Armed actors, post-conflict reform, and statebuilding in 19th century Mexico

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Abstract

How do states govern coercion in the aftermath of armed conflict? This paper addresses institutional change in post-conflict societies through the lens of historical state formation. Using evidence from 19th century Mexico, I illustrate how changes in the organisation of coercion help explain variation in statebuilding outcomes and conclude with some reflections on armed actors' potential to serve as building blocks of statebuilding.

On the basis of archival research and a review of the historiography, this paper traces the relationship between armed actors and pre-existing local governance mechanisms in 19th century Mexico, identifying the effects of successive post-conflict reforms on the transformation of decentralised forms of "armed (dis)order". Finally, I suggest that historical analysis provides a critical point of reference in order to inform contemporary debates about "statebuilding", "peacebuilding" or "security sector reform", as well as reassessing governance patterns in the Global South.

1. Introduction

How do states govern coercion in the aftermath of armed conflict? Studying states' efforts to modify the organisation of public and private violence through their interaction with armed actors provides a privileged vantage point to revisit this question. This chapter addresses institutional change in post-conflict societies through the lens of historical state formation.[1] Using evidence from 19th century Mexico I illustrate how changes in the organisation of coercion help explain variation in statebuilding outcomes. In particular, revisiting the work Charles Tilly, this papers shows how greater attention to armed group dynamics and pre-existing governance mechanisms can help us move beyond the limitations of Tilly's orthodox telling of state formation in early modern Europe.

The analysis focuses on large-scale reforms leading to changes in the organization of armed actors, through periods of violent conflict. On this basis, the paper seeks to address two key conceptual challenges in the literature on post-conflict statebuilding and the politics of armed actors. The first challenge concerns the characterisation of non-state coercive actors and their relation to the state. Given that the interaction between armed actors and political order is generally conceived — under a Weberian light — as a dichotomous opposition between states' efforts to monopolise legitimate coercion and outright anarchy, there is a tendency to portray armed actors as symptoms of state weakness, manifestations of incomplete statehood or as subservient "proxies" of the state or powerful elites (Chandler and Sisk 2013, p. xx).[2]

The second gap, on the other hand, concerns predominant explanations of institutional and organisational change, particularly in the context of armed violence and post-conflict transitions. Approaches that conceptualise institutional outcomes as the product of deliberate designs (in response

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[1] Egnell and Haldén (2013, p.1) stress the need to take into account the "centuries of context-specific social conflict, historically contingent processes and institutional learning and adaptation" behind state formation, as well as the importance of bridging research into historical state formation and contemporary statebuilding.

[2] Historians have often described nonstate armed actors as remnants of traditional and patrimonial politics destined to disappear once that political modernisation and the monopolisation of coercion ran their course. Recent studies on contemporary warlords and militias have displayed an impressive lack of historical awareness and come up with some surprising conclusions: such as calls for "learning to live with militias" or the need for understanding contemporary conflicts in Somalia and Afghanistan as a peculiar form of warfare prevalent among "traditional peoples" (respectively, Ahram 2011, pp. 130-140 and Shultz and Dew 2006, pp. 12-14).

to pre-determined choices and structural constraints)[3] — for example, in the context of contemporary DDR and peacebuilding initiatives driven by the international community — have shown the tendency obscure the context-dependent interaction between local actors, state institutions, and the different forms of providing order and security on the ground. Historical narratives that present the monopolisation of coercion by centralised states as part of a natural progression towards the development of modern political institutions are closely related — in normative and conceptual terms — with contemporary "technocratic" and "broken machine" approaches to statebuilding (Berdal and Zaum 2013, p. 6; Ellis 2005, p.6; Menkhaus 2010, p. 176).

Amid these conceptual challenges, a critical evaluation of historical statebuilding is urgently needed as an empirical and conceptual "reality" check for policy debates on statebuilding (Egnell and Haldén 2013, p.3; Vu 2010, p. 150). Given the limited materials available, the goal set out in this paper, however, is much more modest. I outline a framework connecting post-conflict institutional reforms and historical statebuilding and, on the basis of archival research and a review of the historiography on 19th century Mexico, we illustrate this framework and the potential for further research along these lines.[4]

Nineteenth century Mexico provides an ideal scenario to address questions about the interaction between armed groups and state building efforts. Armed conflict and political mobilisation, as in many parts of in 19th century Latin America, involved a large number of locally-grounded armed actors and pre-existing (colonial) governance mechanisms, and had a significant impact on the emergence of national-level state institutions. More importantly, the "precocity" confronted by the ambitious projects of Mexican statebuilders — pressed "to meet challenges and attain goals far ahead of their institutional development … and political dilemmas that still haunt states today" (Centeno and Ferraro 2013, p. 7) — raises timely questions about contemporary efforts to engineer peace, the rule of law, and good governance in many developing societies (Fukuyama, 2004; Krause, 2012).

Following a brief introduction to the conceptual framework, the paper introduces armed actor configurations and their links to pre-existing local governance mechanisms in 19th century Mexico. Subsequently, the paper traces the transformation of decentralised forms of "armed (dis)order" through post-conflict reforms and contrasts their outcomes with Charles Tilly's account of state formation in early modern Europe. I conclude with some reflections on armed actors' potential to serve as building blocks of statebuilding, through periods of violent conflict, and their profound effects on its subnational outcomes.

[3] Historical evidence on the other hand suggests that, rather than deliberate designs, political institutions are thoroughly affected by contingency, path dependency, and cleavage dynamics that are not effectively captured by macro-level comparative research designs. In particular, cleavage dynamics and the effects of micro-macro linkages shaping the structure of violence and post-conflict institutional outcomes have not been effectively theorised.

