

Killing a Cabby: The Press, Civil Society, and Justice in 1950s Chihuahua

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This article looks at civil society in 1950s Mexico. To do so, it examines the popular responses to the murder of a local taxi driver, Juan Cereceres. It argues that both newspapers and civil-society organizations took the murder seriously, interrogated government findings, attempted to discover the real culprits, and sought a degree of justice. In all, the story asks historians to reassess both the extent and the force of civil society under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Keywords: Chihuahua, civil society, public sphere, newspapers, press.

Este artículo examina la sociedad civil en México durante la década de 1950. Para hacerlo, examina las respuestas populares al asesinato de un taxista, Juan Cereceres. El artículo argumenta que los periódicos y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil tomaron seriamente el asesinato, interrogaron las investigaciones oficiales, trataron de descubrir a los autores intelectuales, y buscaron la justicia. En todo, la historia razona que los historiadores de México deberían revalorar el grado y la fuerza de la sociedad civil bajo el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Palabras clave: Chihuahua, esfera pública, periódicos, la prensa, sociedad civil.

On 27 November 1954, the Chihuahua City taxi driver Juan Cereceres picked up his hired vehicle and started his regular night shift. The following day, he did not come home; the car was found in the center of the city; there was a bullet hole in the windshield; and the driver's seat was drenched in blood. Rumors started immediately. They pointed the finger at two young members of the state's political elite:

Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos Vol. 36, Issue 1-2, Winter/Summer 2020, pages 127–149. ISSN 0742-9797, electronic ISSN 1533-8320. ©2020 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/msem.2020.36.1-2.127>.

Gaspar Máynez Jr. and Gerardo Caraveo. Maynez Jr. was son of the chief of police and first cousin once removed of the governor. Caraveo was a rural cop and son of a famous revolutionary general. Rumors alleged that Máynez and Caraveo had ambushed and shot the driver after he tried to stop them harassing a young woman at one of the city's late-night drinking spots.¹

In 1950s Mexico, murder was not an uncommon practice. (At the time, the national homicide rate stood at thirty-eight per one hundred thousand inhabitants and the regional rate at around twenty; in comparison, Mexico's current homicide rate is around twenty-five.)² But the Cereceres murder was more controversial than most. Open, with multiple witnesses, and committed directly by members of the political elite, it started a political firestorm. Things only got worse when the state and federal authorities tried to cover up the real story and frame a succession of patsies. Their efforts focused the public gaze on a bungling state government, its toadying bureaucrats, and its keystone cops. It would only end with the resignation of the governor, Oscar Soto Máynez, in August 1955. Yet, if the Cereceres killing offers up a disturbingly recognizable—even contemporary—tale of impunity, arse covering, and incompetence, it also tells another story of how Chihuahua's civil society reacted to both the murder and the attempted whitewash. It is this story of how local journalists first highlighted the murder, how one city newspaper doggedly pulled apart the state's lies, and how a group of city inhabitants came together to form the Comité Pro-Justicia y los Derechos de Ciudadanos (CPJDC; Committee Pro-Justice and the Rights of Citizens) and pressure the authorities into delivering some kind of justice that forms the bulk of this article.

The two main characters in this story, the press and civil society, do not figure highly in appreciations of Mexico under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The press was held to be particularly supine. Newspapers were “submissive and unconditional,” “factual deserts,” “timid, oversensational, overinfluenced by official optimism and possibly more concerned over profits than honest and objective presentation of the news.”³ Though commentators

1. *El Norte*, 12 September 1954; *El Norte*, 12 October 1954.

2. Centro Cultural Isidro Fabela, Archivo Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, caja 14.

3. Rafael Rodríguez Castañeda, *Prensa vendida: Los periodistas y presidentes; 40 años de relaciones* (Mexico City: Grijalvo, 1993), 13; Evelyn P Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Boston: MIT Press, 1974), 34; Howard F. Cline, *Mexico: Revolution to Evolution, 1940–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 185–86. All translations from Spanish to English are my own, unless otherwise noted.

admitted that institutional and coercive forms of censorship were rare, they argued that official control of newspapers was inescapable. At best, the press was free but never “made use of its freedom”; at worst, freedom of expression was a “great lie,” which was “subject to so many limits, it d[id] not exist.”⁴ Civil society was equally dismissed. Undermined by a pervasive individualism, co-opted by an overarching corporatist state, and leeches of power by a culture of cynicism and corruption, it was held “very weak . . . disorganized or . . . impotent.”⁵

Yet as the story of the Cereceres murder suggests, such appreciations are overstated. Outside Mexico City, many local newspapers were far from muzzled or passive. They reflected readers’ views and complaints, rebuffed tempting state disbursements, and pursued visceral—and at times rather dangerous—campaigns against both official and corporate malpractice. They were, in essence, a public sphere, albeit a rather localized one that snooty United States (US) observers often failed to recognize as such. Instead, like one visiting journalist, they dismissed local newspapers as “reform sheets, critical, carping, bitter, crusading organs, with axes to grind and personal grudges to nourish.”⁶ Similarly, outside the nation’s capital, civil society—with its horizontal bonds of companionship and common interest—often thrived. It was boosted by waves of urban immigration, sustained by growing literacy, unbound to a weak party system, and reflected in the growth of both explicitly nonpolitical organizations, like sports clubs, neighborhood organizations, and business groups, and also nonaligned citizen pressure groups—or what theorists of democratization would later term cross-class social movements.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first, I look at the panorama of both the press and civil society in midcentury

4. Daniel Cosío Villegas, “The Press and Responsible Freedom in Mexico,” in *Responsible Freedom in the Americas*, ed. Angel del Rio (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 288; Juan Manuel De Mora, *Por la gracia del señor Presidente: México, la gran mentira* (Mexico City: Editores Asociados, 1975), 236.

5. Jorge Castañeda, *Mañana o pasado: El misterio de los mexicanos*, trans. Valeria Luiselli (Mexico City: Debolsillo, 2015), 328.

