The Political Consequences of the Jesuit Expulsion from New Spain*

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Abstract

We examine the short- and longer-term consequences of the expulsion of the Jesuit order from New Spain in 1767. The Jesuits had been important partners of the Spanish Crown in the expansion and stabilization of colonial rule, but officials had become increasingly suspicious of the order's economic and political power and ability to resist imperial authority. Though the Jesuit expulsion was intended to bolster the power, resources, and authority of the colonial state, we show that it had ambiguous short-term and more unfavorable longer-term consequences on these outcomes. Though the expropriation of Jesuit assets provided a short-term resource boost for the Crown, we show that this benefit was partially offset by the additional burdens of replacing Jesuit institutions and pacifying unrest caused by the expulsion. The legacy of 1767 proved more damaging over the longer term as areas adversely affected by the expulsion saw more insurgent activity during Mexico's War of Independence (1810–1821). This example highlights the difficulty of displacing religious intermediaries and illustrates that the indirect consequences of reforms like these can sometimes outweigh the direct ones.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between religious authority and state power is complicated and often uneasy. Religion has sometimes been a useful tool for state building, allowing political authorities to co-opt the resources and legitimacy of religious institutions to extend their power and influence. On the other hand, independent organized religion also poses a unique threat to political power in that it provides an alternative source of authority that can be used to mobilize societal actors to challenge the state from within. As the history of European state building illustrates, the balance between these two forces can be difficult to calibrate. Religious institutions served as important intermediaries between the state and society, but they also stood in the way of later efforts to increase state autonomy and capacity, sometimes through violence (e.g. Tilly 1992).

These tensions are especially evident when examining the centuries-long relationship between the Spanish Empire and the Society of Jesus, the Jesuit order of the Catholic Church. The Jesuits became critical partners of the Crown in the expansion of colonial rule across the Americas through financing missions, educational institutions, churches, and even broader economic investment across the colony. Over time, however, the independent power of the Jesuits to evade political oversight and taxation became seen as a dire threat to state authority. This conflict culminated in 1767, when Charles III announced the immediate expulsion of Jesuit clergy from the Empire, an order that would be implemented with surprising exhaustiveness across the Americas within a few short years.

In this paper, we examine the short- and longer-term consequences of the Jesuit expulsion in colonial Mexico (New Spain), a region where the order had amassed considerable political power and influence. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, we provide evidence that the expulsion had ambiguous short-term and more unfavorable longer-term consequences for colonial rule. Though Spanish authorities gained power and resources through the expropriation of Jesuit property and the secularization of the Jesuits' educational and mission activities, the expulsion also sparked a wave of unrest and forced the Crown to find alternative strategies for governance, education, and pacification in the absence of Jesuit mediation. Over the longer term, grievances over

the expulsion among the creole elite exacerbated growing tensions with the Crown, contributing to the War of Independence and the eventual collapse of Spanish rule.

2. The Jesuits in New Spain

The Society of Jesus, or the Jesuit Order, is a religious order of the Catholic Church founded around the height of the Counter-Reformation during the 16th century. Jesuit missionaries first arrived to New Spain in the early 1570s, about 50 years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, quickly becoming important social, economic, and political actors in colonial society for reasons both material and symbolic.

Christian conversion had been an important justification of the Spanish colonial project from its outset, especially as applied to areas like New Spain with sizable indigenous populations. More broadly, the Catholic faith was central to the political culture and functioning of the Spanish Empire. Ecclesiastical institutions formed one of the five coequal branches of the colonial government—the others being civil, judicial, military, and fiscal (*hacienda*)—highlighting the tight link between church and state in this context. The Church's powers extended well beyond regulating religious life. The Church maintained a parallel judicial system (in addition to the Inquisition), and religious authorities often negotiated explicitly with the Crown on issues related to civil governance and taxation (see e.g., Gerhard 1993*a*, p. 10–22). Religious authorities held positions of power in civil government as well. As Gerhard (1993*a*) notes, ten bishops and archbishops would become viceroys of New Spain (p. 17).

Ecclesiastical institutions in New Spain were further subdivided into a secular and a regular religious establishment. The former was made up of the diocesan clergy, headed by bishops and, as of the 1540s, an archbishop seated in Mexico City. The latter was made up of clergy from the regular religious orders—in the early years of the colony, these were principally Franciscans, Augustinians, and Dominicans—each of which had separate hierarchies and (often overlapping) provincial divisions. Upon their arrival to the Americas, the Jesuits became important players in the regular ecclesiastical establishment alongside the traditional mendicant orders. To understand the

eventual importance of Jesuit culture and institutions to the political economy of colonial Mexico, it is worth highlighting a few different channels through which their influence was felt.

2.1 Jesuit Institutions

A first important channel of Jesuit influence was in education. The first Jesuits to arrive in Mexico City in 1572 came to establish a college (*colegio*) to provide education to wealthy elites in the capital. Over the next several decades, the Jesuits would found a series of schools and colleges (*colegios*), not just in Mexico City but in provincial capitals and commercial centers across the territory, including Guadalajara, Puebla, Oaxaca, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas (e.g., Osorio Romero 1979; Tutino 2021, p. 20–1). These colleges often mixed religious education with training in classical subjects like science and philosophy, some eventually receiving university status and offering training in specific faculties like medicine and law (Tanck Jewel 2006, p. 433). The network of Jesuit colleges grew to play a dominant role in educating the creole elite of New Spain up until the time of the expulsion in 1767 (e.g., Knight 2002, p. 281–3). As time went on, these elites became a major source of funding for the Church and began to push for the creation of additional Jesuit colleges and churches in economic centers like Guanajuato (Tutino 2021, p. 25–6). The Jesuits also funded many primary schools, for both Spanish-speaking and indigenous populations, extending their educational influence to other segments of society as well (Tanck Jewel 2006).

A related but distinct role played by the Jesuits in New Spain (and across the Americas) was as missionaries. As relative latecomers to the continent, the Jesuits arrived after the "spiritual conquest" of central Mexico had largely been completed and as the northward push of Spanish influence was well underway. The Jesuits grew to carve out a dominant sphere of influence in the northwest frontier of New Spain (Nueva Vizcaya, Sinaloa, Sonora, and the Californias) and in Nayarit (Gerhard 1993*b*, p. 19–23). This geography was not accidental. These were remote areas along and across the Sierra Madre where the extension of Spanish rule had been challenging. For the Jesuits, the remoteness was an asset more than a liability, not just because of their religious

commitments, but because the distance shielded them from interference by royal officials and rival groups, allowing them more autonomy to carry out their activities (Merino and Newson 1995, p. 134). These activities included not just the Catholic conversion of the native population but also the reorganization of local communities, sometimes forcibly, the provision of technical training, and investment in local agricultural production (e.g., Knight 2002, p. 132–3). Closer to the center, Jesuits also created urban "missions" to serve the local workforce in places like Zacatecas, often at the behest of local elites who sought to exert a "civilizing" influence over a population that was perceived as "unruly" and "lacking Christian commitments" (Tutino 2021, p. 26).

A last critical channel of Jesuit influence was economic. To pay for their educational, religious, and missionary activities, the Jesuits required funding. As noted earlier, elite benefactors provided one important income source, but the successful of colleges and missions required a more stable stream of resources than might be provided by charity alone. The solution to their problem came through investing in the incipient commercial economy of New Spain, particularly through the acquisition and management of large, for-profit agricultural estates (*haciendas*). Though their superiors in Europe expressed misgivings about this strategy at first (Tutino 2021, p. 21), Mexico's Jesuits gradually amassed huge tracts of valuable land in central and northern Mexico and employed large numbers of workers, including enslaved Africans (e.g., Brading 1994; Tutino 2021). The Jesuits were not the only religious order to invest in commercial agriculture—the Franciscans, for example, obtained and managed large estates across the north—but the Jesuits gained a reputation for being unusually astute investors and managers of their properties (Riley 1973; Knight 2002, p. 75–7, p. 133). The economic impact in the colony was considerable. As Tutino (2021) describes, Jesuit agricultural production worked to critically support the mining economy, making Jesuits "key participants" in Mexico's silver boom of the early eighteenth century (p. 25).

2.2 Jesuits as Political Actors and Intermediaries

Though relative latecomers to Mexico, the Jesuits grew to occupy a central place in colonial society. As religious authorities in a Catholic empire, the Jesuits enjoyed a certain independent

legitimacy in their dealings with local administrators and royal officials, though, as we discuss in the next section, this legitimacy did not insulate the Jesuits from periodic conflicts with the Crown. In addition to this symbolic status, the Jesuits were important economic players in their own right. However, this economic success also had ambiguous consequences, eventually making their properties more attractive targets for taxation and expropriation. Perhaps the most important source of political influence that the Jesuits possessed, and the feature of their influence that would eventually become hardest for officials to overcome in the wake of the expulsion, was that they served as intermediaries between the Crown and colonial society as a function of their status and social embeddedness.

