Mexican political mythology and the public mind with the Catholic Church.⁸⁵ Those favoring church participation increased from 5 percent for ordinary PAN sympathizers to twice that percentage for the most committed partisans.

It could also be argued that Mexicans who have been subjected more to the “liberal” socialization process in their family environment, formal education, and workplace philosophy would express the strongest disapproval of church involvement in politics. Polls have confirmed that the higher a respondent’s level of education, the greater his or her opposition to church political involvement. Similarly, professionals who are well-educated careerists in the public sector—such as bureaucrats, politicians, and interest-group leaders—have proved to be the most opposed to church political activity.

The question that interests political analysts most is the effect of religion on voting for a particular party or issue. In its crudest form, the assumption made by many Mexicans is that the church can transfer its authority directly to the secular political arena and that parishioners will follow the clergy’s lead in supporting specific parties and candidates.⁸⁶ This pattern might well have been true in earlier eras, especially given the clergy’s level of influence over formal education.

Before testing this relationship, it is helpful to understand the political values of Catholic versus non-Catholic Mexicans. On this score, little difference exists between the two (see table 2).⁸⁷ Mexicans as a whole are not particularly immersed in politics. According to one study, 43 percent are not interested in politics, 21 percent express some interest but no more than in other subjects, and 32 percent are interested in politics but do not participate actively. Only 4 percent of Mexicans are actively involved, many of them lower-middle-class young men living in Mexico City who have completed at least a sixth-grade education.⁸⁸

Because most analysts have implied a connection between the Catholic Church and the Partido de Acción Nacional that goes beyond

85. For evidence of philosophical ties, see Mabry, *Mexico’s Acción Nacional*.

86. This influence, more than any other, encouraged establishment politicians to grant Mexican women the right to vote. See Ward Morton, *Women Suffrage in Mexico* (Gainesville: University of Florida Presses, 1962).

87. This finding was confirmed by Andrew Stein in his study of Catholics and Protestants in Central America, where he discovered little difference in their support for government or in left-right voting. What he found is that fundamentalism, conceptualized as a “belief in the Bible or the literal word of God,” illustrates a stronger correlation with center-right parties. Stein and others have demonstrated that fundamental religious beliefs and religious subcategories are far more revealing than traditional differences among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. See Stein, “Religion and Mass Politics in Central America,” paper presented to the New England Council of Latin Americanists, Boston University, 24 Oct. 1992, 24–25.

88. Ivan Zavala, “Valores políticos,” 96.

TABLE 2 *Political Preferences of Catholics and Non-Catholics, 1982*

<i>Preference</i>	<i>Catholics (%)</i>	<i>Non-Catholics (%)</i>
Extreme left	5	4
Left	6	5
Center	29	33
Right	25	27
Extreme right	26	28

Source: Data based on a national survey of 1,837 respondents in 1982 and were adapted from Iván Zavala, "Valores políticos," in *Como somos los mexicanos*, edited by Alberto Hernández Medina and Luis Narro Rodríguez (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Educativos, 1987), 102.

Note: Responses do not add up to 100 because those answering "Don't know" or not answering were not included.

the philosophical (although largely without substantiating evidence),⁸⁹ it has been assumed that strong Catholics will vote disproportionately for PAN and its candidates. The relationship found between religious intensity and self-described party sympathy is revealing. In 1989, 5 percent of Mexicans described themselves as strong PAN supporters, exactly the same percentage as that of strong Catholics. Seven percent of Mexicans in general described themselves as strong supporters of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's populist, left-of-center PRD, as compared with 6 percent of strong Catholics. Sixteen percent of Mexicans described themselves as strongly sympathetic with the PRI, as compared with 18 percent of strong Catholics.⁹⁰

In fact, in examining other polling data from the late 1980s, the only relationship that emerges between religious intensity and party sympathy is among that small percentage of intense Catholics who attend church daily (3.4 percent).⁹¹ This group differs from the rest of the population in the intensity of its support for PAN, 18 percent as compared with 11 percent of the general population (see table 3). This small group also voted in larger percentages for Manuel Clouthier, the charismatic PAN candidate in the 1988 presidential election.