6. John Russell Heitman, “The Press of Mexico: Its History, Characteristics, and Content” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1948), 9. But ignoring or playing down the importance of the local press is common throughout most studies of the Mexican media. See Carlos Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta: Antología de la crónica en México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1980), 71–73; Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Chihuahua. Here I argue that both were thriving, especially in the big cities of Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez. State and particularly PRI party control was weak, critical newspapers abounded, and—though they are more difficult to pick up—so did essential markers of civil society such as clubs, associations, and civic organizations. In the second section, I examine the Cereceres murder in more detail. Here I look at the ways in which journalists and citizens groups pushed for some measure of justice in the case, as well as the government's rolling cover-up. Finally, in the conclusion, I suggest that the movement to prosecute Cereceres's killers had strong parallels both at the time and in the succeeding decades. Justice, in particular, has proved to be a powerful logic and a popular rallying cry for Mexico's social movements throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The State, the Press and Civil Society in Chihuahua

The growth of the press and civil society in midcentury Chihuahua relied on a blend of demographic pressure, cultural change, and political circumstance. Some of these are easy to trace. Between 1940 and 1970, Chihuahua, like much of Mexico, experienced a process of intense urbanization driven by rising birth rates and rural outmigration. The populations of big cities like Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez more than doubled every ten years. And even smaller towns like Delicias and Parral grew substantially. In 1940, 40 percent of the state's population lived in urban centers; thirty years later, over 60 percent did. With urbanization and state-schooling campaigns, literacy also grew. Again in 1940, 50 percent of Chihuahua adults could read and write; by 1970, over 80 percent could.⁷

If some modern developments were shaping Chihuahua society, they had yet to make substantial inroads into the running of state politics. This remained heavily divided. The factionalism of the 1950s went back decades. From 1932 to 1936, the revolutionary general Rodrigo M. Quevedo ruled the state. His supporters were dubbed Quevedistas. They comprised businessmen, small-scale merchants, and colonies of old Villista troops located in an arc to the north of the state, from his hometown of Casas Grandes to the border boom town of Ciudad Juárez. When Quevedo stood down, he appointed a close ally, Gustavo L. Talamantes, to succeed him. Talamantes, however, sought independence from his former patron. Conflict centered on control of the lucrative commercial market and vice

7. Statistics drawn from INEGI, accessed 4 January 2020, inegi.org.mx.

center of Ciudad Juárez. Things soon turned violent, and Talamantes appointed a tough former revolutionary from Parral, Alfredo Chávez, to run the state police and take his side. Chávez was a ruthless opponent. Over the next two years, he used hit squads and laws against drug trafficking and prostitution to run the Quevedistas out of Ciudad Juárez. He also established his own group of supporters, dubbed the Chavistas, who proved instrumental to his election as governor of the state in 1946. For the next two decades, Quevedistas and Chavistas struggled for control of the state, vying for influence within the administrations of successive governors. In general, Quevedistas dominated the northern third of the state, around Quevedo's hometown of Casas Grandes, while Chavistas ruled the southern third, around Chávez's base of Parral.⁸

Factionalism had two crucial knock-on effects. First, the governor's influence rarely extended beyond the immediate environs of the state capital.⁹ Second, the official party—the PRI—was utterly incapable of gaining any significant membership or loyalty. Even in well-organized states, the PRI's corporatist apparatus struggled to extend meaningful influence over peasants, workers, or the urban middle classes.¹⁰ And in Chihuahua, the party was virtually nonexistent.¹¹ The state's political factions refused to cooperate with the governor or allow their followers to work under the umbrella of the PRI. The party's usual electoral cannon fodder—the peasant members of the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC)—were disorganized, disaffected, and increasingly rebellious. Proindependence factions of the railway and miners unions dominated worker politics; and the popular sector was “a complete fiction.” (In fact, as late as 1964 the only listed members of the sector were trainee teachers who wanted to get official Confederación

8. The narrative of Chihuahua high politics is drawn from Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Memorandum, 23 January 1962, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), 100-5-1-62, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN); Nicole Mottier, “Drug Gangs and Politics in Ciudad Juárez: 1928–1936,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 19–46.

9. Memorandum, 23 January 1962, Práxedes Giner Durán, AGN/DFS Versión Pública (VP).

10. For the weakness of PRI, see Benjamin T. Smith, “Who Governed? Grassroots Politics in Mexico under the PRI (1958–1970),” *Past & Present* 225 (November 2014): 227–71; Tiziana Bertaccini, *El régimen priísta frente a las clases medias, 1943–1964* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2009); Rogelio Hernández, *Historia mínima del Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2016).

11. Memorandum, Situación Política en Chihuahua, 8 July 1953, Oscar Soto Máynez, AGN/DFS/VP.

Nacional de Organizaciones Populares [CNOP] T-shirts so they could infiltrate a PRI rally and barrack the presidential candidate.)¹²

But if elite factionalism (and consequently party weakness) sabotaged the smooth running of state politics, it also—however unintentionally—allowed the flourishing of two spaces for the kinds of cross-class alliances and civic engagement that civil society depends on.

The first was the press. No doubt newspaper circulations were inflated, but they were not plucked completely from thin air and did offer some indication of press popularity.¹³ In terms of raw numbers, the García Valseca chain's newspapers dominated the state. In Ciudad Juárez, the morning *El Fronterizo* and the afternoon *El Mexicano* sold forty thousand copies between them. In Chihuahua City, sales of *El Herald* and *El Herald de la Tarde* totaled thirty thousand. At least initially, these papers developed strong relations with their readerships, often through exposés of the crime news. But by the 1950s, they were also involved in “gangster journalism” or extorting local authorities and swung wildly between adulation and condemnation. Such tactics occasionally generated good journalism but could also lose readers when the bootlicking got too much. (*Fronterizo's* circulation actually decreased between 1950 and 1960.)¹⁴

Gangster journalism may have brought in cash but also allowed the establishment and survival of rival publications with less financial backing but more consistently critical editorial lines. And despite the chain's heavy involvement in the state, these other newspapers thrived. By the end of the 1950s, there were six rival dailies spread over the two main cities, as well as smaller towns such as Parral and Ciudad Delicias, and also at least seven weekly or biweekly papers. Together they sold over fifty thousand copies.¹⁵ When combined with

12. For Chihuahua's PRI, see Práxedes Giner Durán informe, 21 August 1964, Chihuahua, AGN/DFS/VP; Memorandum, 13 March 1964; Situación política en Chihuahua, 19 November 1960; Memorandum, 23 January 1962, 100-5-1-62, AGN/DFS; Memorandum sobre tendencias políticas, 30 November 1963; Memorandum, 13 March 1964, Oscar Soto Máynez, AGN/DFS/VP; Informe sobre Chihuahua, 13 October 1963, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), caja 2964E, AGN.

13. Benjamin T. Smith, *The Press and Civil Society in Mexico: Stories from the Newsrooms, Stories from the Street* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 31

14. *Medios Publicitarios Mexicanos* (May–August 1960); Report on newspapers in Ciudad Juárez consular district, 5 January 1954, Confidential US State Department Central Files, Mexico, Internal Affairs, 1940–1959, roll 43; *Anuario Estadístico*, 1958. For the García Valseca Chain in general, see Smith, *Press and Civil Society*, 188–222.