Their importance as intermediaries cut across different segments of colonial society. When it came to elites, Jesuits became the dominant providers of education, often at little to no direct cost to the Crown. The importance of Jesuit education also lent the order a certain legitimacy that could be leveraged to secure support for the colonial state more generally (or, as we discuss later, to undermine support in the state after the expulsion) (Brading 1994). The tight link between creole elites and the Jesuit order extended beyond education, as elites became major funders and organizers of Jesuit church building, charity activities, and missionary activities (e.g., Tutino 2021). More broadly, Jesuits became known as "vocal champions of the creole elite" when they came into tension with *peninsulares* (Spanish-born elites) and the Crown, standing up against growing "European ethnocentrism" in colonial society (Knight 2002, p. 281–2). Even after tensions with the Crown began to build in the eighteenth century, officials recognized the political importance of the Jesuits' cultural linkage with the creole elite in sustaining order, a concern that would come up in high-level discussions over the implementation of the expulsion order (e.g., Brading 1994, p. 4).

Jesuits acted as partners in maintaining political order among commoners as well. As mentioned earlier, the incorporation and pacification of workers was a central justification of the network of urban "missions" funded by elites in places like Guanajuato (Tutino 2021, p. 26). Outside of towns, Jesuit haciendas functioned not just as economic enterprises but as multipurpose institutions that

also provided religious education, training, and social services to resident and non-resident workers. As Tutino (2021) describes, the Jesuits did not always live up to their religious ideals in their work as estate managers, perhaps most obviously when it came to their reliance on slavery, but Jesuit writings at the time reflect an interest in balancing their material and spiritual responsibilities. An eighteenth-century document entitled *Instructions for Jesuit brothers managing estates* emphasizes the importance of making sure that estate workers were clothed and fed, lived in accordance with Christian morality, attended church, behaved well, avoided drunkenness, and eschewed violence (Tutino 2021, p. 29–32). They would enforce these standards through regular oversight and punishment of violations, but also through the voluntary compliance of the population, given the order's position and legitimacy.

The Jesuit's role as intermediaries between the local population and the Crown was perhaps most overt with respect to the indigenous groups of the northwest frontier. Because of their willingness to live in remote territories and their purported "superiority in native languages", relative even to other missionary groups, the Jesuits were particularly important agents of the crown in these frontier zones (Merino and Newson 1995; Kessell 2002, p. 130). Cvil authorities were seldom present or effective in frontier areas, and "the church was the state, its ministers acting as judges and as representatives of the monarchy" (Brading 1994, p. 7). By contracting with the Jesuits to act as their stand-in, officials could project power into distant territories and among populations that might have otherwise been hostile.

One illustration of how this arrangement could work is the long-term relationship between the Jesuits and the Yaqui in the territory of Sonora. Following years of conflict with Spanish forces, the Yaqui invited Jesuit missionaries into their territory in the early seventeenth century. Jesuit missionaries built churches and schools, invested in the local economy, and worked to organize the population into settlements, "exercis[ing] a near-monopoly of colonial power" in the region (Knight 2002, p. 131–2). This coincided with a century of peace between the Yaqui and the Spanish, a peace that would be punctured only when Spanish incursion increased in the eighteenth century,

eventually instigating a massive rebellion (Knight 2002, p. 133). It is important not to overstate the sincerity and depth of the connection between Jesuit missionaries and the indigenous population. This was a complicated and often coercive relationship, with some groups, like the Tepehuanes or Rarámuri/Tarahumara, violently and successfully resisting the Jesuits' efforts to make inroads for decades (Kessell 2002; Knight 2002, p. 133–5). However, when and where they could operate, Jesuit missions were frequently the only meaningful connection between these frontier populations and the colonial state. Jesuit missionaries' willingness to live among these populations and speak local languages thus made them the valuable partners in extending the reach of Spanish rule.

Jesuit actors and institutions thus played an important role in the functioning of colonial rule in Mexico for reasons both direct and indirect. Jesuits controlled a great deal of wealth and occupied an important social position in colonial society, but their influence was also felt via their strong formal and informal ties to elites and commoners in different parts of the territory. The density and complexity of these connections made the Jesuits uniquely valuable allies of the Crown for much of the colonial period, but this is also what made them uniquely threatening to the Crown as the philosophy and structure of Spanish rule began to change in the late eighteenth century.

3. The Jesuit Expulsion

The rapid and near-complete expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish Empire in 1767 remains one of the more mysterious events in imperial history. By all accounts, the King's announcement of the expulsion came unexpectedly. The precise justification was left vague, with the King citing "urgent, just and compelling causes" that would remain concealed in the "royal breast" for eternity (qtd. in Brading 1994, p. 3). In truth, while the severity of the expulsion order, and the speed with which it was carried out in the Americas, came as a surprise to many, tensions had been building between the Jesuits and the Crown long before 1767. This episode was also far from the first instance of conflict between church and state involving the Jesuit order. To understand how the consequences of the expulsion did and did not live up to expectations for the Crown, it is important to revisit the rationale behind this decision.

3.1 External determinants

Some reasons for the expulsion had little to do with New Spain, the Americas, or colonial rule. In the years leading up to 1767, the Jesuit order had found itself under increasing suspicion in much of Europe. At the time of Charles III's decision, the Jesuits had already been expelled from France and Portugal for "reasons of state" (qtd. Brading 1994, p. 10). Austria and Hungary would soon follow suit, and within a decade, Pope Clement XIV would issue a papal brief from Rome suppressing the order continent-wide.

There were doctrinal conflicts behind the suppression of the order—perhaps the most famous was the growing cleavage with "Jansenism" in eighteenth-century France—but the reasons behind the decision were also unmistakably political (e.g., Brading 1994, p. 10–12). The Jesuits had been active in politics, at times leveraging their symbolic position and connection to Rome to resist or challenge royal authority. They became seen as a potential enemy living within the state, an impression that was not always without foundation. In Iberia, the Jesuits had backed the rebellion by the duke of Braganza against the Spanish Crown in 1640, beginning a conflict that eventually led to the dissolution of the Iberian Union (Brading 1994, p. 9). Tensions with the Crown had grown over the eighteenth century as the Bourbon Crown sought to curtail the influence of regular religious orders, often against Jesuit resistance (Brading 1994, p. 11–12).

The immediate impetus behind Charles III's decision is sometimes cited as the Esquilache (or "Hat-and-Cloak") Riots in Madrid in 1766, when an angry mob took to the streets in response to efforts to discourage the wearing of traditional Castilian clothes. Rioters eventually entered the royal palace and forced the king to take refuge. After the event, a *fiscal* of the Council of Castile, Pedro de Campomanes, wrote a lengthy report blaming the Jesuits for serving as the secret organizing force behind this incident, denouncing the order as "the enemy of the Sovereign Power, depending on a despotic government resident in a foreign country" (qtd. Brading 1994, p. 9; see also St. Clair Segurado 2005). Campomanes was far from alone in this sentiment. In 1766, the count de la Villanueva, also on the Council of Castile, wrote a scathing report condemning the Jesuits' legal

battle with the Crown over the collection of tithes, remaking with scorn that "a subject litigates with his king, a Jesuit with his lord, Ferdinand VI" (qtd. Brading 1994, p. 14). Mystery remains over Charles III's decision, but it is clear that considerable pressure for the expulsion came from within the Castilian elite.

The Jesuit expulsion from New Spain can be seen as an outgrowth of these European conflicts. John Tutino, for example, writes that "political reasons little connected to New Spain" were behind the expulsion (2021, p. 28), and Alan Knight casts the decision to enforce the expulsion order across Mexico as a "misguidedly doctrinaire application of *peninsular* policies to colonial problems" (2002, p. 266, emphasis in the original). At the same time, events in the Americas featured heavily in Iberian debates over the Jesuit question, including in the Campomanes report, which devoted disproportionate attention to Jesuit power in the Americas (1994, p. 9–10). Moreover, as St. Clair Segurado (2005) notes, the Jesuit expulsion in New Spain could not have happened without at least some support and cooperation in the colony.

3.2 Economic conflicts

By the eighteenth century, the Jesuits controlled a vast amount of wealth in New Spain, much of it lightly taxed. Their property included a networks of missions, colleges, churches, and schools as well as numerous large and seemingly profitable estates across central and northern Mexico. There was a long history of tension with the Crown and local authorities in Mexico over the taxation of Jesuit property and agricultural production.