[4] More detailed and better quality historical data is required in order to complement inquiries into contemporary patterns of insecurity and political violence and, in conclusion, we suggest that historical analysis can (and, perhaps, even *should*) provide a critical point of reference in order to evaluate the underlying assumptions behind contemporary debates about "statebuilding", "peacebuilding", "security sector reform", as well as reassessing governance patterns in the Global South.

2. Armed actors, violent orders and statebuilding

In many parts of the world, insurgent militias, private security forces, and criminal networks — "armed actors"— closely interact with state organizations, such as regular military and security forces where coercive resources and expertise concentrate (Schlichte 2009, Staniland 2012, 2015a). While traditionally portrayed as states' unconditional proxies or clients, recent research has highlighted the polymorphic interaction between states and armed actors in violent settings that range from riots, militarized elections, and civil wars (Staniland 2012, 2015a, 2015b).

Modern day Afghanistan, for example, provides a powerful illustration of one form of "armed order" in which the state has had to "waive the goal of maintaining a monopoly of violence ... [because of] the persistence of warlords or militia commanders" with autonomous armed forces. Moreover it remains a cautionary example of a post-conflict environment in which, despite significant international efforts towards security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), a form of "privatised militarism" persists (Mac Ginty 2013, p. 23).[5] In Somalia, another case of proverbial "state failure", scholars have identified "new hybrid political orders ... [that build on] a combination of religious practice (i.e. Islam), clan-based order and evolving neighbourhood/village/city definitions of order and governance" (Bøås 2013, p.55).

A growing body of literature seeks to describe and analyse governance patterns present in places where the Weberian state has remained an elusive goal. Research on militias and counterinsurgency strategies in Africa, for example, has shown that insurgents' strategies and state responses both reflect traditional political practices and institutions on the ground — as much as strategic calculation. Militia and counterinsurgency tactics in West Africa also show a strong tendency to reproduce existing structure — namely patronage networks, which have provided "weak" African states with a surprising resilience against (Day and Reno 2014).

Confronted with the prevalence of armed actors and intrastate conflict, scholars have urged for a conceptualisation of statebuilding that focuses on the creation of "sustainable, locally owned systems of governance through which the deep drivers that create social contestation and distributional conflicts can be resolved without resort to violent confrontations" (Chandler and Sisk 2013, p. xx).[6] However, while some argue that these "armed" governance configurations are able to provide a sense of order and security, even amid protracted conflict and violence; critics have questioned whether the notion of "hybrid political orders" really misconstrues the underlying dynamics of "violence and suffering [that] continue unhindered … [amid] disorder and lawlessness" in many of these settings (Hoffman 2009, p. 80). This question requires empirical verification and, more precisely, *historical* comparative analysis of different forms of "wartime" political orders that have shown the potential to develop into "building-blocks" of new versions of statehood over time (Staniland 2012 and Bøås 2013, p.55).

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[5] Mac Ginty (2013, p.23) describes this "*oligopoly of violence*" as an environment in which "multiple sources of armed coercion competing for legitimacy, power and resources" produce a "hybridised security environment in which the Afghan state, its external patrons, paramilitary groups, the Taliban and a substantial portion of the citizenry all bear arms." Criticising "military oligarchy", J.L.M Mora (1856:1:407-458) provided a similar description of 19th century Mexico: "In Mexico, the mistaken view that governments cannot enforce their authority without soldiers has multiplied military organisations … Auxiliary troops, gendarmes, and public security guards and civic militias are all the same thing under different names and have not contributed to the security which states sought to promote through their creation."

[6] Inquiries into the political economy of statebuilding have also urged for greater recognition of the "alternative systems of power, profit and protection" formed during periods of armed conflict and that persist into peacetime, shaping the character of the post-conflict political economy (Berdal and Keen 1997, p. 797). Many of these actors and violent orders, not only precede the states in which they operate but succeeded in adapting pre-existing institutions and local political practices — such as patronage systems — into state institutions and formal governance mechanisms emerging in the aftermath of violent conflicts (Day and Reno 2014; Reno 2010, 2011).

The congruence between "wartime" orders and their translation into post-conflict state institutions constitutes one of the greatest challenges to Tilly's account of state formation in non-Western societies: The capacity of pre-existing institutions and wartime governance mechanisms to reproduce themselves in post-conflict arrangements and formal state institutions suggests that —, to some extent, they account for some of the functions that in an orthodox interpretation the state is expected to fulfil (Krause and Milliken 2009). After all, contemporary governance configurations in much of the Global South can be characterised by the coexistence of a variety of armed actors and violent (dis)order — with different degrees of legitimacy, organisational efficiency, and fluid micro-macro configurations —, rather than by effective "monopolies of legitimate coercion" and the rule of law (Davis 2008, p. 4).[7]

However, given the lack of historical referents, these varying governance configurations in many violent societies — or the conditions of institutional change in post-conflict settings — are rarely analysed *other* than in opposition to a European or Western standard. Instead, new labels have been coined in order to capture the alleged *sui generis* nature of so-called "post-colonial", "weak/failed/collapsed", "hybrid" and other "deviant" forms of statehood (Milliken and Krause 2002).