15. *Medios Publicitarios Mexicanos* (May–August 1960).

the chain's figures, Chihuahua had one of the highest rates of newspaper readership in Mexico. On average, every urban household in the state bought a paper.¹⁶

Many of these smaller-scale publications were deeply critical of the local authorities. Some were run by opposition parties. The Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), in particular, had a strong base of support in the state. During the 1950s, the party gained considerable backing from Ciudad Juárez's business-friendly civil organization the Asociación Cívica. In 1955, it gained a seat in the federal congress, and a few years later, the government estimated that it still had fifteen thousand card-carrying members in Ciudad Juárez alone. Such support ensured a regular readership of the party's newspapers, like Parral's *El Correo* and Ciudad Juárez's *La Antorcha*. Rodolfo Uranga, who ran the latter, had trained—like so many Mexican journalists—at the Los Angeles Spanish-language newspaper *La Opinión*.¹⁷ But in 1940, he had returned to the border city, founded the local branch of the PAN, and started the newspaper. In general, the paper followed the party line, contained long, dry excerpts on political philosophy, and was extremely Catholic and conservative. But, like the PAN's national magazine *La Nación*, it also exposed corruption, revealed state violence, and monitored electoral fraud.¹⁸

Other critical newspapers were linked to particularly difficult journalists, like the old nineteenth-century *periódicos de combate*.¹⁹ In fact, they remained so popular that Ciudad Juárez had two such publications. The first, *El Alacrán*, was established in 1932 by a lawyer's son Juan Sáenz Avalos. Described on the cover as a “Biseminario Joco-Serio y de Combate” (Jokey-serious and combative biweekly), the publication specialized in exposing corruption, revealing the links between the authorities and organized crime,

16. In 1960, 474,568 inhabitants of Chihuahua lived in urban areas. They comprised around 120,000 households or around the same number of newspapers produced daily. *Medios Publicitarios Mexicanos* (May–August 1960).

17. F. Arturo Rosales, *Dictionary of Latino Civil Rights History* (Houston: Arte Público, 2006), 121.

18. For the PAN in Chihuahua, see William V. D'Antonio and William Humbert Form, *Influentials in Two Border Cities: A Study in Community Decision-Making* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1965), 37–39, 168–80; David Shirk, *Mexico's New Politics: The PAN and Democratic Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005) 72–74; *El Norte*, 4 July 1955; *El Norte*, 5 July 1955. Memorandum, Situación política en Chihuahua, 19 November 1960, Práxedes Giner Durán, legajo 1, AGN/DFS/VP; Memorandum, 8 July 1953, Oscar Maynez Soto, AGN/DFS/VP; *La Antorcha*, February 1964; *La Antorcha*, May 1964.

19. Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexico Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 64.

and mocking hapless functionaries. The few remaining issues contain stories on officials ripping off electricity users, taking money from brothel owners, stealing funds for national celebrations, practicing electoral fraud, and protecting the infamous heroin dealer Ignacia Jasso, "La Nacha." Like many other border publications, the newspaper specialized in *nota roja* stories and ran a Sunday supplement devoted to true crime (e.g., "A life for \$500 killed by a well-known Chinaman"). Like many of Mexico's critical artisanal weeklies, it attempted to develop a gossipy, confessional relationship with its readers. The use of nicknames was frequent: "El Gordo" supplied La Nacha with drugs; "El Chinito" was a rival trafficker. Frequent also were articles that demanded readers' involvement. Here formal reading intersected with street chatter. In "Lo conoces, lector?" (Do you know him, reader?), Sáenz would depict a particularly functionary or businessman by listing his various crimes, and readers were asked to guess whom he was describing. In another regular section "Retratos morales" (Moral portraits), readers were asked to pass a judgment on a controversial figure from the world of local politics or crime. Such a confrontational style brought frequent reprisals. In fact, in 1938 a local politician and a local military man opened fire on Sáenz as he tried to start his car. He was gravely injured and only survived when US doctors removed his wounded leg.²⁰

Ciudad Juárez's second critical weekly was *La Jeringa*, established by Ernesto Espinosa in 1946. Like *El Alacrán*, it specialized in denouncing corruption and described itself as a "Seminario Joco-Serio, Independiente y de Combate" (Jokey-serious, independent, and combative weekly). The government summed up the newspaper as "critical, insulting and offensive."²¹ Again few copies remain. Those that do include stories on electoral fraud, the high price of consumer articles, the illegal sale of adulterated milk, and police corruption. Attempts to connect to the oral world of street communication were frequent. Espinosa regularly printed comic songs, to be sung to the tune of popular tunes. And the "Oiga Usted!" (Listen, you!) column explicitly flagged the connection between the written text and spoken gossip. Where *La Jeringa* differed from *El Alacrán* was the emphasis on humor; *joco* often trumped *serio*. Stories were written in a heavily ironic tone. (Officers squeezed information out of a suspect using "that most modern and democratic policing method—torture." The policeman who ordered it was "an example

20. *El Alacrán*, 13 November 1941, 29 March 1942, 29 October 1942, 29 September 1942, 13 July 1947.

21. "Varios problemas ocurridos," 1 October 1964, DGIPS, 1560A, exp. 1, AGN.

of civic beauty, the *crème de la crème* of service to the community.”) Parodies of formal government speeches and celebrations were frequent. Serious articles were larded with quick-fire gags. (After market inspectors confiscated fifteen sacks of donkey meat, Espinosa pondered whether slow-witted local politicians were concerned that they might be next). And puns and jokey acronyms were common. (Mexico’s *Democracia Revolucionaria* [Revolutionary Democracy] was dubbed a “*Dedocracia Robolucionaria*”; rival journalists formed part of the *Frente Único de Lambiscones* [FUL; United front of brown-nosers].) Again, such writing could be perilous. In 1956, the local judge locked up the editor for slandering the chief of police. And fourteen years later, thugs murdered Espinosa for publishing photographic evidence that the head of the local jail was forcing prisoners to work for free. Three years later, hitmen shot dead his successor for revealing links between local officials and the drug trade.²²

The other effect of the elite factionalism and the weak party system was the growth of nonaligned citizen groups. These are more difficult to quantify. They were not listed on the census and often passed under the radar of state officials. But they were on the rise, and by the 1950s, they included business clubs like *Club de Leones*, the *Rotary Club*, and *Unión de Profesionistas y Intelectuales*; charity organizations like the *Cruz Roja*, *Club 20–30*, the *Club de Servicio Kiwanis*, and the *Sembradores de Amistad*; leisure clubs like the *Club Campestre* and the *Casino de Ciudad Juárez*; and intellectual organizations like the *Sociedad de Estudios Históricos* of Chihuahua and the *Ateneo Fronterizo*. Beyond these formal organizations, there were also hundreds of small-scale sports clubs (particularly baseball and shooting and fishing), neighborhood infrastructure organizations, and charity foundations aimed at specific schools and hospitals.²³ There were also sporadic organizations established to deal with emergencies, such as the group set up to deal with the *Río Grande* flash flood in 1954 and the school breakfast program of the same year. Two US political scientists who visited the state in the mid-1950s, expecting to find weak levels of civil organizations, were in fact surprised to find a “large number of voluntary organizations in the state.” According to their survey, 62 percent of businessmen were in service clubs, 57 percent in church organizations, and 33 percent

22. *La Jeringa*, 23 November 1946, 31 December 1946, 1 February 1947, 26 April 1947, 10 January 1948, 20 March 1948, 30 January 1966.

