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978-1-107-00120-6 - Politics, Identity, and Mexico's Indigenous Rights Movements

Todd A. Eisenstadt

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Politics, Identity, and Mexico's Indigenous Rights Movements

Drawing on years of field research and an original survey of more than 5,000 respondents, this book argues that, contrary to claims by the 1994 Zapatista insurgency, indigenous and non-indigenous respondents in southern Mexico have been united by their socio-economic conditions and land tenure institutions as much as, or more than, by their ethnic identities. The prevalence of communitarian attitudes in rural Chiapas – as compared with neighboring Oaxaca – is the result of centuries of peasant repression, the form land tenure institutions take, and indigenous identity. Contrary to many analyses of Chiapas' 1994 indigenous rebellion, Todd A. Eisenstadt argues, using a comparison with Oaxaca, that structural factors like social and economic history can trump ethnic identity in the formation of individuals' attitudes regarding individual and collective rights. The book finds that in Oaxaca, where indigenous communities have been less repressed and where land tenure institutions emphasize individual property rights, indigenous and non-indigenous survey respondents adopt individual rights-favoring positions, rather than those favoring collective rights. Further evidence for this argument is found by comparing the non-indigenous 2006 anti-government social movement in Oaxaca to Chiapas' 1994 Zapatista insurgency, which acquired a strong indigenous rights platform, but only after an initial discourse of class-based revolution.

Todd A. Eisenstadt is Associate Professor of Government at American University, where he also serves as chair of the department. He is the author of *Courting Democracy in Mexico* (Cambridge, 2004) and has published dozens of articles and book chapters and co-authored or edited several books on democratization, identity and social movements, public opinion, political parties, elections, and campaign finance, mainly in Latin America. Professor Eisenstadt has been a visiting scholar at Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) and El Colegio de México in Mexico City, the Latin American Social Science Faculty (FLACSO) in Quito, Ecuador, and the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies of the University of California–San Diego. Formerly an award-winning “police beat” newspaper reporter, he has also consulted for international development agencies and worked as a legislative aide on Capitol Hill.

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To Planting Trees with Guapasan, and the Many

Other Adventures that Await

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Every student of Mexico has an opinion about the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and its role in Mexico's recent political history. For that reason, this has not been an easy topic to research or an easy book to write. But for that same reason, it was an extremely rewarding book to write, and I hope I was up to the challenge. While a whole generation of cool-headed analysts is coming of age, some of the early scholarship treated these social movement underdogs as a cause to fight for rather than as a phenomenon to study. Activism definitely has its place, but I have tried here to focus mostly on scholarship. I must confess great personal sympathy for the movement when I started taking research trips to southern Mexico as part of my dissertation research in the mid-1990s.

By the late 1990s, I was hooked on the story unfolding in Chiapas and found several excuses to return even before I was formally working on this book. The Zapatistas have faded, although they can claim many accomplishments. But the scholarly community, led by several brave researchers in San Cristóbal de las Casas and a few in Mexico City, has started reckoning more objectively with the strengths and weaknesses of that movement, its broader lessons, and what it has portended for southern Mexico's development model and for the indigenous autonomy model the Zapatistas so articulately advocated.

If I am able to contribute to this discussion, it will have been by arriving in Chiapas by way of Oaxaca. As a complement to the superlatives of Chiapas, I was lucky to find in Oaxaca a less politicized environment (at least before 2006), clever but unpretentious colleagues with whom to discuss important issues, and an empirical counterpoint to the polemical academic battlefields of Chiapas (and all international events relating to Chiapas). Although I only started framing the comparison between the polarized and

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centralized movement in Chiapas with the workaday, bottom-up movements in Oaxaca after the 2006 Oaxaca urban revolt (which was devoid of indigenous identity issues), I was making implicit connections well before then. Not to mention that the less-studied (and hence less intellectually pigeonholed) context of Oaxaca offered an emotionally and intellectually vibrant balance against the hyper-intensity of Chiapas.

Both field research environments were fascinating respites from my more mundane university office back in the United States, and they beckon me still. Colleagues from around the hemisphere have read and commented on portions of this manuscript, and I thank all of them, with the usual caveat that any mistakes in this text are mine and mine alone. First, I thank friend and colleague Shannan Mattiace who allowed me to use a grant proposal we co-authored as the basis for several pages in Chapter 7, gave me access to her archive of Zapatista movement founding documents, and offered friendly advice and support throughout the process, as well as a good critical read. Next, I thank my outstanding doctoral student, Michael S. Danielson, whose own dissertation in some regards grew out of paths stemming from research we jointly conducted (with our Oaxacan colleagues) for this book and papers we have written. Danielson generously contributed his growing expertise to this project, as did my former undergraduate research assistant, Viridiana Ríos, whose own doctoral career in political science has also prospered since we worked together in Mexico City on postelectoral conflicts in Oaxaca. Jennifer Yelle has stepped in very ably to index, proofread, and otherwise serve as research assistant for the completion of this volume. She is also emerging as an outstanding researcher in her own right, and the last (but far from least) student I have had the privilege of working with on research related to this book.