Going back to the sixteenth century, the Jesuits had successfully obtained a series of papal bulls exempting them from paying the standard tithe of ten percent to the Crown. When the Crown moved to revoke this privilege in the early seventeenth century, Jesuits in the Americas resisted and legally challenged the basis for the decision. In the 1640s, these tensions spilled over into a massive conflict with the then-Bishop of Puebla, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, who sought to levy taxes on Jesuit production, only to be forced out of office after the viceroy sided with the Jesuits and threatened to have the bishop arrested (Brading 1994, p. 12). This event that was emphasized by Campomanes in

his report on the political danger of Jesuit influence. The Council of Indies formally resolved in favor of the Crown in 1655 after decades of litigation, but the Jesuits continued to resist payment, arguing that it was beyond the authority of the Crown to collect this tax (Brading 1994, p. 13–4).

The Jesuits finally recognized the Crown's right to collect taxes on their property nearly a century later in 1750, reaching an arrangement as part of a larger settlement that also included meaningful fiscal concessions to the order (Brading 1994, p. 14). The 1750 settlement allowed for the taxation of production on Jesuits estates, but reduced the tax rate from the standard one-tenth to one-thirtieth of the assessed value. In what was perhaps an even bigger concession to the order, authorities agreed to shield the reports of managers and overseers on Jesuit estates from official scrutiny, potentially opening the door to even greater tax avoidance (Brading 1994, p. 14). The 1750 settlement was perceived to be so favorable to the order that there were later accusations that Jesuit leaders had colluded to unduly influence Ferdinand VI through his father-confessor, the Jesuit Francisco de Rávago (Brading 1994, p. 14; St. Clair Segurado 2005, p. 15–16).

Because Jesuits' property remained lightly taxed and poorly monitored, the Crown remained somewhat in the dark over the actual value of their estates, colleges, and missions. Historians in fact continue to debate over the true value of Jesuit holdings as of 1767, though it appears that the Crown may have overestimated their value in the run up to the expulsion (e.g., Brading 1994, p. 14; St. Clair Segurado 2005, p. 11, 23–5). The lack of transparency about Jesuit holdings allowed rumors to propagate about the vast "riches" controlled by the order, which further fed anti-Jesuit sentiment and served as a motivation for the seizure of Jesuits' assets during the expulsion (St. Clair Segurado 2005, p. 6, 8–9, 13).

3.3 Political conflicts

The conflicts between the Jesuits and the colonial state went beyond taxation or economics. As in Europe, there had been a gradual trend toward rolling back the autonomy and privileges of the regular religious orders in favor of secular clergy in New Spain (e.g., Gerhard 1993*a*, p. 19–22). This was not just for economic reasons but also political ones. Though they were essential to the

expansion and continued functioning of the colony, the regular religious orders sat somewhat in tension with the Crown and the secular religious establishment. The regular orders existed under a separate political hierarchy and answered to a separate set of authorities: their superiors in Europe, not the archbishop.

A key question underlying conflicts between the Jesuits and royal officials in the Americas was whether local authorities had any jurisdiction over the order. When it came to taxation, though the Jesuits eventually conceded that the Crown held "full dominion" to tax their estates, they refused to recognize the authority of the Council of Indies or American bishops, opting to settle the issue directly with the king and his ministers in Madrid (Brading 1994, p. 14). To resolve another set of conflicts over autonomy, the order went above the Crown to secure a papal brief in 1766 reinforcing Jesuit missionaries' rights to read books banned by the Inquisition, issue marriage dispensations, and declare local indigenous populations as "neophytes" that could be kept on missions (and thus outside the king's direct jurisdiction) indefinitely. This brief undercut the authority of local bishops, the Inquisition, and the civil administration to constrain the Jesuits' activities, so much so that Charles III ordered the Council of Indies to ban the document from circulation (Brading 1994, p. 15). The Minister of Indies complained over "the disparity with which that Court [in Rome] treats our bishops of the Indies as compared to the Jesuits, since what to the former it concedes with so much difficulty, to the latter it dispenses with unparalleled freedom" (qtd. in Brading 1994, p. 15).

The power the Jesuits could command outside the colonial state was alarming to the Crown, but what was perhaps more alarming was the power Jesuit clergy had to resist the state from within. The Jesuits forged close connections with different segments of the population in New Spain through their work as educators, missionaries, clergy, and even employers. As mentioned earlier, these connections could be useful to the state, allowing the Jesuits to act as intermediaries between the Crown and local populations, but they were also dangerous. When the Jesuits found themselves at odds with the state, they could leverage these connections against the Crown. The conflict between the Jesuits and Bishop Palafox provides an illustration. When Palafox attempted to curtail the

influence of the order and levy taxes on Jesuit properties in the 1640s, he found himself opposed not just by the Jesuit clergy but a wide swath of other colonial interests, eventually including even the viceroy. In the end, his proposed reforms were unsuccessful, and Palafox was forced out of his position and back to Spain (Simmons 1966, Brading 1994, p. 9). The backlash to another set of ill-fated reforms provides another example. Following a series of unpopular reform efforts intended to strengthen Crown control, a riot broke out in Mexico City in 1624 with the Jesuits joining the crowd against the viceroy, eventually forcing his escape and removal (Knight 2002, p. 171).

It was these two factors together—Jesuits' ability to appeal to authority outside the colonial state and their ability to command social power within it—that made Jesuit influence particularly threatening in the Americas. There were growing worries that the Jesuits could use their position to undermine Spanish authority or strike deals with imperial rivals in places like northwest Mexico where Jesuit missionaries held a virtual monopoly on political power (e.g., St. Clair Segurado 2005, p. 4–5). As in Europe, these tensions became especially prominent as the Bourbon Crown sought to expand its political control. As Brading (1994) summarizes, "by reason of their corporate independence, their extensive jurisdiction, their great riches and frequent laxity...[the Church] presented a major obstacle to the plans of the Bourbon ministers to augment the power of the colonial state" (p. 7). Pressure for the Jesuit expulsion may have originated in Europe, but the wide application of the order in the Americas was not incidental.

3.4 Implementation of the expulsion

Though tensions had been building for some time, Charles III's expulsion order came as a shock. Jesuit institutions at the time were operating with no clear evidence of being imminently seized. In fact, leading up to 1767, the Jesuits had completed several new colleges, missions, and churches thanks to a recent silver boom, including the famous Templo de la Compañía in Guanajuato in 1765 (Brading 1994; Tutino 2021). As Charles III's order came down through the colony, these activities were halted virtually overnight and Jesuit clergy were forced to return to the continent. This was extraordinarily disruptive. In addition the direct consequences, the forcible removal of clergy gave

rise to some famous set pieces of the expulsion in popular culture, including the images of elderly Jesuit teachers being forced to pack up their belongings overnight, expelled clergy asking to pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Tepeyac on their way to board ships in Veracruz, or Jesuit missionaries asking to hold one last mass before departing California (Brading 1994, p. 3–4; Kessell 2002, p. 261).

Local officials implementing the expulsion knew that they would face backlash. Upon hearing of the expulsion plan, the viceroy warned the Minister of the Indies to expect resistance from the colonial elite as "all the clergy and lawyers, since they belong entirely to them [the Jesuits] are also the most resentful" (qtd. Brading 1994, p. 4). Officials timed the takeover of the main house of the Company of Jesus in Mexico City to coincide with the Feast of St. John the Baptist to reduce the possibility of immediate resistance (Kessell 2002, p. 260). Concern over elite subterfuge proved well-founded when a major conspiracy of high-placed elites in Mexico City sought to undermine the authority of general visitor José de Gálvez to implement the expulsion order, though this effort eventually backfired (Brading 1994, p. 4–5). As we describe in the next section, the order also sparked a damaging wave of popular unrest along the northern frontier and across central Mexico.

However, the expulsion presented an opportunity for the Crown as well as a risk. After more than a century of conflicts over tithes and taxation, the Jesuits' network of properties and estates could be fully expropriated and sold. Longstanding debates over the jurisdiction of Jesuit missions in the frontier could be closed overnight, opening the door to a major wave of secularization. The closure of Jesuit colleges could bring an immediate end to looming educational reforms that the Crown increasingly viewed as dangerous (e.g., Tanck Jewel 2006, p. 435). In the next sections, we consider how the benefits and costs of the expulsion balanced against one another more systematically.

4. The Near-Term Consequences of the Expulsion of the Jesuits

4.1 Material Windfall for the Spanish Crown

Following the expulsion of the Jesuits, the Crown seized their extensive assets. Although initial expectations of a significant financial gain were high, revenues from the expropriation of properties

were slow to materialize. Over time, however, these revenues—organized as separate fiscal branch known as *temporalidades* —grew and reached substantial levels by the turn of the century.