Nonetheless, these allusions to hybridity also beg the question of the exemplar Weberian or Western state that is taken as a reference — "hybrid in relation to what?" (Krause 2012).[8]

Armed actors as drivers of "armed orders"

Analysing "alternative" forms of armed (dis)order through the *lens* of historical state formation offers one way of moving beyond the conceptual dichotomies of a Weberian paradigm (Vu 2010; Staniland 2012). Around the world, before modern states claimed the monopoly of public violence, national and local governments coexisted and routinely interacted with armed actors — such as mercantile corporations, rural militias, and even religious organisations — with *legitimate* claims on the deployment of coercion and which pre-dated the territorial states where they operated (Ertman 1997; Holden 2004; Tilly 1985, 1992; Spruyt 1994). Well into the 19th century, states actively encouraged different forms of nonstate violence as means of competing against external threats, as well as providing security and enforcement against domestic competitors (Thomson 1994, Tilly 1992).

The "macro" side of this "war making and state making" story has been thoroughly discussed. However, interpretations that focus on armed conflict and state capacity at a national level often obscure the contradictory mechanisms through which 'weak' states resort to local armed allies and intermediaries in order to secure their authority, as well as the ambiguous roles played by irregular security forces, criminal organisations, and traditional armed groups, in this process. Nevertheless, the micro-level processes and arrangements accompanying this transition remain understudied.[9]

For example, students of the Ottoman Empire, Russia and China, have documented the roles played by armed groups with "fluid identities … [such as] ex-peasants, landless vagrants, students, soldiers, mercenaries, bandits," as providers of security, state intermediaries, or *foci* of resistance at

[7] "In many of these locations, specialized paramilitary forces and police now replace the national military on the front lines of violent conflict, while citizens arm themselves both offensively and defensively as vigilante groups, militias, terrorists, and even mafia organizations seeking to counteract or bypass the state's claim on a monopoly of legitimate force" (Davis 2008, p. 4)

[8] Even the formation of states in early modern Europe involved some degree of hybridisation as "novel 'national' amalgams of civic, ethnic, and state modes of organization and identification" (Ziblatt 2006, pp. 4-5)

[9] The classical "macro" studies followed the tradition of political sociology (Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol 1985; Tilly 1992; Mann 1986). Ertman (1997) offered an eloquent critique of prevailing explanations emphasising the importance of analysing local government and national representative institutions in order to account for variations in regimes. With regards to Latin America, Centeno (2002a, 2013) and López-Alves (2000) have made important contributions to the literature.

different points in time. Scholars have also analysed the interaction between these groups and state elites that led to distinct "paths" of state formation and "styles" of political centralisation (Barkey 1994, p. 22). Nevertheless, the micro-level processes and arrangements accompanying this transition remain understudied.[10] For example, in 19th century Venezuela, through a combination of banditry *and* political incorporation "regional bosses provided 'protection' to the rural populations … [offering] the rural poor a place in their armies." But, rather than Ottoman-style centralisation,[11] this process "contributed to decentralization, because the caudillos and militias ... were better served by prolonging conflict."[12]

As students of political violence have noted, blurred boundaries between armed conflict and criminal violence continues to haunt the region today (Krause 2009). In present-day Latin America, for example, criminal and drug-trafficking organisations, just like the local *caudillos* and military commanders of the 19th century, "often take on the functionally equivalent role of mini-states by monopolizing the means of violence and providing protection in exchange for loyalty and territorial dominion" (Davis 2010; Lupsha 1996).[13]

The literature on statebuilding often displays two key weaknesses. First, many accounts of state formation and the politics of armed actors continue to focus on national level outcomes and macro-level actors, such as states or state elites, which are treated as unitary entities. Secondly, analyses of conflict and post-conflict institutional reform do not always recognise that these processes do not take place on a *tabula rasa* and that pre-existing networks and actors continuously resist or attempt to manipulate external statebuilding efforts (Roberts 2013, p. 94). Finally, there is little recognition of the fact that "a weak of 'failed' state [can] be in the interest of certain local actors" and, consequently, the need to account for *bargaining structures* and *strategies* that shape the interaction between states and decentralised armed actors in these contexts.

In other words, an increased attention to subnational dynamics is an important prerequisite for better comparative historical research and the conceptualisation of causal mechanisms leading to variation in statebuilding outcomes. Conversely, more fine-grained historical data is necessary will be necessary in order to be able analyse the different strategies through which "local elites have actively worked to hollow out the state and its institutions in order to entrench their own power and personal economic interests" (Berdal and Zaum 2013, p.7).

Studying post-conflict reform as statebuilding: transitions between "armed orders"

Armed actor politics and state responses have important effects on their strategies and institutional choices that shape conflict and post-conflict environments — across degrees of competition, accommodation and collaboration (Ramírez González 2011). Historical accounts confirm the salience of the varying "arrangements" between armed groups and state makers identified by recent contributions to the comparative politics literature.

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[11] In 19th century Venezuela, despite its centralising policies, the Government "was unable either to integrate bandits and military chief tenants into the central army or to eliminate them completely. *The state grew stronger in terms of the administration of services and tax collection, but it remained unable to monopolize coercion*" (López-Alves 2000, p. 202, my italics).

[12] For a brief comparison between Ottoman and Venezuelan bandits and their respective states see (López-Alves 2000, pp. 200-203, my italics). See the work of Irwin (1990, 2001) for an account of "violent entrepreneurs" at the service of the Venezuelan state.

[13] For examples of contemporary uses of "disorder" and crime as a political instrument in contemporary Africa, see Bayart *et al.* (1999) and Chabal *et al.* (1999).

Recent contributions provide alternative explanations for observed variation in the way in which armed actors use violence, seek internal and external support, and interact with the state (respectively, Schlichte 2009, P. Krause 2013, Staniland 2012, 2015a, 2015b). Comparative studies have developed interesting frameworks to explain the different forms in which armed actors deploy violence in order to achieve objectives such as territorial control, internal and external legitimacy, and control of economic activities (P. Krause 2013). Over long periods of time, armed actors can be seen as drivers of shifting and unstable "armed orders" — based on local governance mechanisms, such as patronage networks — at the same time they are progressively integrated into nation-wide statebuilding efforts through periods of conflict (collaboration, accommodation, elimination) and post-conflict reform (Reno 2010, p.127, 131).