Departed friend Donna Lee Van Cott offered her usual intense editing assistance to try to bring the manuscript up to snuff. I miss her, as do many in our discipline, but am pleased, in retrospect, that this work was still able to benefit from her extensive talents and high standards. Other colleagues who have been extremely generous in reading, commenting, and otherwise encouraging this work include: Raúl Avila, Diego Ayo, Moisés Jaime Bailón Corres, Allyson Benton, Catherine Boone, Charles Brockett, Araceli Burguete, Roderic Camp, Miguel Centellas, Matthew Cleary, Erik Cooke, Federico Estévez, Marco Estrada Saavedra, Manuel Garza, Edward Gibson, Agustina Giraudy, Jorge Hernández-Díaz, Maria Inclán, Rene Kuppe, Jason Lakin, Laura Langbein, Carl Le Van, Soledad Loaeza, José Antonio Lucero, Raúl Madrid, Eric Magar, Victor Leonel Juan Martínez, Carmen

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Burguete is a field research guru, spirited writer, and prolific social scientist who helped me establish contacts and contexts, and was a consistent source of good advice for navigating the contentious politics of studying Chiapas. Dedicated former Secretary of Agrarian Reform, Chiapas Representative Martha Cecilia Díaz Gordillo, and her resourceful and clever policy analyst, Fermín Ledezma, tirelessly explained the nuances of the post-1994 land reforms, and took me with them to the Lacandon jungle to watch them conduct negotiations. Their tasks were herculean, but with persuasion and diligence, they resolved a lot of stalemates. I also thank them for letting me use some of their graphics in the book.

In Oaxaca, my work would not have been possible without the encyclopedic knowledge and constant patience of several colleagues at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University (UABJO): Moisés Jaime Bailón Corres, Manuel Garza, Victor Leonel Juan Martínez, and Carlos Sorroza, as well as help from public servant Cipriano Flores Cruz, former electoral institute director and presently the director of Oaxaca's successful adult literacy program. With Bailón Corres, Sorroza, Juan Martínez, and Danielson, I ran a successful USAID-HED project in Oaxaca, which, in addition to the provision of fellowships, training, and research, allowed me to learn a lot in a limited period of time. My colleagues at UABJO were exemplary partners from the moment we commenced the project, even when co-director Bailón Corres' UABJO office was inaccessible because of the 2006 teachers' protest. I also wish to thank Services for an Alternative Education (EDUCA), a dedicated non-profit group in Oaxaca that has boldly challenged Oaxaca's authoritarian government by meticulously documenting human rights abuses and by proposing and lobbying for policy alternatives. EDUCA let me use the cover photo of this book, which came from their comprehensive multimedia documentation of Oaxaca's customary law elections over the last decade.

Our project was profiled by Higher Education in Development (HED) as a "success story" because of my colleagues' resourcefulness and determination to succeed, even in the unstable political environment we initially faced. I will never forget working with Flores Cruz, but I will never remember exactly how much of the *mezcal* from his village I actually did drink before getting sick at a dinner celebrating the collaboration between

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The Center for US-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego, under the able leadership of Christopher Woodruff, Graciela Platero, and Erik Lee (and more recently under the excellent new direction of Alberto Díaz-Cayeros and Platero), welcomed me back to UCSD in 2005–2006, as did my UCSD dissertation chair Wayne Cornelius (emeritus director of that Center and another), Stephan Haggard, and Matthew Shugart. In the summer of 2010, several researchers at the Latin American Faculty for the Social Sciences (FLACSO) received me in Quito, which helped me broaden my comparative horizons at just the right moment. Thanks in particular to Eduardo Kingman, Santiago Basabe, Fernando García, Luis Verdesoto, Carmen Martínez Novo, and Werner Vásquez.

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Most recently, as chair myself, I counted in 2009–2010 on the extremely able assistance of Jenna Bramble. Knowing that Bramble was on the beat allowed me to excuse myself from the university a day or two a week while writing this manuscript in favor of my cozy home office, where

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the distractions were fewer and the coffee stronger. Sara Ghebremichael took over that job with a lot of enthusiasm and promise as this book was going to press. I also wish to thank my friendly, knowledgeable, and straight-shooting project editor at Cambridge University Press, Eric Crahan; his assistant Jason Przybylski; project director Bindu Vinod; and super text editor Elizabeth Goldberg for bringing this project together with care and precision.

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On a more personal note, my parents Mel and Pauline Eisenstadt have given me many things, including a passion for writing and for trying to make a difference. Most importantly, they have given their love and support for whatever I do. My "Renaissance Man" brother Keith "Keegan" Eisenstadt, his wonderful wife Kristy Pilgrim, and their beautiful kids – son Spencer and daughter Holly – are also a constant source of encouragement. My own marvelous and increasingly autonomous daughters, Natalia and Paola, give me unending inspiration and perspective, and offer the single best antidote to any rough day at the office. Most of all, I'd like to thank my lovely wife and *confidente* Mireya Solís, who holds our family together with discipline, virtue, and intellect; excels at many things (showing our daughters that "you can do it all"); and graces my life with love, elegance, and joy. I dedicate this book to her.