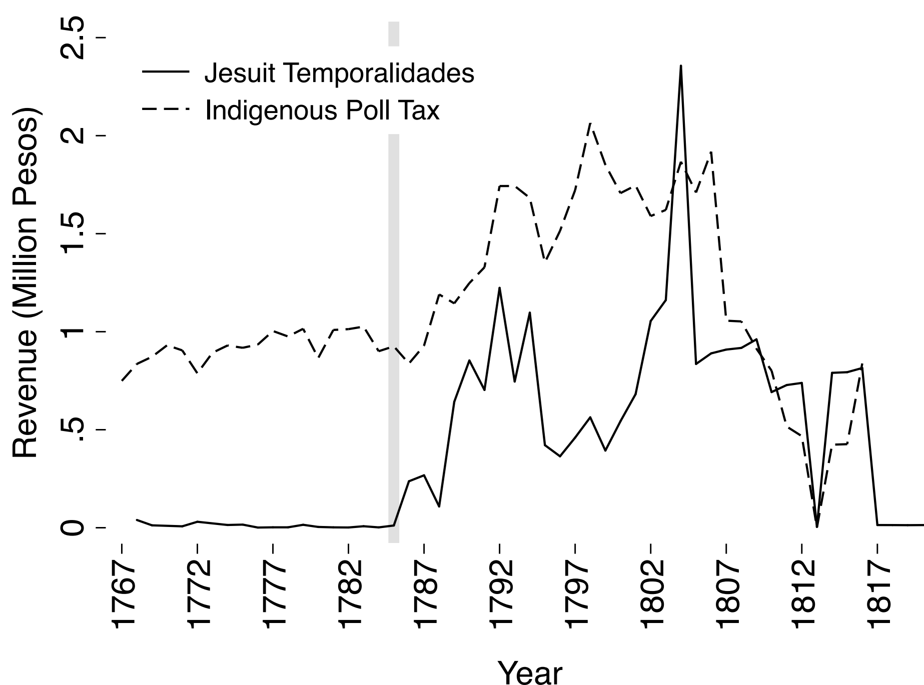
To organize the sale of expropriated properties, the Crown created an entire new bureaucracy. A first set of officials were hastily put in charge of the initial process of expulsion. Many of these same officials then coordinated the continuation of religious services and instruction in Jesuit schools, as well as the taking of inventory, classification of documents, and the initial valuation of all the exproprtiated assets (Recéndez Guerrero 2000; Martínez Tornero 2008; Abascal Sherwell Raull 2024).

These operations were costly to implement, and many of the expenses in this process were made before the gross revenue was recorded in the Royal Treasuries. A portion of the newly acquired revenue was set aside to pay these officials and their staff (de Fonseca and de Urrutia 1853, V p. 111). Additionally, many former Jesuit schools initially continued to receive financial support through the estates previously owned by the Jesuits and now managed by the Crown. Finally, expenses related to the unrest that the expulsion created were also covered by the *temporalidades* (de Fonseca and de Urrutia 1853, V p. 114).

In 1769, regional boards were established across the empire to oversee the sale and transfer of properties. These boards wer staffed by top officials; in New Spain, the superior board included the viceroy, the head of the Audiencia, and the archbishop (Martínez Tornero 2008, p. 553). To help to execute the superior board's plans, a number of subordinate boards were created across the territory. Despite this reorganization, revenue from *temporalidades* remained limited during the 1770s.

This overall pattern of low revenue immediately following the expulsion is visible in Figure 1, which plots the yearly revenue across all Royal Treasuries in New Spain that was recorded as part of the *temporalidades* branch. The data likely represents an incomplete account of the total resources that the Crown derived from Jesuit assets prior to 1784. This is due to the *temporalidades* being managed through a distinct accounting system separate from the main tax administration before that

Figure 1: Revenue from Jesuit Properties



The figure plots the revenue from expropriated Jesuit properties (*temporalidades*) between 1767 and 1821 entered into New Spain's 18 Royal Treasuries. The total amount is incomplete during the first years following the 1767 expulsion, due to a parallel administration of the funds. Jesuit *temporalidades* were incorporated into the Royal Treasury after 1784, which is shaded in grey. Revenue from the indigenous capitation tax, the *tributo*, is also presented, and it illustrates the magnitude of the Jesuit revenue. Data from TePaske and Klein (1982, 1990).

year (de Fonseca and de Urrutia 1853, V pp. 157–158). Additionally, the data does not account for other strategies the Crown employed to generate funds, such as taking loans against accumulated funds. In 1783, these loans reached a significant total of 2.7 million pesos (Marichal 2007, pp. 153-154).

Nevertheless, there are indications that it was not until the 1780s that the revenue from *temporalidades* began to see a significant increase. This was not only because of the large sums that were initially used to cover the expenses of the expulsion, but also because the sales of assets was much delayed, and some actions that were meant to increase revenue were not promptly executed. For example, by 1784, only 3 out of 21 Jesuit schools had completed a full accounting and redistribution of ecclesiastical ornaments to other orders (de Fonseca and de Urrutia 1853, V p. 178). It was not only ththe 1780s that the Crown instructed the sale of some of the ornaments (Recéndez Guerrero

2000, p. 118; Martínez Tornero 2008, p. 556).

Similarly, the sale of Jesuit estates proceeded slowly.[1] This was partly because the high value of the assets reduced the pool of potential private buyers to a select few. Additionally, the process was at times deliberately delayed by officials to facilitate rent-seeking (Abascal Sherwell Raull 2024, pp. 1572-1573). Following the end of the Ango-Spanish war in 1783, the Crown sought to accelerate the process to cover the expenses, and renewed the pressure to tap into the former Jesuit wealth. An edict in 1784 instructed the liquidation of Jesuit assets (Abascal Sherwell Raull 2024, pp. 1571-1572), while another in 1786 directed the boards to reduce the valuation of Jesuit goods, enabling their final auction (de Fonseca and de Urrutia 1853, V p. 165).

This process is exemplified in Zacatecas, where auctions only began in 1785, and by 1802, a significant portion of the expropriated properties remained unsold (Recéndez Guerrero 2000, p. 126). Similar delays affected the auction of Jesuit haciendas, which ranked among the most valuable of the seized assets. In Zacatecas, for instance, two of the three Jesuit haciendas were purchased until 1781 by one of New Spain's magnates, Pedro Romero de Terreros, for the substantial sum of over 700,000 pesos. Following his death in 1782, the settlement of his estate further postponed the payment.

As the figure shows, *temporalidades* revenue recorded in the Treasury begins to increase in the late 1780s, and remain substantial for the next decades. After 1790, this revenue represents about 1.4% of the total, surpassing over 3% in some years. This figure is smaller than New Spain's major sources of revenue like mining or the *alcabala* tax—which correspond to about 15% and 4.5% of total revenue, respectively—but is of comparable magnitude to the Indigenous poll tax (2.1%). These funds were used, in part, to pay for the sizeable pension that the Crown assigned to all exiled Jesuits and other related expenses. However, the revenue generated from *temporalidades* in New

[1] Other valuable Jesuit properties were directly transferred to the other regular orders and to the secular clergy, in part to guarantee the continuity of religious services, but also to reassure the church that the expulsion was narrowly directed at the Jesuits (Recéndez Guerrero 2000, p. 106).

Spain alone was more than sufficient to cover these costs across all of Spanish America, and still leave a sizeable surplus.[2]

In short, despite challenges in managing the extensive Jesuit operations and the diversion of a portion of the wealth to other religious orders and private actors through corruption, the Crown ultimately experienced substantial material benefits from the expulsion. This windfall, although delayed, was significant, even if it did not fully meet the pre-expulsion exaggerated expectations of vast Jesuit riches.

4.2 Political Order in New Spain

We now turn to examine the consequences of the expulsion on political order. Following the publication of the expulsion decree and its subsequent execution in 1767, a series of large revolts roiled the territory. These were mostly concentrated in regions to the north of Mexico City, where the Jesuit order had wielded significant influence.

In some areas, this wave of violence seems to have been triggered by the expulsion itself, while in others it seems to have served as a focal point to reignite and intensify already existing unrest. In San Luis de la Paz, where the Jesuits held two nearby estates and a school, for example, the secretive implementation of the expulsion was accidentally discovered, as residents confused the Crown agent charged with executing it with an undercover priest that would seek to take over the town's church. This led to the mobilization of thousands—most of the town's population —, who, while not expecting the outright expulsion of the order, had been concerned about the secularization of their parish. The rioters were able to block the implementation of the order for a few days, until a militia was raised to enforce it (Castro Gutiérrez 1996, p.115–120).