Intuitively there are two key mechanisms through which nonstate actors and pre-state governance configurations become institutionalised in post-conflict settings. The first concerns the impact of pre-existing practices and forms of organisation on state / armed actor dynamics.[14] Pre-existing structures — such as local and regional representative institutions, political cultures, and ethnic or regional identities — shape crucial aspects of the interaction between statebuilders, armed actors, and local governance mechanisms: These include the relative salience of particular conflict cleavages and identities, ideological affinities, and the distribution of institutional capacity, as well, and other preconditions for *effective* negotiations, alliance-building, and sustained collaboration.[15]

A second mechanism concerns the attempts by state agents and armed actors to maximise ("privatise") the benefits from their interaction.[16] In this regard, Tilly's focus on "*extraction*" as a top-down process through which statebuilders secured the necessary resources from their communities, for example, reflects a bias in the European experience: where rulers already counted with significant capacity *vis-à-vis* other social actors (presumably because of the intensity of interstate warfare and geopolitical competition). On the contrary, in many developing societies and post-conflict settings nonstate domestic and external actors often dwarf state institutions. Given "the relative weakness of state institutions and the relative strength of traditional communities and authorities," in contemporary Africa, for example, "governments have come to rely on the latter for performing certain state functions, thus contributing to a resurgence of customary rule albeit in partly (new forms and with new functions)" (Boege *et al.* 2009, p.22).

Similarly, many contemporary post-conflict settings, rather than top-down "extraction", display attempts at *both* top-down and bottom-up appropriation and accommodation among those caught in the "business of survival" (Andreas 2008). Armed actors are often incorporated into formal state institutions, along with their patronage networks, political cultures, and traditional governance

[14] Commonly these have been understood in dichotomous terms as *either* consisting of material structures or ideational factors (i.e. *mentalités*). Therefore students of state formation have tended to define "stateness" in terms of its economic and institutional factors, on the one hand, or political culture as the essential elements of "stateness" *cf.* Haldén (2013), Harste (2013), Lemay-Hébert (2013) and Roberts (2013). I believe that a dynamic approach to armed actors and their interaction with the state can help us go beyond this dichotomy. Regarding the need for a joint "institutional" and "functional" approach to statebuilding see Milliken and Krause (2002).

[15] Ertman (1997) pioneered this line of research, providing a powerful critique of predominant accounts of state formation in early modern Europe (Tilly 1992, Mann 1986). More recently, Ziblatt (2006) and Hallenberg have (2013) further demonstrated the importance of analysing the interaction between local institutions and the national government structures. The institutionalist literature have proposed different analytical framework to analyse the structural conditions of coalition-building through the notion of "credible commitment" and its impact on economic development (Bates 2010; North *et al.* 2013; and Haber *et al.* 2003).

[16] While states' efforts to "capture" resources in order to serve their self-seeking purposes has been thoroughly documented (Krueger 1974). However, other than vague references to "popular resistance", the bottom-up efforts by armed actors and pre-existing social networks to capture formal state institutions have not received sufficient attention in the historical literature. Concerning "popular resistance" see (Tilly 1985 and Scott 1990, 1994). Kalyvas' (2006) work on civil wars, for example, has documented the territorial logic through which local actors privatise macro-level conflicts in order to serve parochial interests that have no *a priori* connection with the civil war at large.

practices, in exchange for placing their capacity and resources in the service of the state.[17] In recent post-conflict settings in Africa, for example, "wartime fighting units re-emerge after wars as commercial organizations, as community-based NGOs, and in quasi-administrative roles ... while remaining able to exploit wartime commercial expertise and connections" (Reno 2010, p.135).

For these reasons, we propose studying post-conflict institutional reforms as transitions between different "armed orders". Emphasising a processual understanding of the state, we highlight armed actors' attempts to transcend conflict settings in ways that derive benefits from emerging state institutions while preserving valuable elements of wartime orders — whether autonomy, access to resources, or local cohesion — as they interact with national governments and state institutions (*cf.* Egnell and Haldén 2013, p. 5; Hallenberg 2013, p. 123).

3. Armed actors and violent (dis)order in 19th century Mexico

Nineteenth century Mexico provides an ideal scenario to address questions about the mutually constitutive relations between armed groups and state building efforts. If we emphasise internal conflict and violence, the "collapse of state authority" and political instability, widespread crime and violence, and "revolutionary wars", Independent Mexico displays the features of a weak, failed and occasionally collapsed state. [18] For example, during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts, nonstate armed actors routinely secured territorial control over significant swathes of territory — where they regulated trade, imposed taxes, controlled custom houses and foreign trade and even negotiated with the central government — but they rarely sought to become independent.[19]

National and foreign commentators lamented the effects of widespread armed mobilisation experienced in the aftermath of independence; the intermittent rebellions by military units, either members of the permanent armed forces or local militias; regional elites' resistance to Mexico City efforts to centralise revenue and authority; and the recurrent economic and fiscal crises as the main causes behind these failures.[20] During this period Mexico was constituted as an *empire* (1821-22, 1864-67), a *federal republic* (1824-35, 1847-53, 1857-1917), a *centralist republic* (1835-43, 1843-46), and a *dictatorship* (1854-55).