23. The list of organizations comes from the short biographies of candidates for Chihuahua’s municipal elections in 1965. DGIPS/1994 A, AGN.

in community-welfare organizations. No doubt, politicians were less enthusiastic participants, but at least a third of them were members of the local branch of the masons.²⁴

The Cereceres Murder

Chihuahua's newspapers developed strong links with civil society, through both open-ended and conversational styles—as in the cases of *El Alacrán* and *La Jeringa*—and through support for popular campaigns. Over the years, various crusades forced authorities to sack unpopular ministers, prosecute protected criminals, close down brothels, and improve sanitation.²⁵ But none were as large-scale and popular as the one in support of the murdered taxi driver Cereceres. The movement was instigated not by one of the chain newspapers or the rabble-rousing border satirists but instead by a relatively new Chihuahua City newspaper, *El Norte*.

El Norte had been established in August 1954 by the journalist Luis Fuentes Saucedo and his son, a civic-minded lawyer, Luis Fuentes Molinar. For months, the paper struggled to gain a foothold in the city's crowded newspaper market, but in November of that year, the paper's journalists started to investigate the Cereceres killing. The investigation revealed connections to the vice industry, nepotism, police incompetence, an official cover-up, and the employment of torture and false accusations. It also generated a large-scale popular mobilization, which demanded justice and called for the sacking of the governor, Soto. By August of the following year, the combination of mass marches and critical newspaper coverage proved too much, and the president, Adolfo Ruíz Cortines, forced Soto to stand down. The press and civil society (regimented into a new civic pressure group) were not only interlinked, but together they also possessed considerable political power.

Cereceres was killed on 28 November, but for two weeks, the city newspapers failed to mention the story. Then suddenly and without explanation, on 10 December, *El Norte* broke the silence. The paper's best writer, Fuentes Molinar, wrote an emotive piece on the state of mourning in the Cereceres household. He emphasized the poverty of Cereceres's home, which contained "only four seats, a bed, and a sowing machine." He described the driver's young daughters

24. William H. Form and William V. D'Antonio, "Integration and Cleavage among Community Influentials in Two Border Cities," *American Sociological Review* 24, no. 6 (1959): 804–14.

25. E.g., Smith, *Press and Civil Society*, 201–7.

“crying when they should be laughing”; he imagined that they “missed the hand that stroked their hair every morning” and that they knew that “the man who took them to the cinema every Sunday would never return.” The article concluded with the cry of the taxi driver’s mother, “My son, where is my son?”²⁶ The piece was heart-breaking, designed to generate sympathy and anger in *El Norte*’s readers.

For the next two months, *El Norte*’s journalists doubled as detectives and employed modern police techniques to crack the Cereceres case. The newspaper’s inquiry repeatedly showed up the flaws in the authorized investigation and made clear that politicians and policemen were trying to cover for the real authors of the crime. On 12 December, *El Norte* organized a reconstruction of events. They traced Cereceres leaving the taxi rank at just past midnight on 28 November. They located his last customer, a Ciudad Delicias man named Heriberto Cervantes. They discovered a witness who placed Cereceres at a cheap cabaret club, the Huerta Luz on the banks of the Río Chuviscar, an hour later. And they gathered together additional bystanders, who claimed that he left the club with two leather-coated, pistol-carrying men. Finally, they tracked down a newspaper vendor who saw the same two men exiting Cereceres’s blood-stained car at six o’clock the following morning.²⁷

In response, the governor called in investigators from Mexico’s secret police, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS; Federal Ministry of Security). After briefly interviewing the witnesses, they released their own report, which claimed that a Mexican American drug trafficker, David Gates Guerrero, had killed Cereceres. The motive was revenge. According to the DFS, up until a few years before his murder, Cereceres had been a low-level member of the criminal underworld. To escape a criminal charge, he had reported Gates’s drug-trafficking business to the police. To back up the allegations, the DFS presented the statement of an anonymous witness, who claimed that, six years before while in the Ciudad Juárez jail, Gates had sworn to murder Cereceres.²⁸

El Norte’s journalists immediately interrogated the theory. They asked the name of the anonymous witness; they asked why Gates had let six years pass before killing Cereceres; they asked where the body was; they asked why the police had yet to arrest Gates; and they asked

26. *El Norte*, 10 December 1954.

27. *El Norte*, 13 December 1954, 14 December 1954, 15 December 1954, 17 December 1954, 18 December 1954.

28. *El Norte*, 17 December 1954.

whether the DFS had any evidence of Cereceres's shady past. They also tracked down the witnesses mentioned in the report, who all claimed that their statements were completely made up. The journalists concluded that "most people ha[d] not only refused to take this version seriously, but actually laughed at it." The following day, they accompanied Cereceres's wife and mother to the local attorney general's office. When they explained the problems with the official version, the attorney general became irate and shouted that the DFS account was "the truth, the ONLY TRUTH." For the next week, the *El Norte* team demolished the remaining pillars of the DFS case. They traced Cereceres's boss during his supposed stint in the Ciudad Juárez underworld. He stated that he had hired the young driver to haul corn and beans from the state capital to the border city and described Cereceres as a model employee, whom he often trusted with loads worth up to forty thousand pesos. They also used contacts in the US police forces to track down Gates. They found him living peaceably and without a grudge in a small town in Arizona. They even interviewed his mother, who presented reporters with proof of Gates's whereabouts on the night on the murder.²⁹