On the basis of church attendance, however, all other Mexicans indicate no significant difference in their party preferences, suggesting that contrary to common myth, being Catholic has little or nothing to do with party sympathy in Mexico. In fact, among those Mexicans attending

89. Carlos Martínez Assad, "State Elections in Mexico," in *Electoral Patterns and Perspectives in Mexico*, edited by Arturo Alvarado (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987), 36.

90. Raw data in a poll conducted for the *Los Angeles Times* in August 1989.

91. The first finding of no relationship between party choice and religiosity (in Mexico City only) appeared in Kenneth Coleman's pioneering effort, "The Capital City Electorate and Mexico's Acción Nacional: Some Survey Evidence on Conventional Hypotheses," *Social Science Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Dec. 1975):506-7.

TABLE 3 Partisanship according to Religiosity in Mexico, 1990

<i>Party of Sympathy^a</i>	<i>Intense Catholic (%)</i>	<i>Moderate Catholic (%)</i>	<i>General Population (%)</i>
Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN)	18.2	9.5	11.4
Partido Revolucionario Demócrata (PRD)	2.0	6.5	6.3
Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)	9.2	25.1	24.8

Source: Raw data, "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

^aQuestion asked: Do you sympathize with any political party? Which one?

church daily, only 12 percent supported PAN, just half a percentage point above the national average. Actually, PAN receives its strongest backing according to religious categories from those who do not attend church at all.⁹² These findings have been corroborated by Charles Davis in his recent examination of worker religiosity and partisanship based on data from 1979 and 1980. He concluded that "secular workers are also slightly more likely to support rightist opposition parties than are religious workers. Clearly, Catholic workers in the survey are not generally attracted to the two right-wing parties, the National Action Party (PAN) or the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM)."⁹³

In the 1988 presidential elections, the intensity of Catholic beliefs did not translate into partisan political support. For example, PAN candidate Clouthier did no better among various religious groups except among Catholics who attend church daily. Cárdenas, in contrast, did much better among nonreligious or atheist voters, a pattern found elsewhere in the region,⁹⁴ while Salinas received the lowest rate of support among Protestants.⁹⁵

An obvious connection exists in Mexico between atheism and level of education. Independent parties tend to attract better educated and nonreligious voters, particularly students and intellectuals. These two educated groups account for the largest percentage of atheists. For example, in May 1990 in a survey taken in the Federal District, 42 percent of all

92. Miguel Basáñez, "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, estado-iglesia," cross-tabulations of raw data.

93. Davis, "Religion and Partisan Loyalty," 8.

94. In their excellent preliminary findings, Timothy Steigenga and Kenneth Coleman reported that the religiously nonaffiliated in Chile tend to favor left-wing political views. See Steigenga and Coleman, "Protestantism and Politics in Chile: 1972-1991," paper presented to the New England Council of Latin Americanists, Boston, Mass., 24 Oct. 1992.

95. Yet Edgar Butler, James Pick, and Glenda Jones found a significant correlation between non-Catholic voters and support for the PRI as well as a negative correlation between these voters and PAN. Non-Catholics include atheists and adherents of all other religions (including Protestants). See "An Examination of the Official Results of the 1988 Mexican Presidential Election," in *Sucesión Presidencial: The 1988 Mexican Presidential Election*, edited by Edgar W. Butler and Jorge A. Bustamante (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), 33.

respondents said they would vote for the PRI, in comparison with 60 percent of the uneducated. But among those having graduate education, 67 percent would have cast their ballot for the PRD, which was favored by only 19 percent of all respondents.⁹⁶ Thus although religious beliefs versus no religious beliefs may influence voting behavior in general, among Mexican Catholics (86 percent of the population), strong differences in religious intensity have little connection with voting preferences. In the 1988 elections, PAN fared worse among fanatic Catholics and only slightly better than the PRI and other parties among weekly churchgoers. Religious intensity was unrelated to voting for PAN in 1988, nor did Catholics as a group vote more often for PAN and less for PRI or for Cárdenas's PRD in 1988.⁹⁷ Cárdenas as an individual presidential candidate did attract larger numbers of voters who were nonpracticing Catholics.