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[17] This process might be almost identical to the substitution of "indirect rule" with state agents with which Tilly and other do directly engage. However, in our view this remains and *empirical* question and cannot be written off before much more detailed comparative historical analyses documenting the formation of states in non-European societies is available. See also Milliken and Krause's (2002, p. 753-54) review of remaining questions regarding Tilly's conventional story of state formation.

[18] These include revolutionary wars ("sustained military conflicts between insurgents and central governments, aimed at displacing the regime"); political violence ("sustained policies by states or their agents and, in civil wars, by contending authorities that result in deaths of a substantial portion of members of communal or political groups"), and political instability ("major, abrupt shifts in patterns of governance, including state collapse, periods of severe regime instability, and shifts toward authoritarian rule"). See Esty et al. (1998, pp. 27-38), King and Zeng (2001), and Rotberg (2003, p.2).

[19] Mexico continually faced signs of *failure*, such as violent contestation of power among armed factions, armed revolts, civil wars and ethnic conflicts (caste wars), endemic predation by the military during periods of armed conflict, banditry and high levels of rural crime that paralysed transit and internal trade, lack of control over borders, lack of control over natural resources and extraction, lack of control over ports and custom houses and contraband. *Cf.* Fowler (2010, 2012); Gruening (1928, pp. 289-331); Katz (1988); Medina (2012); Merino (2005); Rodriguez (1992); Sinking (1979); Tutino (1986); Vanderwood, 2009).

[20] Contemporary observers emphasised two key dimensions of "failure": (1) political instability ascribed to the emergence of armed violence and governments' predatory habits, as well as (2) governments' incapacity to honour financial commitments, to promote trade and investment, and to provide security (particularly for foreigners and their property) Martin (1863, pp. 89, 108-109, 120-121). See also O'Gorman (1960, p.133), According to Stevens (1991, p. 117, en.2), "this interpretation was especially popular in the United States where it appeared to justify the annexation of Texas and the conquest of the northern half of Mexico."

Pre-existing structures and models for armed organisation in 19th century Mexico

As in other instances of historical state formation, at the outset of independence, several armed actors had legitimate access to coercive resources — either because of the institutional inheritance of colonial rule or the creation of new armed forces during a violent process of independence (Koonings and Kruijt 2002a, 2002b). In 19th century Mexico, post-independence statebuilding therefore confronted the institutional frameworks of local and national government, with the *de facto* armed configurations on the ground that had developed during a decade of insurgent warfare (1810-21).

The dynamic interaction between national governments and local governance mechanisms involved a wide range of "levels" and "actors". At the top, the interaction among armed actors and the state — for example between private militias and the national army — entailed differences between competing notions of legitimacy: between the remnants of colonial governance and new republican institutions. At the same time, "hyperlocal" conflict cleavages were also present: such as personal conflicts between *caudillos* and military commanders, neighbouring communities, aggrieved landowners and peasants, which were easily transposed into national politics.

The fact that many subnational governments pre-dated the independent state and statebuilding projects helps explains the significant variation in subnational outcomes of post-conflict institutional reforms.[21] Moreover, it is possible to distinguish alternative legal-institutional frameworks for the organisation of coercion, even when such models were not fully implemented in practice.[22] In the first place, there was a model for the organisation of a (1) *national permanent army* ("*ejército regular*") that built on the royal forces deployed in Mexico before independence and 18th century Spanish regulations (known as "*Ordenanzas Militares*").[23] (2) A second model also built on a colonial precedent: the *"civic" and "regional" militias* organised by local and regional authorities for local security purposes and that could, in cases of extreme need, be deployed as auxiliary units of the regular army.[24]

In practice, this ideal of "virtuous citizens" serving as patriotic soldiers in case of foreign aggression, while providing security within their communities' jurisdiction during times of peace was not fulfilled. On the contrary, these militias became virtual "private armies" in the hands of their patrons — whether provincial governors or military commanders. At first, militias were organised by provincial and municipal governments (particularly, under the federalist regime between 1824 and 1835). However, they soon became a "catch all" category for many locally-organised and privately funded armed units, including those raised by rebellious indigenous communities and political entrepreneurs.[25] Finally, a residual category includes the different (3) *irregular forces* that were active

[21] Despite the huge impact of these groups on political life in 19th century Latin America (given the lack of formal political parties) and constant armed mobilisation (Deas 2002), they have received surprisingly little attention in the historiography and comparative politics literature. Only recently, scholars interested in the history of local governments have begun unearthing rich materials for comparative analysis, including evidence regarding the close connections the institutional capacity of municipal and provincial governments and their role as administrators of locally funded and staffed armed groups under different labels and frameworks (Medina 2007, 2015, Merino 1998, Ruiz 2009).

[22] For example Reno (2011) distinguishes between "reform", "warlord" and "parochial" rebels in African warfare: "Not all of them sought to capture capitals and install a reform agenda. Some wanted secession; others wished to carve out a warlord fiefdom while a few fought to protect their communities from rebels and soldiers alike" (Day and Reno 2014, p.106). Much more archival research is needed in order to better specify some of the apparent contradictions and huge variation displayed by these actors in the19th century. For example, many historians refer indistinctively to the *regular army*, *regional militias* and the *National Guard* as "the military"— thus overlooking the radical differences in organisation and institutional variation among them.

[23] The annual reports of the Ministers of War (*Memorias*) throughout the 1820s, provide an interesting discussion of these projects. For example, *Memoria … de 1823*, Mexico City, 1823, pp. 18, 29-32.

[24] The 1825 report of the Ministry of War provides a lengthy justification for the creation of "civic militias". *Memoria … de 1825,* Mexico City, 1825, pp.6, 7-9.