In response, the state officials jettisoned the entire DFS line and instead presented a new narrative. On 24 December, they accused Arturo Chávez López, the guard at the Huerta Luz nightclub, of committing the crime. Chávez López was a rather better patsy. He was a former rural cop with a short fuse, was wildly reviled, and, according to witnesses, had shot at least three suspects in the line of duty. Four days later, they also pointed the finger at Cervantes, the taxi driver's final passenger. This thesis was rather more problematic: Cervantes was blind and had been so since birth. To overcome this, officials claimed that Cervantes had paid Chávez and his cousin Ascención Sánchez to commit the murder. Again *El Norte's* journalists investigated the charges. They pointed to the lack of motive; they poked at holes in the government's timeline; and they reinterviewed witnesses from the Huerta Luz club, who all denied the official version of events. They also managed to gain access to the supposed *autor intelectual*, Cervantes, and the alleged shooter, Chávez. Both claimed that they had been tortured into confessions; Cervantes had been strapped to a metal chair, which was then plugged into the mains, while Chávez had been dunked repeatedly underwater. This

29. *El Norte*, 17 December 1954, 18 December 1954, 19 December 1954, 20 December 1954, 22 December 1954. There is an excellent summary of events in *La Nación*, 9 January 1955.

technique, *El Norte* informed readers, was called “el buzo,” or “the diver.”³⁰

At this point, things got even more embarrassing for Chihuahua officials. On 29 December, a pedestrian found Cereceres’s corpse dumped by the side of the Chihuahua City-Cuauhtémoc road. For a corpse that had remained open to the elements for over a month, the body seemed in surprisingly good shape. There was limited decomposition; there were no signs of attacks by animals or insects; and Cereceres’s clothes were not dirty or dusty. The government doctors explained the state of the corpse by arguing that a combination of dry air, shade, and unseasonably cool temperatures had prevented rapid decay. Again, *El Norte*’s writers countered the claims and suggested that officials close to the two main suspects had deliberately frozen the corpse. One reporter suggested that the corpse had remained for days in the chief of police’s freezer; another would later claim that the governor kept it in his fridge. Without a body, successful prosecutions were difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. This gave officials time to put together a case against a handful of scapegoats. As soon as official charges were made, they released the corpse ready, they hoped, for a successful prosecution. As *El Norte*’s headline read, “the government [had] descend[ed] into the grotesque”; the investigation had become a “tragicomic farce.”³¹

For the following month, the macabre accusations became the focus of *El Norte*’s stories. *Nota roja* met modern forensics. First, they pushed for the release of the body for Cereceres’s family. Then they employed a respected local doctor to do his own autopsy on the corpse; he concluded that there were signs of “mummification on the skin of the face, the hands, the arms and the feet” and “marks of ecchymosis” on different parts of the body. For those not au fait with modern medicine, *El Norte* explained that such trauma was inconsistent with prolonged exposure. The doctor also opened the corpse and found all of the organs completely intact; he thus concluded that “they could only have been kept this way through refrigeration.” In addition to the autopsy, *El Norte*’s reporters asked a meteorologist to put together a historical review of weather on the Chihuahua City-Cuauhtémoc road. The meteorologist claimed that, far from being unseasonably cool, temperatures had soared during December, hitting an average of twenty-nine to thirty degrees Celsius a day.

30. *El Norte*, 13 December 1954, 24 December 1954, 28 December 1954, 13 January 1955, 16 January 1955.

31. *El Norte*, 30 December 1954, 31 December 1954, 31 December 1954 EXTRA, 3 January 1955, 6 January 1955, 9 January 1954.

They also sent pieces of Cereceres's ears and toes to laboratories over the border in El Paso, Texas. There experts concluded that the skin showed signs of frostbite, "consistent with refrigeration." A few weeks later specialists in Mexico City backed this up. Finally, they interviewed farmers who worked around the area the body was found. They all confirmed *El Norte's* thesis that scavengers and insects would devour any animal within a week of its death: "All that would remain is bones."³²

In the most general terms, the newspaper's dogged investigation laid bare the chasm that separated popular and official ideas of justice. For average citizens, justice was about uncovering the truth and punishing those guilty of the crime. But, for policemen and politicians, criminal inquiries seemed little more than convenient narratives designed to sustain elite impunity and fob off a gullible public. Justice and punishment were selective acts. For the poor and powerless, they presented the prospect of torture, jail, and possibly death; for the rich and connected, they offered complete license and exemption from the law. In more specific terms, the newspaper coverage showed the Chihuahua ruling class to be murderous, nepotistic, corrupt, and, above all, stunningly incompetent—or what one local woman rather floridly described as "hellish people propped up by unconscious bigwigs who seem to be drugged out of their minds on heroin or soto."³³

By late December, popular outrage at the government's handling of the case reached a crisis point, and groups of concerned citizens started to join together to form a pressure group, the CPJDC. For the next six months, the CPJDC publicly demanded the proper provision of justice, or what they termed "a clean justice, a justice without *leguleyos* [a term referring to corrupt lawyers], and a justice without official protection." To make their point, they petitioned the national government, held massive demonstrations, and collected thousands of pesos to pay for the fees of lawyers and forensic scientists.³⁴

The CPJDC was a grass-roots civil-society organization, unconnected to any particular political party or union group. The three leaders were the city's chief mason and owner of a furniture business,

32. *El Norte*, 3 January 1955, 4 January 1955, 9 January 1954.

33. The heroin reference was linked to the fairly well-substantiated rumors that Soto was involved in controlling border drug trafficking. Soto is a distilled cactus spirit from northern Mexico. The accusation was clearly a reference to Soto's name. *El Norte*, 24 December 1954.

34. For the emergence of the CPJDC, see *El Norte*, 21 December 1954. Also see Presidente Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (ARC), 541/477, AGN.

Lázaro Villareal, his wife, Dolores D. de Villareal, and Ana María Echave, who worked as a nurse at a local sanatorium. Members came from across the political spectrum and included anticlerical masons, like Villareal, supporters of the Catholic lodge, the Caballeros de Colón, official party stalwarts, PANistas, sinarquistas, and left-wing union members. They also came from every tier of the social hierarchy: some were taxi drivers like Cereceres; many were miners and railway workers; others still were white-collar workers from downtown Chihuahua City.³⁵

But there was one characteristic that did mark the CPJDC from most public organizations: the vast majority of members were women. The group actually started out as the Pro-Justice Committee of Women before changing its name; women dominated the speeches at the group's rallies; women outnumbered men on the board of the committee two to one; published lists of donations indicated that three times as many women gave to the organization as men; and women's speeches received the most enthusiastic applause (in comparison, Villareal, the wordy orator from the Masonic Lodge, might have been a good organizer, but as a speaker, he was a bore).³⁶ The story of murder and impunity played to traditional norms. In Mexico's highly gendered public sphere, women's discussion of conventional politics was still frowned upon. But demands for protection and justice were acceptable.³⁷ At the same time, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, nonaligned social movements like the CPJDC provided acceptable avenues for women to practice politics without getting involved in the messy, violent, and still resolutely masculine world of elections.³⁸

The support of *El Norte* was crucial to the growth and maintenance of the CPJDC. By refusing to accept the official version, the

35. For Villareal's background, see Lázaro Villareal to President López Mateos, 12 May 1959, DGG/2/311M (6)/47, AGN; Memorandum, 20 February 1955, Memorandum, 5 January 1955, ARC/541/477, AGN; Lázaro Villareal to President Ruiz Cortines, 20 August 1955, ARC/549.44/841, AGN; Mendoza Medrano, "A la breve historia," *Alpha Siglo XXI*, accessed 20 March 2017, http://alphasigloxxi.org/historia_gran_logia.html.