Joseph Klesner argued recently that "religiosity is correlated with voting for the right in Mexico," but his conclusions were based on regional voting preferences over time.⁹⁸ In other words, if one controls for region, a certain consistency of opposition support—including that for parties of the right (PAN and PDM)—appears in specific states, especially those where the Cristero Rebellion was strongest. Part of the reason is that some of these same regions have a higher percentage of intense practicing Catholics, although the percentage of non-Catholics is evenly distributed throughout Mexico. As my data make clear, historical experience and religious beliefs combined, not religious beliefs alone, may explain some voting patterns.

Allegations have been made that individual Mexican priests have encouraged their parishioners to vote for specific parties. While evidence exists to support isolated local cases, this behavior has been exceptional in recent decades.⁹⁹ If members of the clergy were to suggest to their constituencies that they vote for specific candidates, parties, or policies, how would Mexicans respond? The evidence makes it clear that Mexican Catholics, raised in a strong tradition of separation of church and state, are not favorably inclined toward political indoctrination by the church.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, Mexico typifies Catholic societies in which the state has usually provoked the kind of rupture with religious authorities witnessed there.¹⁰¹

Taking their cue from the state, Mexicans definitely separate church

96. Ricardo de la Peña and Rosario Toledo, "La cultura política en el D.F.," in "Política," *El Nacional*, 10 May 1990, p. 10.

97. "Encuesta nacional del proceso electoral," 1988.

98. Klesner, "Changing Patterns of Electoral Participation," 108.

99. Oscar González, "Batallas en el reino de este mundo," *Nexos*, no. 78 (June 1984):23.

100. In fact, Weigert and Thomas's comparative study concluded that Mexican high school students from the religiously conservative city of Mérida, Yucatán, did not follow priests' wishes in voting, nor were they any less independent than their European and U.S. counterparts. See Weigert and Thomas, "Secularization and Religiosity," 12.

101. Gabriel Zaid, "Intelectuales," *Vuelta* 15, no. 168 (Nov. 1990):22.

positions on public-policy issues from spiritual teachings. Contrary to widespread suspicions, Mexicans evaluate policy issues and vote according to their individual consciences. For example, when asked if they agreed with the church's opposition to a program for preventing AIDS, 71 percent replied "no" as compared with 17 percent who supported the church's position. On the issue of family planning, which the church opposes, 74 percent of Mexicans interviewed favored such a program, 19 percent replied that they thought it depended on the situation, and only 6 percent were opposed. Even on the subject of abortion, the most highly politicized social issue with major religious ramifications, only 47 percent were opposed, followed by 42 percent who believe it depends on the case, and 8 percent in favor.¹⁰²

In one regional poll, when respondents who favored church participation in politics were asked if they should vote for a candidate suggested by the church, only 9 percent responded favorably (two-thirds of this group were women). Moreover, Enrique Garza Ramírez found that 84 percent of the voters in Nuevo León were not influenced by suggestions to vote for a particular candidate, whether made by unions, clergy, or employers.¹⁰³

Do these findings mean that the church exerts, or potentially exerts, little political influence? If one envisions church influence as subtle and broad, then the answer to this question is no. A more critical issue regarding politicization in terms of religious influence is, to what extent does the Mexican church's posture on important social and economic questions affect political attitudes and behavior? In response, the church is likely to influence the formation of values and to promote awareness of issues with political consequences rather than attempt to orchestrate citizen voting responses specifically. Mexicans with Catholic religious values tend overall to be much less critical politically than Mexican atheists, who are twice as critical of political leadership, and to a lesser extent, of President Salinas himself.¹⁰⁴

Mexican Catholics, although they do not want a politically active church in the traditional meaning of the phrase, are much more interested in redefining the church's role in society. Their conceived redefinition of the church's role has serious, long-term implications for the church as an institution, for Mexican political life, and for the indirect political role of the church. When asked the principal function of the church, less than

102. "Encuesta nacional de opinión pública, iglesia-estado," 1990.