[25] Many students of military rebellions and 19th century politics mistakenly confuse the "*civic militias*"—organised by municipalities and other rural communities — with the "*provincial militias*" raised by provincial governments during the

in 19th century Mexico, particularly at the local level, such as "self-defence" units raised by landed estates (*haciendas*) or by indigenous communities.[26]

Two key properties of armed actors are particularly important in order to understand their impact on post-conflict transitions. The first once concerns the *institutional hybridity associated with their colonial origins*. Through periods of violent conflict, armed actors built on layers of pre-existing institutional arrangements in order to meet short-term challenges. Therefore their organisational structures, *modus operandi*, and their politics, more generally, reflect a tense combination of old and new institutions, techniques and organisational frameworks.[27] New conjunctural settings, such as new waves of rural insecurity or political conflicts, often called for *improvisation* as an important adaptation mechanism that catered to context-specific environments.[28]

Local governance institutions and mechanisms, furthermore, help explain the origins of many armed actors and their different, often contradictory, "organisational models". These crucial connection with local government, or more generally "governance configurations" on the ground, helps explain how different groups were organised and resourced, the nature and level of formalisation of internal hierarchies, and external alliances.

Therefore, a second property concerns the process of *adaptation at the local level and the "privatisation" of emerging state institutions in post conflict settings*. Armed actors' institutional capacity also determined whether they were patronised by national or regional political coalitions — for example, if they were able to sustain lengthier military campaigns, generate broader political agendas, and gain access to institutionalised politics —; or whether they lost their fighting power, broke apart and resorted to banditry as soon as they left their communities and "parochial" struggles. These differences also had a significant impact on the structure of national politics and state formation in the aftermath of violent conflict.[29]

4. Unpacking post-conflict institutional reforms

The lens of historical state formation allows us to contextualise historical examples of post-conflict reform and, more importantly, to reassess the role of armed actors and subnational governance

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federal administration (1824-35). Kahle (1997, p. 129-47), as many other historians, lump all armed organisations other than the permanent army under the label of "milicias" but provides a good overview of irregular warfare and decentralised coercion in 19th century Mexico. Only recently, specialised studies of militias and their role in local politics have been published. An edited volume by Ruíz (2009) provides a much-needed comparative perspective on the development of militias across the different territories of the Spanish Empire; while Medina (2015) offers a detailed account of the role of militias and local military organisation in the development of regional and municipal governments.

[26] The only survey of irregular armed actors in 19th century Mexico overstates the explanatory capacity of "social banditry" and provides a blurring account of the interaction between bandits, irregular armed groups, and government militias (Vanderwood 2009). However, it remains the sole attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. Foreign volunteers serving with the French troops and the "Mexican Empire" (1862-67) published interesting witness accounts that include descriptions of the militias deployed by Republican politicians, as well as the blurred boundaries between irregular warfare and banditry in the 1860s. See Alvensleben (1867), Keratry (1986 [1865]), and Salm-Salm (1868). For an account from a former National Guard officer see Galindo y Galindo (1904).

[27] The Colombian "War of the *Supremos*" (1839-41) provides a radical illustration of this type of local privatisation of national conflict. Among other picturesque micro-cleavages, the war "saw the reappearance of royalist guerrillas, fighting in the name of the Spanish king Ferdinand VII, who was in fact dead" (Earle 2000, p.131).The example is not by any means extreme, in fact similar puzzling and counterintuitive micro conflicts brought together armed constituencies fighting for parochial agendas into larger disputes about the state or the legitimacy of a particular government well into the 20th century.

[28] This situation was so prevalent at different levels of the state in 19th century Latin America, that some have coined the expression the "improvisational state" in order to describe the "continuous need to improvise its coercive authority by bargaining with caudillo-led armed bands of various kinds, and the concomitant problem of how those forces were gradually superseded, at different time and with different results, by a single army" (Holden 2004, p.5).

[29] Knight (1987) employs a similar logic and classifies armed factions during the Mexican Revolution (1910-20) on the basis of two ideal types "*serrano*" or "*agrarian*". On this basis, he described the mutually reinforcing relationship between (1) *group characteristics* (such as origins, organizational forms, and *modus operandi*), and their (2) *group trajectories* (military performance, political alliances, and links to the broader revolutionary movements).

configurations in cases in which this process did not follow the same patterns of state formation seen in early modern Europe.

The following four major attempts to re-organise armed actors at the national level illustrate the influence of pre-existing structures and short-term adaptations on post-conflict settings. Rather than a *progressive* centralisation of armed force driven by top-down strategies, what we see is the re-configuration of pre-existing models of armed organisation (national army, regional and civic militias, and irregular units) on the ground. We highlight armed actors' attempts to derive benefits from these institutional reforms through recurrent strategies — such as context-specific adaptation and privatisation. These brushstrokes merely provide an illustration of how recurring bottom-up processes shaped the outcome of post-conflict statebuilding: further micro-level comparative analysis is necessary in order to specify and systematically assess the salience of such mechanisms.