36. For the predominantly female make-up of the organization, see *El Norte*, 21 December 1954. For the dominance of female speakers, see Memorandum, 20 February 1955, ARC/ 541/477, AGN.

37. Benjamin T. Smith, "The Paradoxes of the Public Sphere: Journalism, Gender, and Corruption in Mexico, 1940–70," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 4 (Summer 2019): 1030–54, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shy054>.

38. For masculine world of elections, see Smith, "Who Governed?" For female involvement in citizen movements, see Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 393–95.

newspaper's journalists kept the story in the public eye. They collaborated with CPJDC members to seek out medical specialists and trace witnesses. As civil society and the press intertwined, *El Norte* also provided a vital space for the group to organize and coalesce. On the one hand, the newspaper became a forum for the group's members. The publication's letters section was expanded to a full page and retitled, "The Voice of the People." Here, readers declared their solidarity, discussed the case, condemned the government's actions, and broadened the debate to include other examples of injustice. By the end of January, farmers and housewives were writing in from the state's far-flung villages to compare the Cereceres killing to the murder of peasants by landowners' hitmen.³⁹

On the other hand and on a more practical level, *El Norte's* headquarters also doubled as the CPJDC treasury. From 17 December onward, citizens dropped off their contributions at the newspaper's offices in the center of town. The following day, citizens could read about their donations and those of their fellow activists on the back pages of the newspaper. The strategy offered transparency, generated trust, and offered donors the impression that they were part of a broader movement. It was also extremely effective. Between 17 December and 4 January, the CPJDC collected 24,563 pesos from over 7000 sources. Some groups donated collectively. The local branch of the railway workers union gave 257 pesos, and the employees of the El Potosí workshop donated 26 pesos. But most were small-scale individual donations, like the 80 centavos given by Guadalupe V. de Vitela, a nurse for Coyame, or the peso handed over by an anonymous shoe-shine boy.⁴⁰

If the civil-justice movement had its roots in *El Norte's* newsroom, it soon spread to the streets. On 31 December, Cereceres's funeral was held at the Chihuahua City cathedral, where the bishop presided over the function. Over twenty thousand mourners turned out to pay their respects and packed the square and the side streets in front of the church. A month later, the CPJDC held its first mass demonstration. By 11:00 a.m. on 30 January, sixty thousand people or nearly a third of the city's population had congregated in the center of the city. For four hours, they heard speeches by the organization's female leaders, by the father of one of the tortured suspects, and by the head of Cereceres's taxi rank. Two months of revelations had taken the lid off public discourse. And the speeches even went beyond what was printed in the critical press. The nurse

39. E.g., *El Norte*, 5 January 1954, 8 January 1955, 21 January 1955.

40. *El Norte*, 17 December 1954, 4 January 1955.

Echave described the governor as possessed by “the vanity of power and a severe inferiority complex.” And in the concluding speech, Nieves Cervantes described a citizenry “sick of insecurity, anxiety, fear, official brutality, torture, the immorality of judicial functionaries and the professional mafias of lawyers and doctors, the discontent among poorly paid employees, and the despotism with which the governor treats them.”⁴¹

Subsequent meetings and marches never reached the numbers of the late January demonstration. But for the next five months, the CPJDC maintained its physical presence in the city. There were still big set pieces. On 20 February, for example, two thousand people met at the square in front of the Guadalupe church in Chihuahua City. Speakers from the miners union, peasant groups, and other civic associations now added their experiences of official corruption and civil organizing to the pointed demands for justice. But, in general, events were scaled back. Taxi drivers carrying the group’s badge held regular stoppages each week, and groups of between five hundred and one thousand mostly female members met on a regular basis.⁴²

Gradually the aims of the CPJDC developed and changed. At one level, they moved into the social realm and engaged in other broadly charitable services, including collecting food and donating it to the braceros passing through the city on their way to the United States. At another level, their demands became more explicitly political. Rather than simply asking for the prosecution of Cereceres’s murderers and an end to the state cover-up, they now focused their demands on forcing the resignation of the governor.⁴³ The move had symbolic weight. Soto personified the corruption of the regime; some even suspected he was responsible for the freezing of the body. He was also held responsible for the torture of witnesses and the stitch-up of innocent bystanders. It was also realistic. Over the previous decade, an average of nearly two governors had been removed each year.⁴⁴

Despite the movement’s influence and the demands for his resignation, Governor Soto managed to hold on to power for six months. Concessions proved key. In January, he sacked his chief of police, and in February, he appointed a panel of two allegedly impartial lawyers

41. *El Norte*, 31 January 1955; Ricardo Muñoz Aguero to President Ruiz Cortines, 2 February 1955, ARC/541/477, AGN.

42. Memorandum, 20 February 1955, ARC/ 541/477, AGN; Lázaro Villareal to Ruiz Cortines, 31 January 1955; Memorandum from Fausto Morales, 28 March 1955, 12 May 1955, 18 May 1955, 25 May 1955, Oscar Maynez Soto, AGN/DFS/VP.