In two other significant instances—in Guanajuato, and in San Luis Potosi and its vicinity—the Jesuits operated large rural estates and urban schools. In these regions, unrest emerged a few weeks

[2] In 1783, the Crown instructed that the *temporalidades* in the Americas should remit 11,255,380 reales to pay for these expenses between 1767 and 1783, and then a yearly 2,500,000 reales from that year forward (Martínez Tornero 2013, pp. 302). Using the nominal exchange rates in García Martínez (1968) to convert these figures into silver pesos, these figures correspond to under 60% of the total (and incomplete) *temporalidades* recorded by the Royal Treasury in New Spain between 1767 and 1821.

before the expulsion's proclamation, sparked by new regulations on weapons and vagrancy, as well as by conscriptions to staff the newly established militias. Nevertheless, in both towns, these initial disturbances intensified significantly upon the expulsion's announcement (Castro Gutiérrez 1996; Benavides Martínez 2016; Florek 2008).

Across all these cases, the Jesuits themselves immediately complied with the authorities and actively collaborated in efforts to peacefully demobilize the rebels. Despite these efforts, residents expressed their dismay at the announcement of the order. The expulsion decree not only provided a focal point to coordinate potential rioters but also represented a significant grievance. Apart from the reactions of the rioters, who were predominantly mine workers and commoners from these towns, the local elite also responded unfavorably to the expulsion. In Guanajuato, Castro Gutiérrez (1996, p. 156–157) observes that local authorities unsuccessfully sought the assistance of prominent figures to raise militias to suppress the rebellion. Instead, several of these notables were later implicated for openly supporting the uprising; some mine managers even instructed their workers to ally with the rebels to defend the Jesuits and facilitated their arming.

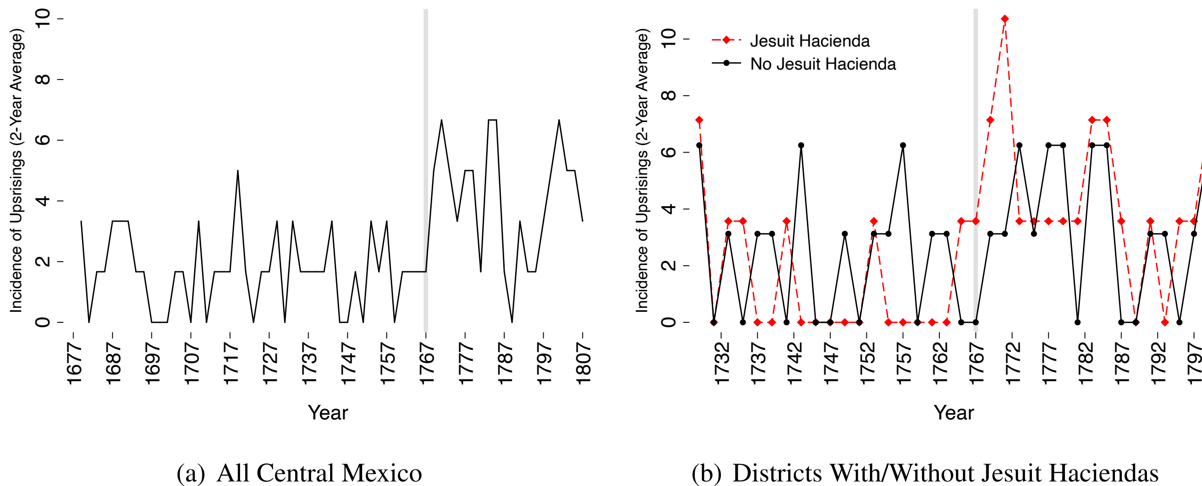
Beyond these notable cases of large revolts, we can examine the patterns of rural uprisings in central and southern Mexico. These uprisings were generally smaller in scale than the urban revolts in the central-north region and typically involved localized attacks on authorities that did not spread beyond a single community and were controlled within a few days. The available documentation suggests that these uprisings were far from revolutionary actions; instead, they were often aimed at restoring some customary equilibrium (Taylor 1979).

Triggering factors explicitly highlighted in archival sources include the imposition or enforcement of new or higher taxes, labor drafts, land and other local political disputes between towns, quarantine requirements by authorities, and internal factionalism. In addition to these economic and political triggers, religious factors were often cited as a major cause. Relatively minor events, such as refurbishing the town chapel, refusing to preach in the native language, or a priest moving their place of residence, are mentioned (Taylor 1979, p. 137). The sudden expulsion of the Jesuits would

have undoubtedly disrupted the economic, political, and religious equilibrium in communities near the order's estates, potentially sparking these types of violent outbursts.

To assess this possibility, we digitize data from Taylor (1979), who compiled these events, and match it to the colonial district the territorial administrative unit in place by 1786. The data includes information on 30 districts in central Mexico and Oaxaca from 1680 to 1810. These data suggests a noticeable increase in rural uprisings following the 1767 expulsion (left panel of Figure A.1). The average incidence of uprisings increased from 1.6% in the decade prior to the expulsion (1757–1766) to 4.3% in the following decade (1767–1776).

Figure 2: Uprisings in Central Mexico, 1680–1808



(a) All Central Mexico (b) Districts With/Without Jesuit Haciendas

The figure on the **left** plots the proportion of districts that experienced an uprising in central Mexico between 1680 and 1808. The figure on the **right** compares the proportion of of uprisings in district with and without Jesuit haciendas.

While this pattern suggests a generalized increase in unrest as a result of the expulsion, other changes occurred during this period across New Spain. Notably, the formation of new militias in the 1760s direclty led to resistance, as in the cases described above (e.g., Archer 1987). Another important event was the general inspection by osé de Gálvez, which set the stage for the extensive Bourbon reforms. While these were mostly carried out in the 1770s and 1780s, Gálvez implemented several administrative and regulatory changes during the inspection itself, including the enforcement of older legislation, the reorganization of customs offices, the establishment of a tobacco monopoly,

an edict that facilitated peonage labor (e.g., de Fonseca and de Urrutia 1853; Zavala 1944; Smith 1948; Jáuregui 1999), among others, some of which may have directly incited unrest. To be able to account for such colony-wide events over time, we compiled data on all Jesuit estates—haciendas, ranches, grain, and sugar—that were expropriated as part of the expulsion decree. This allows us to compare the trajectory of areas with Jesuit influence, where local economic, political, and religious relations would have been most disrupted, to areas without direct Jesuit presence.

Of the 112 estates reported in de Fonseca and de Urrutia (1853), we are able to match 110 to their corresponding colonial district. In the central and southern Mexico sample with rural uprisging information, 14 out of 30 districts have at least one Jesuit estate. As illustrated in the right panel of Figure A.1, the surge in uprisings following the expulsion is more pronounced in districts with Jesuit estates, which experienced a notable increase in the years that followed.

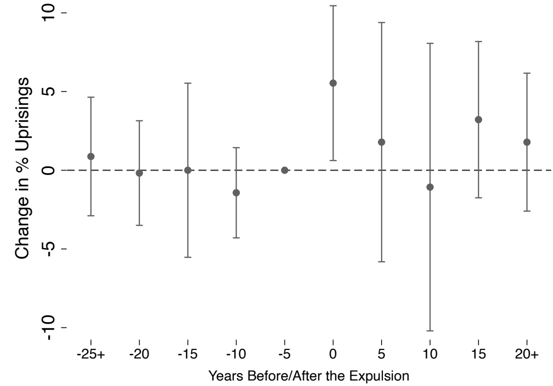
In Table 1, we present difference-in-differences estimates of the expulsion's impact on rural uprisings. The estimates remain consistent across specifications with and without time-invariant geographic and time-interacted climatic covariates (columns 2 and 1). The results indicate that in the aftermath of the expulsion, districts with Jesuit presence experienced a 3 percentage point increase in violent unrest episodes, compared to districts without Jesuit influence. This effect represents a substantial relative increase; it is double the pre-expulsion yearly average, and one-third of the within-district standard deviation in pre-expulsion unrest levels. The event study illustrated in Figure 3 further reveals that the expulsion's impact was particularly pronounced in the immediate five-year period following the event, which is consistent with the idea that it not only might have generated grievance among the rural population, but especially that it disrupted local economic, political, and religious relations. Additionally, the event study analysis shows that the pre-expulsion trends in districts with and without Jesuit presence were parallel, lending credibility to the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption in this context.