*The elimination of provincial militias by the national army (*ca.*1832-35)*

Conflicts between federalist and centralist politicians in the late 1820s and1830s led to the first major reorganisation of armed force at the national level. Centralist politicians and metropolitan elites resented the rise of provincial governments and regional elites, backed by autonomous armed forces, during the federalist administrations (1824-35).[30] These "provincial militias", which constituted an uncomfortable inheritance from the last years of colonial government and the war of independence, had played a significant role in the establishment of federalism in 1824 — which had been imposed on metropolitan elites as a *fait accompli* amid the decentralisation of political authority and the weakness of central government in the aftermath of independence.[31]

The "federalist revolt" broke out in 1832 and it constituted the first civil war of independent Mexico,[32] one of two large-scale armed conflicts that saw lethal conventional combat and the participation of civilian populations.[33] In the aftermath, the centralist government attempted a major reorganisation of armed force and its relationship to regional politics. First, provincial militias were eliminated and measures were taken to strengthen the regular army. Second, the military apparatus was employed in order to control provincial governments (elites and politicians) that had used the federal regime as way of increasing their power and autonomy: Military commanders appointed by the national government were given political, fiscal and military responsibilities across the national territory. As tax auditors, military commanders acquired fiscal authority over provincial governments, as well as control over the national rents (such as certain monopolies, mints and customs houses).[34]

In other words, the centralist government sought a military solution to the "fragmented sovereignty" posed by the existence of provincial militias that behaved as private armies. However,

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[30] Regarding the economic incentives behind this conflict and the struggle between "metropolitan" (Mexico City) and "provincial" elites for control of the economy see Cardoso, Córdova (1976), and Tenenbaum (1986).

[31] Costeloe (2010, pp.327-436) provides a synthetic political history of period (1824-1835), but important lacunae remain concerning the regional particularities and trends accompanying national level processes.

[32] Before 1832, the numerous armed rebellions and minor revolts — often instigated by civilian politicians as the equivalent of "mass consultations" — have been described as "forceful negotiations" rather than "armed conflicts", given their political use of force and the absence of lethal combats (Fowler 2000a, 2000b).

[33] The national government and units of the regular army defeated federalist militias in four major battles between March and November 1832. The limited sources provide the following estimates of this conflict's lethality: battle of *Tolomé* (80 battle deaths), *Gallinero* (between 900 and 2,000), *San Agustín del Palmar* (200 among the federalist militia), and *Rancho de Posadas* (200). In 1835, a second revolt by the provincial governor of Zacatecas was defeated and led to the establishment of a centralist government and significant institutional reforms (Fowler 2000, pp. 67-68).

[34] See *Memoria … de 1835, op. cit.,* Costeloe (1975, 2000), Fowler (2000a), Merino (2007). In order to restrict popular participation in national politics, the centralist regime also reduced the number of *municipalities* and introduced voting rights and rules for official appointments that benefited proprietors (Warren 1996 and Arroyo García 2011, p. 134-72).

the regular army lacked the necessary institutional incapacity to fulfil these tasks.[35] Rather than achieving the centralisation of political authority under military commands expected by the national government, the regular army became overstrained and politicised. In the 1840s and 1850s, as the national government grew dependent on regular army commanders and their units — along with spending on salaries and pensions — rebellions by *rogue* military commanders proliferated. Only between 1834 and 1853, for example, six regime changes at the national level were achieved by military rebellions.[36]

*The creation of new regional and local militias as a "National Guard" (*ca.*1847-55)*

Amid the failure of the regular army to contain the advance of US troops during the Mexico-US War (1846-48), a desperate national government decided to unleash patriotic irregular militias across the country: A second major institutional reform began amid the war with the creation of the National Guard (1847). As in the previous case, its implementation on the ground was subsequently shaped by two important precedents.[37] First, the Guard incorporated pre-existing irregular armed units organised by veterans of the Wars of Independence and regional strongmen under the new institutional framework.[38] In some cases, therefore, the organisers of "new" National Guard units were precisely the same political entrepreneurs and belligerent rural communities behind the continuous regional rebellions that had proliferated in the 1840s. As patrons and commanders of National Guard units, regional strongmen gained significant influence and became the arbiters of local and regional conflicts (for example, responding popular grievances, or mediating political and economic disputes between regional elites) (Reina1998, pp. 15-21; Buve 1988, pp. 306-335).[39]

In a deliberate attempt to avoid the negative features of decentralised "provincial militias" raised in the 1820s, important institutional innovations were introduced. Detailed legislation and regulations were established at national and provincial levels.[40] The National Guard also combined the system of local ownership with dual authority: Provincial governments were in charge for organising

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[35] The regular army was a flaky amalgam of former royal units, militias, and irregular troops mobilised during the wars of independence (1810-21). After independence, for example, ranks and promotions had been granted on the basis of the number of troops commanded — rather than the seniority or instruction — so military commanders were used to being rewarded for their political acumen rather than on technical skills. Judicial immunities and expansive administrative powers (for example, fiscal responsibilities) prevented civilian oversight and promoted corruption and graft. *Memoria … de 1825,* Mexico City, 1825, p.10. Regarding continuity in the transition from insurgency to independence, see Hernández López (2008, p. 39) and Paz (1907). Concerning the reorganisation of royal and insurgent forces after independence (1821), see Hamnett (1986, p.178).
Escalante (1992, pp.161-87, 1999), Gruening (1928, pp. 289-331), Hernández López (2008, p.39), Kahle (1997, *passim*) and Paz (1907).

[36] These were the rebellions of *Cuernavaca* (1834); *Guadalajara, Ciudadela and Perote* (1841); *San Luis* (1845); *Polkos* (1847); and *Jalapa* (1853), *cf.* Fowler (2000a).

[37] The National Guard had a negligible impact in the US-Mexico War but revived a powerful precedent of regional and communal armed mobilisation: the "civic militias" that had existed as a prerogative of corporate bodies — municipalities, towns and cities. Different social actors contributed to the organisation of armed units, leading to a level of heterogeneity that has not been fully captured in the literature

[38] Given the rules concerning the election of officers (Dublán and Lozano 1876-1912, vol. 4, pp. 161-169, vol. 5, pp. 414-421), the Guard was placed in the hands of state politicians or regional *caudillos* who led units composed of artisans and rural labourers, **(**Hernández Chávez, 1989:268).