43. Memorandum from Fausto Morales, 12 May 1955.

44. Rogelio Hernández, *El centro dividido: La nueva autonomía de los gobernadores* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 2008), 88–89.

to investigate the case, who drew out their inquiry for months. The report, when it came, was a masterpiece of hand-wringing imprecision. The first paragraph admitted that they had “not come to any conclusions” because most of the witnesses “refused to give concrete facts.” Instead, they gave three hypotheses: that the murder was “revenge” (for what they neglected to say), a crime of passion, or the result of a drunken argument. Perhaps, they speculated, a couple of drunks had killed Cereceres “because they were disgusted at the amount he charged.”⁴⁵

But attempts to undercut the movement’s legitimacy were also crucial. Here, the governor’s tactics were revealing and demonstrate, in slow motion, one of the least understood processes of PRI rule: the co-optation of the independent spaces established by civil society during the 1940s and 1950s. As Soto—or at least his advisors—realized, when controlled by the government, these spaces could give the illusion of civic input while at the same time propping up the state. Over the next two decades, they would go on to form the foundations of the urban branch of the PRI’s still woefully understudied and misunderstood Popular Sector, or CNOP.⁴⁶

In terms of newspapers, Soto’s principal ally was the García Valseca chain. The alliance was probably costly but not intrinsically difficult. The chain’s editors were businessmen first and journalists second; they were encouraged to take big state payments in return for positive coverage.⁴⁷ And so gradually, a conflict over the provision of justice transformed into a struggle over control of the public sphere. In January 1955, chain journalists denigrated the mass march, claiming it was a “vulgar political protest,” arguing that no more than two thousand attended the event, and assuring readers that the vast majority were bussed in from out of town. And for the next three months, they pulled coverage of the CPJDC completely. Instead, they promoted stories of school openings, road building, and state freebies. These all portrayed the governor and the state administration in a positive light.

Finally, from May onward, the chain journalists started a campaign of dirty tricks. First, they published the open letter by someone close to the CPJDC leader and furniture tycoon, Villareal.

45. *El Heraldo*, 25 May 1955.

46. Studies of the gradual growth of the CNOP are almost completely absent from the literature. For a good start, see Bertaccini, *El régimen priista*; David Schers, “The Popular Sector of the Mexican PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 1972).

47. Smith, *Press and Civil Society*, 207–14.

The piece claimed that Villareal was as dishonest and corrupt as the officials he criticized and had actually stolen his furniture business from a cooperative of carpenters. It was followed up by another story, this time the alleged confession of a former leader of the CPJDC, who now claimed that Villareal was linked to a group of dissident Henriquistas and was using pliable members of the CPJDC to plot the assassination of the governor.⁴⁸ The charges were, of course, false. But, using press revelations of potential violent sedition to undercut the credibility of social movements would become a popular strategy for government press officials and right-wing columnists for the next two decades. Spin doctors and chain journalists would use similar tactics to weaken the San Luis Potosí Navista movement in 1961 and the student movement seven years later.⁴⁹

In terms of civil organizations, Soto's strategy was to rename the city's fourteen neighborhood organizations the Juntas de Mejoramiento Moral, Cívico, y Material (Boards of Moral, Civic, and Material Improvement). He then offered them an official disbursement of 50 percent of their funds and sent official engineers to help them construct water services, drainage, pavements, and even schools. He also backed further fund-raising initiatives by paying for bands to play at weekly neighborhood dances. Interestingly, the civil-society leaders were well aware of the explicitly political aims of these newly minted infrastructure boards. Villareal would denounce them in an official CPJDC publication as "funded by the product of vice in *bailongos* [a dismissive term for dances] where the workers leave their salaries each week." They knew it was a culture war they would struggle to win.⁵⁰

But in the short term, at least the governor's countermeasures were in vain. In summer 1955, the pro-justice campaign intertwined with three further scandals to secure Soto's demise. The first revolved the congressional elections of early July, which had highlighted Soto's political weakness. In Ciudad Juárez, the PAN won a deputyship; and in Chihuahua City, the PAN ran the PRI so close it was forced to employ widespread vote rigging and fraud. Methods were not very subtle, and PAN agitators were able to publish letters to union members

48. *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*, 7 January 1955, 29 January 1955, 31 January 1955, 13 May 1955, 27 May 1955.

49. For San Luis Potosí, see *El Sol de San Luis*, 27 March 1961, 22 April 1961, 24 July 1961; *La Tribuna*, 13 July 1961.

50. Juntas de Mejoramiento Moral, Cívico y Material de Chihuahua to President Ruiz Cortines, 15 April 1955; Lázaro Villareal to President Ruiz Cortines, 26 July 1955, ARC/609/222, AGN.

demanding that they vote PRI or risk losing their jobs.⁵¹ The second was a 10 percent business tax introduced in the immediate aftermath of the elections. The move was a populist measure designed to target the PAN's rich backers, but it backfired badly, as it also affected poorer stall owners and traveling merchants.⁵² The third was the illegal arrest of one of the CPJDC's members by a local cacique.⁵³ Together, these scandals were too much. They removed what remained of Soto's legitimacy and federal support, and after a series of muddled trips between Chihuahua City and Mexico City, Soto declared on 10 August that he had stepped down.⁵⁴

For the Cereceres's mother and daughters, it was not the justice they had originally sought. By summer 1955, the claims and counter-claims, the interviews derived from torture, the four conflicting inquiries (by the police, the secret service, the lawyers, and the newspaper), and the myriad different forensic interpretations had effectively buried any potential for solving the crime. (It seems that this strategy of allowing rival overlapping investigations to muddy the water of any knotty judicial problem is still used by PRI authorities today. It is hard to read about the Cereceres case without bringing to mind the official treatment of the Ayotzinapa massacre.) It was an ersatz justice that smacked of political compromise rather than legal rigor or truth telling. As such, it resembled the kind of partial justice Pablo Piccato describes as shaping midcentury Mexicans' interactions with the state.⁵⁵ But at least this justice was some sort of answer to civil society's demands.

Conclusions

The story of the murder of the taxi driver Cereceres, the subsequent newspaper campaign for justice, and the large-scale support that it generated reveal the strength of Mexican civil society even during the so-called golden age of the PRI. This strength was embedded in the independent regional newspapers, like *El Norte*, which sought to listen to, shape, and effectively channel its readers' demands. It was located in the independent groups of citizens and readers that were inspired by the newspaper campaign and came together to form the

51. *El Norte*, 4 July 1955, 5 July 1955, 10 August 1955.

52. *El Norte*, 5 July 1955; Memorandum from Fausto Morales, 12 August 1955, Oscar Maynez Soto, AGN/DFS/VP.

53. *El Norte*, 5 July 1955.

54. *El Norte*, 11 August 1955; *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*, 10 August 1955.

55. Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth, and Justice in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

CPJDC. And it was expressed in the CPJDC's street demonstrations, charity organizing, and open, democratic, and wordy meetings. Furthermore, it was a strength that the PRI recognized, acknowledged, and, as a result, tried to co-opt. Paying off the García Valseca newspapers, backing a propaganda campaign in favor of the governor, and establishing the neighborhood-level infrastructure boards were all part of this longer program—as was, in the end, the forced resignation of Governor Soto.