Table 1: The Expulsion of the Jesuits and Uprisings in Central Mexico

	Rural Uprisings (1680–1808)	
	(1)	(2)
Jesuit Hacienda × Post Expulsion	0.026**	0.034**
	(0.013)	(0.015)
	{0.012}	{0.014}
	[0.048]	[0.075]
Palmer Drought Severity Index	No	Yes
Controls × Year FE	No	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes
Pre-Expulsion Within-District Mean of DV	0.016	0.015
Pre-Expulsion Within-District SD of DV	0.093	0.089
R sq.	0.056	0.259
Observations	3840.000	3712.000
Number of districts	30.000	29.000

OLS estimations of equation $Uprising_{i,t} = \beta Jesuit\ Estate_i \times post\ 1767_t + \Theta_t X_i + \Pi U_{i,t} + \lambda_t + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{it}$, where $Uprising_{i,t}$ indicates whether there was any violent outburst in district i in year t; $Jesuit\ Estate_i$ is an indicator for any Jesuit estate in the district; $post\ 1767_t$ is an indicator for the post-expulsion period; λ_t and γ_i represent year and district fixed effects; $U_{i,t}$ are time-verying controls, including the average and standard deviation of the district's Palmer Drought Severity Index (a measure of within-district climatic variation); X_i, is a vector of time-invariant covariates interacted with each year indicator, including latitude, longitude elevation, surface area, log distance to Mexico City, and maize suitability; and $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ is an error term. The unit-of-analysis is the district-year. Standard errors (clustered a the district level) in parentheses. Standard errors that allow for serial correlation within districts and spatial correlation between districts within 250 km from each other in curly brackets. Wild-cluster bootstrap p-values are in brackets.

Figure 3: Event Study of the Expulsion of the Jesuits



The figure displays the point estimates and 95% confidence intervals of decade-by-Jesuit Hacienda interactions from a dynamic panel regression that includes district and decade fixed effects. The initial lead is equal to 1 for every 5-year period prior to 25 years before the expulsion, and the final lag is equal to 1 for every 5-year period beginning 20 years after the expulsion. The omitted category corresponds to the 5-year period before the expulsion. The confidence intervals are based on standard errors that allow for serial correlation within districts and spatial correlation between districts within 250 km.

5. The Longer-Term Consequences of the Jesuit Expulsion

As the previous section describes, the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish Empire brought some political and fiscal advantages in New Spain, but these benefits were tempered by the loss of Jesuit intermediary institutions and a wave of social unrest that affected much of the colony. These downsides did not exactly come as a surprise to the Crown. Contemporary accounts indicate that the officials were well aware that the expulsion would be politically disruptive in areas, especially in places where the Jesuits had been especially powerful, such as the northwest frontier or the mining centers of the Bajío (e.g., Brading 1994; Tutino 2011). The question facing the Crown was not whether there would be costs to the expulsion—officials knew there would be, and there were—but rather whether these risks exceeded the longer-term benefits of disempowering the Jesuits

as potential rivals and taking control of their extensive assets.

Taking this perspective, the outcome of the expulsion was not immediately clear. The political unrest in 1767 was explosive, but it was ultimately contained to a few regions and quickly brought under control using the Crown's expanding military power and the private militias of cooperating elites (e.g., Taylor 1979, p. 122; Brading 1994, p. 5; Tutino 2011, p. 237–244). Similarly, though the loss of Jesuit missionaries had been unquestionably disruptive to governance along the northwest frontier, this also had uncertain longer-term consequences as officials (and most famously Gálvez himself) saw the expulsion as an opportunity to fill the resulting power vacuum with direct agents of the Crown (Kessell 2002, p. 260–271).

For a time, it looked as if the expulsion might have succeeded in achieving these longer-term goals, or at least that the Crown had proven capable of weathering the political backlash to the unpopular policy. However, the legacies of the expulsion for colonial politics were complex, and not all were evident immediately. In the end, it was not the immediate backlash but the longer-term indirect political consequences of the expulsion that proved hardest for the Crown to overcome.

5.1 Impacts on Governance

The wave of unrest described in the previous section proved damaging, but temporary. In fact, the political response to the uprisings provided an opportunity for the Crown to showcase its growing strength. Far from making concessions to defuse the crisis, officials responded with an unprecedented wave of severe repression.

The Crown had traditionally taken a somewhat conciliatory approach to containing rural unrest in Mexico. Officials seldom resorted to collective punishment of rebelling communities and often favored mercy even when it came to the purported leaders of uprisings (Taylor 1979, p. 120–122). In aftermath of the 1767 uprisings, by contrast, the Crown not only meted out severe punishments to participating individuals—including a wave of executions, lashings, and sentences to exile or forced labor—it also resorted to broader strategies of repression, up to and including the abolition of municipal governments and religious institutions in rebelling communities (Taylor 1979, p. 122;

Brading 1994, p. 6; Tutino 2011, p. 148–156). (Taylor 1979) characterizes the harsh policy as"the unbending response of a leading peninsular reformer [visitor-general José de Gálvez] who had little understanding of the delicate divide-and-rule policies that had governed the Mexican countryside for two centuries" (p. 122).

This heavy-handed approach could have backfired, but it did not, at least not right away. In his efforts to contain popular unrest, Gálvez found common cause with many local elites, who willingly lent their resources and private militias to bolster the Crown's repressive apparatus, even as many privately opposed the terms of the expulsion (e.g., Brading 1994, p. 5; Tutino 2011, p. 248–256). Gálvez and the Crown proved resilient to high-level political defection as well. Several very highly placed colonial officials in Mexico City had attempted to undermine Gálvez's authority in the wake of the Jesuit expulsion, in part by spreading rumors about his loyalty and morality, only to find themselves expelled back to Spain after the viceroy sided with the visitor-general and accused the dissidents of subversion against the Crown (Brading 1994, p. 4–5). As Tutino (2011) notes, when faced with unrest following the Jesuit expulsion, provincial elites could have joined popular resistance against the Crown in defense of their former teachers and clergy, but they instead chose to join the "alliance for repression" led by Gálvez (p. 255).

Bolstered by his successes, Gálvez turned his attention to broader reforms over taxation, regulation, and bureaucratic oversight, not just in heavily affected areas like Guanajuato, but across the colony as a whole. As a large literature describes, the Bourbon Reforms would eventually radically remake colonial institutions and usher in a period of unprecedented peninsular control and a sharp increase in revenue collection for the Crown. The Jesuit expulsion was far from the only contributor to this broader administrative and ideological shift, but historians have highlighted the crisis as an important watershed moment in the trajectory of colonial rule in Mexico, which would henceforth be less conciliatory and more coercive (e.g., Knight 2002, p. 267; Brading 1994, p. 7; Tutino 2011, p. 255–6). In the words of David Brading, the Jesuit expulsion and its aftermath demonstrated that "[h]enceforth Leviathan would brook no rivals in the exercise of state power" (Brading 1994, p. 16).

Somewhat less successful was the Bourbon attempt to extend state power to the northwest frontier in the aftermath of the expulsion. Some of Gálvez's goals were achieved. The seizure of Jesuit missions in the northwest helped to accelerate a pre-existing trend toward secularization in places like Sinaloa and Nayarit (Gerhard 1993*b*, p. 22–3, p. 228). In disbanding Jesuit missions, Gálvez also expanded the administrative reach of the Crown as this implicitly reclassified mission populations as full "tribute-paying citizens" who would be in principle responsible for paying the head tax (Kessell 2002, p. 267). As noted earlier, the classification of indigenous groups in the northwest as "neophytes" outside of Crown control had been a major source of conflict between the Crown and Jesuits prior to the expulsion. More generally, the Jesuit expulsion provided an opportunity for reformers to revisit the long-standing approach to governing the north. Gálvez himself became personally invested in this effort, traveling to California to oversee the reallocation of mission land, the appointment of local tax officials, the creation of secular schools, and even the inventorying of supplies to be shipped up the coast from San Blas (Kessell 2002, p. 264).

The results of this last effort were more mixed. Following the expulsion, a "political and military" government under Crown control was established in California for the first time (Gerhard 1993*b*, p. 292–3). As viceroy, Gálvez further created a new supreme authority to oversee the governance of the north, a *Comandante General de las Provincias Internas*, and handpicked a political ally to serve in this position (Gerhard 1993*b*, p. 16; Kessell 2002, p. 270). However, Gálvez was forced to roll back and reverse some of his more ambitious efforts to extend state control. After the expulsion, longstanding conflicts against the Seris and other groups worsened, and the Apaches took advantage of the diversion of military effort to expand attacks against newly arrived settlers and officials (Kessell 2002, p. 260–268). Left without their traditional intermediaries in the region, the Jesuits, the Crown was forced to bear the costs of containing these conflicts directly with somewhat more limited success (Kessell 2002, p. 271; Knight 2002, p. 266).

The Crown used familiar solutions to address these problems. After Gálvez's preferred hardline approach proved highly ineffective at controlling conflict in the north, he resorted to the much

older colonial strategy of pacification through trade, bargaining, and conciliation (Kessell 2002, p. 271). Gálvez was also forced to abandon his efforts to administer Jesuit missions directly under the Crown, eventually turning control over to a new set of intermediaries: Franciscan and (to a lesser extent) Dominican missionaries, who would take on new powers of their own (Gerhard 1993*b*, p. 21, p. 293–4; Kessell 2002, p. 266–7). The northwest frontier was thus never brought under solid control of the Bourbon Crown. As Kessell (2002) writes, "Despite threats by secular absolutists... missionaries stood out on New Spain's contested northern frontier as boldly in the late eighteenth century as they ever had" (p. 272). In contrast to the experience in central Mexico, the aftermath of the Jesuit expulsion drew attention to the limits of state power along the frontier.