103. Garza Ramírez, *Nuevo León*, 1985, 106, 158.

104. In their earlier study of urban Mexico, Coleman and Davis concluded that "secular authoritarian regimes benefit from the propensity of those who are more conventionally religious" and that the PRI "attracts a greater percentage of its support from the most conventionally religious elements of urban Mexico" than PAN does. See Kenneth Coleman and Charles Davis, "Civil and Conventional Religion in Secular Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Mexico," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1978):59.

half (45 percent) defined it as religious. More than half viewed its main activities as political, social, moral, economic, or something else.¹⁰⁵ Thus a large percentage of Mexicans do not conceptualize church activities in a narrow and traditional religious sense. More important, those who perceive the church having a broader set of responsibilities are dissatisfied with the church's performance. In the early 1980s, the more sophisticated and urbanized the region (as in Mexico City and the border towns), the more critical Mexicans were of the church's response to social and economic needs. Among those interviewed who were younger than thirty-four, three-quarters were dissatisfied, and even half in the oldest age group (fifty-five to seventy-two) were not pleased.¹⁰⁶ In 1990 similar levels of satisfaction were measured. In assessing the church's more traditional functions—spiritual problems, family life, and moral problems—Mexicans ranked church answers adequate 74, 59, and 59 percent of the time. Regarding social problems, only 54 percent categorized the church's response as adequate.

More specifically, Mexicans believe that the church should openly discuss Third World problems. Support for such discussion suggests a strong desire for a more active church role in taking public positions and voicing opinion on controversial social and economic issues. For example, 59 percent of Mexicans interviewed thought the church should discuss such problems as compared with 31 percent who considered them beyond church responsibilities. Although the 1990 World Values Survey shows overwhelming support for discussing significant developmental issues, it also makes clear that Mexicans do not want the Catholic Church to evaluate government performance. In other words, Mexicans appear to distinguish between discussing the merits of policy issues and criticizing government actions. Criticism is unacceptable to the majority (60 versus 30 percent), but discussing specific issues is acceptable to nearly as many, depending on the issue.¹⁰⁷ The depth of this commitment is also measured by the fact that many Mexicans like the idea of a church for the poor. Thirty-nine percent believe the church should favor that group most, a concept that is a significant philosophical underpinning of liberation theology.

CONCLUSIONS

From a theoretical view of the political role of religion and the Catholic Church among the laity, these findings are revealing. In the first place, scholarly argument on U.S. religion and politics has suggested that

105. "Política," *El Nacional*, 10 May 1990, p. 13.

106. Hernández Medina and Narro Rodríguez, *Como somos los mexicanos*, 126.

107. "World Values Survey," 1990. For example, the episcopate has been critical of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

local religious communities exercise considerable influence on the political orientations of their members.¹⁰⁸ These studies and those of Fleet and Smith suggest the importance of refocusing inquiry on the political influence of religion in the local sphere. My data clearly suggest that the greatest differences in religiosity as well as the potential influence of religious intensity on partisan political sympathies stem from differences among cities and states. Further exploration of smaller religious communities, particularly parishes, would likely reveal even stronger differences.

Second, recent work on Latin America has argued that religious activism, specifically participation in lay groups, is a more important measure of religious commitment and related values than mere attendance. Figures on attendance can distinguish only among regular attendance, intensive attendance, and nonattendance. Intense churchgoers represent such a small group (between 3 and 5 percent of the Mexican population) that their political and social views can have few consequences on Catholic behavior generally or the political community at large. Thus additional measures of religious commitment in relation to partisanship need to be examined.

Third, some of the key differences emerge between those who are religious and those who are not, and occasionally between Protestants and Catholics. Again, those who profess no religion make up an extremely small group in Mexico. Thus although they support populist leftist parties in greater numbers than Catholics, their probable influence on the electorate is marginal. Furthermore, their higher levels of education (a universally important variable in political partisanship) are likely more significant than their lack of religious beliefs in determining political partisanship.

Fourth, Mexicans in general are much more sophisticated about the source of their views and their partisan political behavior than observers have suggested. They can distinguish among a variety of issues and do not automatically transfer strong loyalty and respect for Catholicism, priests, or the church to support of the church's public views on social and political issues. Moreover, their opinions reflect an intriguing blend of nineteenth-century liberalism and Christian moral education.