The question remains: To what extent was Chihuahua an exceptional case? No doubt, it was a relatively built-up state, with a fairly literate population, a history of outspoken and radical journalism, and a rich array of popular publications. But it was not alone. Bolstered by cheap paper, growing advertising revenue, and an increasingly urban and literate population, regional newspapers like *El Norte* were common throughout midcentury Mexico. Between 1931 and 1958, the total number of printed publications circulating the country increased sevenfold from 491 to 3,415.⁵⁶ These were read especially in the regional cities. A quick comparison of circulations and the number of households bears this out. In 1967, Monterrey's five dailies produced around 241,000 copies for 114,000 households; in Torreón four dailies generated 81,500 copies for just 30,000 households. Down south, where literacy rates were lower, local newspapers still managed to make substantial gains. In Mérida, notarized estimations of *El Diario del Sureste*, *El Diario de Yucatán*, and *Novedades de Yucatán*'s circulations were 101,900.⁵⁷ Furthermore, many regional newspapers, like *El Norte*, were combative and independent. Louise Montgomery's extensive analysis of newspaper columns and editorials written between 1951 and 1980 concluded that 49.9 percent of Guadalajara's *El Informador*'s articles and 60.1 percent of Monterrey's *El Norte*'s articles were critical. In comparison, only 10.2 percent of the national *Novedades*'s pieces were similarly barbed.⁵⁸

56. *Anuario Estadístico Compendiado* (1942–58).

57. The figures on households and circulations come from a table in *Directorio de Medios* (August 1967).

58. Louise F. Montgomery, "Stress on Government and Press Criticism of Government Leaders: Mexico, 1951–1980," *International Communication Gazette* 34, no. 3 (1984): 163–74; see also Paul Gillingham, "The Regional Press Boom, c. 1945–1965: How Much News Was Fit to Print?" and Javier Garza Ramos, "Democratization and the Regional Press," in *Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico*, ed. Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin T. Smith (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018), 153–82 and 263–82.

If independent newspapers were relatively common, so were citizen-led social movements like the CPJDC. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, they were frequent, if overlooked, features of Mexico's political landscape. They were often dubbed *comités cívicos* (civic committees), and their influence rose and fell depending on the level of pressing concerns. But during this period, most states contained such groups at one time or another, such as the Comité Cívico Pro Baja California, which pushed for infrastructure works throughout the state; the Comité Cívico Oaxaqueño, which brought down the governor of Oaxaca on not one but two occasions; and the neighborhood Comités Políticos of San Luis, which joined together to topple the *cacicazgo* of Gonzalo Santos in 1958. They shared certain characteristics and comprised members from throughout the social spectrum—from lawyers, doctors, and big provincial merchants to street sellers, workers, and housewives. They were predominantly urban phenomena and were distinctly regional in scope. Few boasted members from outside a particular city or its immediate suburbs. Their politics varied. In some groups, members from the business community or the PAN predominated; in others, it was workers, often attached to independent unions or even some vestige of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party), who predominated; in most, it was a confusing and atonal mix of the two. Their demands were also diverse: some concerned tax, others urban infrastructure, others still politics and elections.⁵⁹ A few, like the CPJDC, focused on justice.

Here, perhaps, the CPJDC was a forerunner of future developments. As organized civil society movements declined in visibility, morphed into guerrilla organizations, or were subsumed into the PRI, the demand for justice lived on into the Cold War, the struggle for democratization, and, even now, the war on drugs. In fact, I would suggest that it was this demand for justice that provided both a logic and a powerful rhetoric for many of Mexico's subsequent protest movements. Perhaps nowhere is this lineage clearer than in Chihuahua itself. It was here in the mid-1960s where the former CPJDC leader Villareal tried to pull together his old allies to defend protesting students against torture and false imprisonment.⁶⁰ It was here in the early 1970s that the utopian squatter colony the Colonia Francisco Villa held mock trials of corrupt politicians and

59. Comité Cívico Pro Baja California to President Ruiz Cortines, 20 July 1956, ARC/543.1/12, AGN; San Luis Potosí, Elecciones Municipales, 1958, Secretaría de Gobernación, 2/311M (20)/145, AGN; Smith, *Pistoleros*, 316–20, 379–91.

60. Informe, 28 April 1964; Informe, 1 May 1964; Informe, 17 May 1964; Informe, 14 June 1964, DGIPS/1560A, exp. 1, AGN.

policemen.⁶¹ It was here in the 1985 prodemocracy movement that PAN voters demanded an end to electoral fraud.⁶² And it was here in the citizen movements that people pleaded for justice for the dead women and children of Ciudad Juárez.⁶³

But it can also be seen in other protest organizations outside the northern state. As Cold War has slid into Drug War and the state's body count has mounted, demands for justice have become the dominant discourse of popular civil organizations. These demands were there in Guerrero's 1970s Peasant Brigades of *Ajusticiamiento* and in the Zapatistas' *Juicios Populares*. And they are still there in efforts to prosecute those responsible for the ABC Day-Care Center disaster or the recent protests concerning Ayotzinapa, femicides, or the victims of the Drug War more generally.⁶⁴

61. *Por Qué?*, 30 April 1970; *Por Qué?*, 20 September 1972; V. Orozco, "La luchas populares en Chihuahua," *Cuadernos Políticos* 9 (July–September 1976): 49–66.

62. Marco Antonio Bernal, "Ciudad Juárez, 1983 y 1985: Las dificultades de la democracia," in *La vida política mexicana en la crisis*, ed. Soledad Loaeza and Rafael Segovia (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 149–70; Lilia Venegas Aguilera, "Political Culture and Women of the Popular Sector in Ciudad Juárez, 1983–1986," in *Opposition Government in Mexico*, ed. Victoria E. Rodríguez and Peter Ward (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 97–111; Tonatiuh Guillén López, "Political Culture from the Northern Border of Mexico: Elements for a Debate," in *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture*, ed. Wil G. Pansters (Amsterdam: Thela, 1997), 337–62.

63. Kathleen Staudt and Zulma Y. Méndez, *Courage, Resistance, and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

64. I would particularly like to thank Wil Pansters who focused my thinking on this issue. Alexander Aviña, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8, 144; Paulina Fernández Christlieb, "Justicia autónoma frente a justicia oficial," *Estudios Políticos* 26 (May–August 2012): 37–55; Diego Osorno, *Nosotros somos los culpables: La tragedia de la guardería ABC* (Mexico City: Delbolsillo, 2019); Elena Azaola, "El Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad," *Desacatos* 40 (September–December 2012): 159–70; Francisco Goldman, "Crisis in Mexico: The Protests for the Missing Forty-Three," *New Yorker*, 12 November 2014; "Mexican Government Paralyzed in the Face of a Wave of Femicides," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 2020.