5.2 The War of Independence

In the end, however, the more severe threat to Spanish rule would originate in the center, not the far north. Though officials succeeded in controlling the immediate wave of unrest that followed the Jesuit expulsion, the adverse political legacies of this event would prove to be longer-lasting. Though they had largely sided with Gálvez in 1767, the Jesuit expulsion had damaged the credibility of the Crown with creole elites, many of whom had been the students of Jesuit teachers and the benefactors of Jesuit institutions. Tensions with the Crown would only grow in the aftermath of the expulsion as a series of other reforms were implemented that seemingly favored the state and *peninsulares* at the expense of local elites, including an overhaul of local tax collection, a redrawing of administrative boundaries, and an expansion of the fiscal bureaucracy that brought an influx of new officials from Spain to the colony (e.g., Knight 2002, p. 245).

While there were many contributors to the growing cleavage between the creole elites and the Crown, the Jesuit expulsion had an important symbolic as well as material influence. As noted previously, the Jesuits had been seen as politically aligned with the creole elite prior to the expulsion and had in fact sided with local elites against the Crown on several notable occasions, such as during the 1624 riots in Mexico City that ended with the removal of the viceroy. As a result of their conflicts with the Crown, the Jesuits had become seen as particularly "vocal and telling critics

of European ethnocentrism...whose expulsion typified Spanish colonial tyranny" (Knight 2002, p. 281). Some expelled Jesuit scholars and clergy, many of whom were Mexican by birth, became staunch advocates of Mexican culture and interests while in exile. One notable example is the American-born Jesuit historian Francisco Javier Clavijero, whose influential writing would extoll the Aztec civilization as "greatly superior to that which the Phoenicians and Carthaginians found in our Spain" and the Nahuatl language as "as euphonious a language as German or Polish" (qtd. Knight 2002, p. 281). In addition to bolstering patriotic sentiment, these writings served to reinforce the popular representation of the Jesuit expulsion as an example of peninsular overreach at the expense of creole—and specifically *Mexican*—interests (e.g., Brading 1994; Knight 2002).

Elite grievances over the expulsion remained largely dormant, though tensions periodically arose during conflicts with the Crown over other matters (e.g., Knight 2002, p. 280–1). These issues became especially salient decades later, however, when a series of imperial crises severely tested creole elites' loyalties to the Crown at the turn of the nineteenth century. Facing a fiscal crisis in Spain, authorities attempted a series of highly unpopular reforms to raise revenue across the Empire, including the consolidation of royal bonds, a measure that entailed the expropriation of resources from creole educational, religious, and social institutions across the colony. The crisis deepened greatly a few years later when Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808, ousting the king from power and precipitating an attempted coup against the viceroy in Mexico City. That same year, a major drought exacerbated tensions by sparking a subsistence crisis in the countryside.

As we and others have written, preexisiting elite and popular grievances made it difficult for the Crown to weather these shocks and contributed to the crisis growing out of control, culminating in the outbreak of the Hidalgo Revolt of 1810 and Mexico's War of Independence (e.g., Tutino 1988; 2011; Garfias and Sellars 2022). Building on the sizable historical literature on this case, we examine how the lingering consequences of the Jesuit expulsion may have contributed to this event.

To do this, we use data from Ortiz Escamilla (2014) on insurgent activity during Mexico's War of Independence (1810–1821). The main outcome variable is the number of insurgent events taking

place in a given district (i.e., the 1786 administrative unit). In the appendix, we examine a binary indicator for whether any insurgent activity took place in the district as an alternative outcome. We examine the conditional correlations between insurgent activity and two measures of exposure to Jesuit influence. The first measure is whether the district contained a Jesuit hacienda as of 1767 using the de Fonseca and de Urrutia (1853) data described earlier. The second is whether the district contained a Jesuit school as of 1767 using data from Osorio Romero (1979), a measure of the local elite's exposure to Jesuit education.[3]

In some specifications, we incorporate a series of geographic control variables to condition on other known contributors to the conflict. These include the mean and standard deviation of drought conditions in 1808 as measured by the Palmer Drought Severity Index (Cook and Krusic 2004), potential agricultural maize suitability (from the FAO), log elevation and area of the district, log distance to Mexico, and the latitude and longitude of the district centroid.

Table 2: The Expulsion of the Jesuits and Insurgency During Mexico's Independence War, 1810–1821

	Number of Insurgent Events, 1810–1821					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Jesuit Estate by 1767	1.378*	0.639			0.806	-0.099
	(0.761)	(0.769)			(0.501)	(0.599)
	{1.015}	{0.860}			{0.536}	{0.429}
Jesuit School by 1767			3.382*	3.967**	3.028*	4.005**
			(1.939)	(1.920)	(1.814)	(1.871)
			{2.252}	{2.064}	{2.042}	{1.989}
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean of DV	2.000	2.157	2.000	2.157	2.000	2.157
SD of DV	3.802	3.927	3.802	3.927	3.802	3.927
R sq.	0.027	0.199	0.070	0.280	0.078	0.280
Observations	195.000	178.000	195.000	178.000	195.000	178.000

OLS estimations. The unit of analysis is the district. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Spatial standard errors in curly brackets.

The results are presented in Table 2. In the first two columns, we examine the correlation between insurgency and the presence of a Jesuit hacienda in 1767 with and without the vector of geographic

[3]We considered a third measure of Jesuit influence, whether an area was in a Jesuit missionary district in 1808, but there was no documented insurgent activity in Ortiz Escamilla (2014) in this area or anywhere along the northwest frontier.

controls. We then examine the correlation between the insurgency and the presence of Jesuit schools in columns 3 and 4 (with and without controls respectively). In columns 5 and 6, we examine both measures of Jesuit influence simultaneously. We report both heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors and standard errors that allow for spatial correlation of districts within 250 km in curly brackets.

Looking first at Jesuit haciendas, the coefficient estimates are generally positive, indicating that areas with Jesuit haciendas experienced somewhat more insurgent activity during the conflict. However, the estimates are not statistically significant at conventional levels when incorporating the control variables or conditioning on the presence of Jesuit schools, which were often located in nearby areas (e.g., Tutino 2021). The sign of the estimate also flips when using the saturated model with both controls and the schools measure in column 6.

There is stronger evidence of a positive relationship between the number of insurgent events and the presence of Jesuit schools. These coefficient estimates are positive, larger in magnitude, and statistically significant at conventional levels in all specifications. The estimates indicate that districts containing a Jesuit school as of 1767 saw on average 3–4 more insurgent events during the conflict as compared to others. This magnitude is stable across specifications, corresponding to about three-quarters to a full standard deviation of the outcome variable.

This cross-sectional evidence is generally consistent with other work on Mexico's War of Independence. Though most insurgents were commoners, elite divisions and grievances played an important role in shaping commoners' incentives to join the rebellion, allowing the conflict to spread across the territory (Tutino 1988; 2011; Garfias and Sellars 2022). The legacies of the Jesuit expulsion on shaping the political consciousness and grievances of the creole elite have been emphasized in other work, particularly as focused on the early wave of the conflict in the Bajío region where Jesuit influence had been strong (e.g., Knight 2002, p. 280–1; Tutino 2011, p. 248–256).

As the qualitative literature also emphasizes, the connection between popular grievances over the Jesuit expulsion and insurgency was complicated, which might explain the null finding on

Jesuit estates. The expulsion had an important effect on the political consciousness of non-elites as well, particularly through its impact on the Mexican church and popular Catholicism (Knight 2002, p. 268–269). As compared with the creole elites, however, there is less clear evidence on the connection between this shift in political consciousness and participation in the insurgency, perhaps because less documentation exists on the motivations of commoners relative to the political leadership, or perhaps because variation in commoner activity is better explained by localized concerns rather than national trends (e.g., Tutino 1988; Garfias and Sellars 2022). This was also true of many of the uprisings immediately following the Jesuit expulsion, as we discuss earlier in the paper. The upheaval of the expulsion provided an opportunity for rebellion over other causes. As Tutino (2011) argues, even in places where rioters explicitly mobilized over the treatment of Jesuits, such as in San Luis de la Paz, the appropriation of this cause can be seen as a strategic attempt to bring elites on board with popular appeals over other matters (p. 247).