Finally, Mexican liberalism, which incorporated a heavy dose of anti-church principles, has socialized Mexicans since the revolution. These secular principles have created a high level of acceptance among Mexicans of separation of church and state. Yet although Mexicans are steeped in this peculiar liberal tradition, they reject some of its more notorious elements, especially those infringing on individual rights. Such rejection paved the way for a political context favorable to the 1992 constitutional reforms.

108. Wald, Owen, and Hill, "Church as Political Communities," 531–48.

In the 1980s, the Catholic Church undeniably became a more audible voice on social and political matters. Confronted within the Mexican Church and from abroad by the issue of pastoral duties versus social and political responsibilities, the leadership realized that the church must represent the interests of its constituents in order to survive. In recent years, some clergy have adopted increasingly public political positions, despite constitutional prohibitions. In July 1983, for example, the bishop of Chihuahua, Manuel Talamás Calamandari, openly criticized PRI candidates and encouraged citizens to vote for the party of change.¹⁰⁹ In 1985 a spokesperson for the Archbishop of Monterrey, Adolfo Suárez Rivera, who also headed the Mexican episcopate from 1991 to 1993, explained that the church would not limit itself to "saying the rosary" as some would prefer but would support a multiparty system for the healthy expression of political ideas.¹¹⁰ In 1985, after widespread electoral fraud in the northern state of Chihuahua, several bishops took out an ad demanding a recount of votes and threatened to stop saying masses in protest.¹¹¹ In 1991 the archbishop of Guadalajara publicly requested that the newly elected governor of San Luis Potosí consider resigning.¹¹²

These incidents by no means indicate universal attitudes among Mexican hierarchy or clergy. But they do indicate the level of internal discussion and even dissension over church policies. Although religion and the church serve as a moderating influence on radical or violent change (an alternative not widely entertained in Mexico), they also promote maintaining steady pressure for democratization and redefining state-group relations along the lines of the U.S. model, in which churches often oppose and criticize government policy publicly. The ongoing cooperation between various bishops (especially in the North) with U.S. Catholic dioceses and other U.S. religious institutions can only encourage the Mexican clergy to take the broader view of church responsibilities entertained by its northern neighbor.

The institutional church is now responding to competing roles. Most bishops agree on their spiritual functions, but a growing group of moderate bishops view their pastoral functions from a broader perspective. Those administering urban dioceses are particularly concerned with the same issues that are confronting U.S. cities, especially the conse-

109. Garza Ramírez, *Nuevo León, 1985*, 102.

110. Graciela Guadarrama, "Entrepreneurs and Politics: Businessmen in Electoral Contests in Sonora and Nuevo León, July 1985," in *Electoral Patterns and Perspectives in Mexico*, edited by Arturo Alvarado (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987), 102.

111. Javier Contreras Orozco, *Chihuahua, trampa del sistema* (Mexico City: EDAMEX, 1987), 63–66.

112. Joe Keenan, "Showdown in San Luis Potosí," *El Financiero Internacional*, 30 Sept. 1991, p. 14. The governor resigned two weeks into his administration, on 9 Oct. 1991. I am not implying, however, that his decision was in response to the archbishop's statement.

quences of drug and alcohol abuse. Individual bishops and the episcopate collectively have spoken out on this issue and its social consequences. But except for the June 1993 episcopate statement on drug trafficking and the role of the military, public criticism of the government remains oblique. More often, the episcopate has openly addressed two important issues—election fraud and human rights abuses. Election fraud often unites progressive and conservative bishops. Moreover, the church has created important regional councils that amplify the voice of individual dioceses. Moderates also realize that the church will lose the respect of parishioners if it does not convey their electoral frustrations to the government. Finally, given the extensive evidence of government responsibility in human rights abuses, this issue more than any other will draw the church into “politically tainted” activities in the long run. Also, the issue of human rights appeals to a broader group of bishops because of its clearer moral implications.

Neither the church hierarchy nor the Mexican people envision the church playing a direct political role, but redefinition of its social and economic responsibilities would have important political repercussions on the political process at a time of dynamic change. Awareness of this influence on the part of public figures has encouraged increasing criticism of the church among those who suspect its motives. Mexicans themselves may take greater interest in political outcomes as these issues confront church authorities and the laity alike.

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