While uncertainty surrounding the impending expropriation of Jesuit estates provided an opening for rebellion in 1767, it less clear that this would have an effect in 1810 given that many Jesuit estates simply continued to operate under new ownership in the interim. This is not to say that the Jesuit expulsion had no influence on popular participation in the insurgency, but rather that its influence is not likely to be well captured by cross-sectional evidence on the earlier presence of Jesuit estates. There are clear symbolic continuities between the post-1767 wave of uprisings across the Bajío and the Hidalgo revolt of 1810, which originated in the same region (Tutino 1988; 2011). Considerable evidence suggests that the expulsion also had important indirect effects on peasant mobilization, both through its consequences for elite behavior in places like the Bajío and the stress that it placed on colonial institutions elsewhere. Tutino (1988), for example, cites the example of guerrilla conflict in the Sierra Gorda during and after the War of Independence. While there was little if any direct Jesuit presence in this region, local Franciscan missionaries (famously including Junipero Serra) were dispatched to the northwest frontier after the 1767 expulsion, which left the Crown ill-equipped to address later conflicts in this region (p. 198–9).

Taken together, this evidence in this section suggests an interesting and multifaceted connection between the Jesuit expulsion and the outbreak of the War of Independence. There was more insurgent activity in areas where Jesuit schools had been operational prior to 1767, and considerable qualitative evidence ties the Jesuit expulsion to patterns of mobilization and participation in the later crisis. The Jesuit expulsion—which had promised to bolster the political and economic control of the Crown at the expense of intermediaries—-thus contributed to the collapse of Spanish rule.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the causes and consequences of the expulsion of the Jesuit order from New Spain in 1767. The Jesuits had been important allies and intermediaries of the Spanish Crown in the consolidation of colonial rule, but they also represented a threat to power. As religious authorities, the Jesuits could claim legitimacy from a higher power than the king himself. They also controlled considerable resources and commanded a great deal of respect across different segments of colonial society as a function of their roles as educators, missionaries, and employers. The same characteristics that had made the Jesuits uniquely useful partners to the Crown eventually made them uniquely threatening to imperial interests.

Through the 1767 expulsion, the Crown solved some problems for itself while creating others. The direct threat of Jesuit subversion disappeared virtually overnight as Jesuit missionaries, scholars, clergy, and estate operators were sent into exile. The seizure of Jesuits' assets provided a financial windfall for the Crown, albeit a somewhat smaller one than had been imagined in anticipation. Long-running conflicts between Jesuit clergy and the Crown over taxation, political jurisdiction, and religious authority were de facto eliminated, providing an opportunity to extend state authority into new regions and issue areas.

At the same time, this was a very costly and risky strategy for the Crown. In expelling their erstwhile intermediaries, the Crown was forced to pick up the direct and indirect costs of educating citizens, providing social services, and pacifying conflict, and that they were not always well-equipped to handle these duties. The political upheaval of the expulsion further created an opening

for a damaging wave of social unrest. Though the immediate crisis was contained, over the longer term, the popular and elite grievances over the expulsion would contribute to the outbreak of the War of Independence and the eventual collapse of Spanish rule. As Knight (2002) summarizes, in the end "popular Catholicism was more than a match for enlightened reform" (p. 269).

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Online Appendix

The Political Consequences of the Jesuit Expulsion from New Spain

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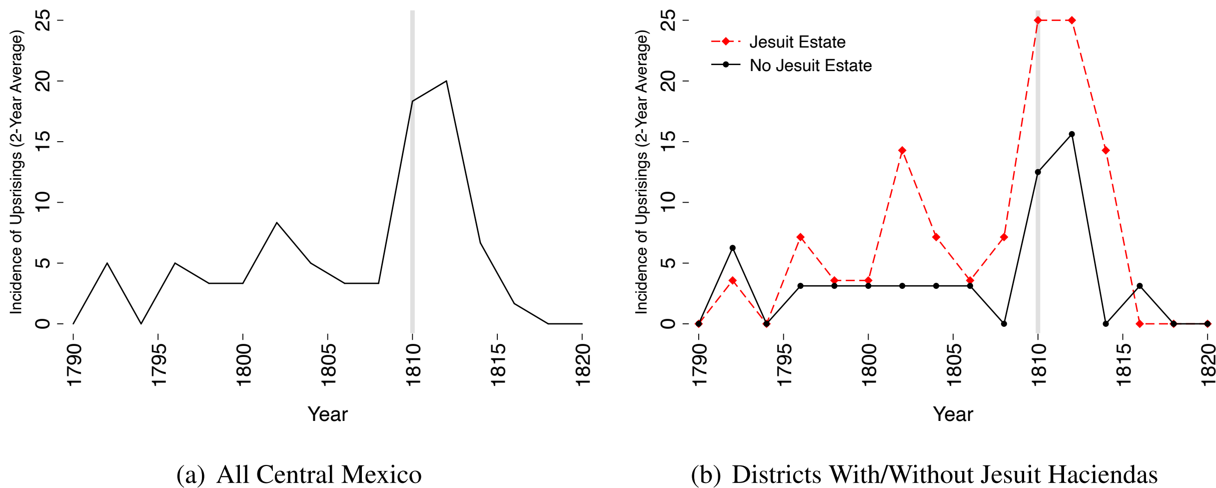
A. Additional Evidence

Figure A.1: Uprisings in Central Mexico, 1790–1821



(a) All Central Mexico

(b) Districts With/Without Jesuit Haciendas

The figure on the **left** plots the proportion of districts that experienced a rural uprising in central Mexico between 1680 and 1808. The figure on the **right** compares the proportion of of uprisings in district with and without Jesuit haciendas.

Table A.1: Uprisings in Jesuit Estates During Mexico's Independence War, 1810–1821

	Rural Uprisings (1790–1821)	
	(1)	(2)
Jesuit Estate × Post 1810	0.030	0.019
	(0.034)	(0.034)
	{0.032}	{0.030}
	[0.405]	[0.611]
Palmer Drought Severity Index	No	Yes
Controls × Year FE	No	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes
Pre-1810 Within-District Mean of DV	0.037	0.036
Pre-1810 Within-District SD of DV	0.115	0.111
R sq.	0.170	0.420
Observations	960.000	928.000
Number of districts	30.000	29.000

OLS estimations of equation $Uprising_{i,t} = \beta Jesuit\ Estate_i \times post\ 1810_t + \Theta_t X_i + \Pi U_{i,t} + \lambda_t + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{it}$, where $Uprising_{i,t}$ indicates whether there was any violent outburst in district i in year t; $Jesuit\ Estate_i$ is an indicator for any Jesuit estate in the district prior to the 1767 expulsion; $post\ 1810_t$ is an indicator for the post-War of Independence period; λ_t and γ_i represent year and district fixed effects; $U_{i,t}$ are time-verying controls, including the average and standard deviation of the district's Palmer Drought Severity Index (a measure of within-district climatic variation); X_i, is a vector of time-invariant covariates interacted with each year indicator, including latitude, longitude elevation, surface area, log distance to Mexico City, and maize suitability; and $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ is an error term. The unit-of-analysis is the district-year. Standard errors (clustered a the district level) in parentheses. Standard errors that allow for serial correlation within districts and spatial correlation between districts within 250 km from each other in curly brackets. Wild-cluster bootstrap p-values are in brackets.

Table A.2: Insurgency in Jesuit Estates During Mexico's Independence War, 1810–1821 (Central and Southern Mexico)

	Any Insurgency		Number of Events	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Jesuit Estate by 1767	0.196	0.118	0.893	0.663^{*}
	(0.186)	(0.140)	(0.554)	(0.367)
	{0.096}	{0.050}	{0.288}	{0.234}
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean of DV	0.467	0.448	1.167	1.172
SD of DV	0.507	0.506	1.510	1.537
R sq.	0.039	0.632	0.090	0.681
Observations	30.000	29.000	30.000	29.000

OLS estimations. See equation (**??**) for the econometric specification. The unit-of-analysis is the district. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table A.3: The Expulsion of the Jesuits and Insurgency During Mexico's Independence War, 1810–1821

	Any Insurgent Activity, 1810-1821					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Jesuit Estate by 1767	0.161**	0.055			0.168**	0.040
	(0.078)	(0.080)			(0.081)	(0.083)
	{0.065}	{0.051}			{0.068}	{0.059}
Jesuit School by 1767			0.038	0.093	-0.036	0.077
			(0.121)	(0.121)	(0.127)	(0.126)
			{0.153}	{0.131}	{0.150}	{0.139}
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean of DV	0.492	0.528	0.492	0.528	0.492	0.528
SD of DV	0.501	0.501	0.501	0.501	0.501	0.501
R sq.	0.021	0.280	0.000	0.281	0.022	0.282
Observations	195.000	178.000	195.000	178.000	195.000	178.000

OLS estimations. See equation (**??**) for the econometric specification. The unit-of-analysis is the district. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

B. Supporting Information References