[39] The strength of the National Guard reflected the predominance of federal states' political and economic power, and the *weakness* of the central state. The creation of Guard units reliant on regional commanders and provincial governors for patronage and political leadership increased the tension between the autonomy of decentralised armed actors and the national government's dependence on their support. Finally, the interaction between provincial governors and Guard commanders further propitiated alliances among regional elites. See Carmagnani (1983, pp. 287-289, 1984), De la Garza (2000, pp. 39-45), and Hernández Chávez (1989, p.266).

[40] "Reglamento para organizar, armar y disciplinar la Guardia Nacional en los Estados, Distritos y Territorios de la Federación" (11 September 1846), "Ley del 3 de febrero de 1847" and "Ley Orgánica de la Guardia Nacional" (15 july 1848) both in Dublán and Lozano (1876-1912, vol.5, pp. 162-169, 414-421). For a discussion of the antecedents of the National Guard in the form of patriotic militias, see Santoni (1988).

and commanding Guards in times of peace, but the appointment of officers, for example, required the acquiescence of the national government.[41] Yet again, this model was not fully implemented in practice. While provincial governments were responsible for recruiting, training and organising new units; amid the pressing circumstances imposed by the US invasion, the national government soon began issuing letters of patent authorising rural estates (*haciendas*), villages, provincial towns, and political entrepreneurs, to create their own units.[42]

Therefore, the National Guard presented extreme organisational forms, depending on the characteristics of pre-existing armed groups and governance practices in different regions.[43] In the North, units were formed as "civic militias", staffed by farmers and small proprietors, and managed by relatively efficient municipal and provincial administrations. In many densely populated rural areas, on the contrary, "peasant armies" were assembled by regional politicians seeking to harness the political support of indigenous communities. In the South and the South East, Guard units often took the form of armed retainers assembled and funded by landowners or provincial governments (Hart 2004, p. 240).

In short, while a new type of professional and disciplined "civic militias" was emerging in those areas where local government capacity was high or had increased during recent conflicts (Merino 2015). In the rest of the country, *pre-existing* armed actors simply re-emerged under the institutional umbrella provided by the National Guard.[44]

The creation of the National Guard, therefore, provides a clear example of the varying effects that mechanisms at the local level — such as improvisation, short-term adaptation and privatisation — had in response to national reforms. The governance outcomes paralleled the results of previous national efforts: This time, rather than empowering *rogue* military commanders backed by semi-autonomous regular army units, the National Guard empowered *recalcitrant* provincial governors and regional leaders (civilian or military) capable of raising, feeding and leading irregular armed groups into battle. At times the effort led to rebellions by newly organised Guard units amid aggrieved populations;[45] elsewhere, the National Guard offered significant opportunities for private gain for political and commercial entrepreneurs with the relevant resources and connections.[46]

An important tension remained between (1) national government efforts to incorporate regional and local allies into its statebuilding projects — in this case, the war against the US — and (2) the unintended tendency to increase armed actors' capacity to wrestle power and resources away

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[41] The national government could request the deployment of Guard units at its expense, in which case officers and guardsmen would receive equal pay and privileges as the regular army. Guard units were subject to civilian oversight by provincial governors and district prefects (*jefes políticos*) and national dispositions regulated their organization, discipline, and armament (Kahle 1997; Medina 2015, Merino 2007).

[42] After the publication of the regulations in 1847, the Ministry of War received numerous letters requesting "authorisation for the creation for the creation of guerrilla units". The "territorial" circumscription of these units changed considerably: rural estates (*haciendas*), small rural populations, cities, and even entire provinces could be authorised to authorised to "recruit, organize and place in active service" units or divisions of the National Guard — on the basis of their strategic importance and, more importantly, available resources (Kahle 1997, p. 143).

[43] In 1842, the President decreed the creation of "cavalry companies" under the authority of the provincial governments and funded by the municipalities on the basis of their population and resources. Rural estates (*haciendas*) were requested to create their own units (known as "rural forces"). In case of need these armed units would be deployed under the command of the national government (Reyes 1901, p. 26; Kahle 1997, p. 141).

[44] For a typical example of the terms in which the organisation of Guard unit was authorised, see "Letter from the Interior Minister to a state governor, authorising the creation of a 100-strong "National Guard" unit financed by a rural estate" (2 April 1857). AGN/Gobernacion/Sin Seccion/Caja 460/E4/18. See also Escalante (1992), Merino, (1997) and Medina (2015).

[45] In the 1840s, Guard units were created among peasant communities in regions that suffered from agrarian violence. However, rather than combating US troops, many of these units dedicated themselves to raiding the landed states (*haciendas*) against which their communities had been fighting over land and water and other regular army forces had to be spared from the international conflict in order to stop them (Hart 2004; Reina 1998).

[46] Micro level research could investigate, for example, how many of these "new" National Guard units were constituted by pre-existing armed groups that had been organised as "provincial militias" in previous decades.

for the centre.[47] The creation of a national framework that legitimised decentralised armed configurations, such as the National Guard, but which lacked *effective* control mechanisms, empowered armed actors to use their "state-sanctioned" coercive resources in order to solidify their autonomy and pre-existing authority structures.

*The elimination of the regular army by the National Guard (*ca.*1855-1876)*

Subsequent attempts at institutional reform show a clear effort to privilege political and economic, rather than purely military, measures toward the centralisation of authority. However, the persistent of violent conflict preserved the privilege position acquired by armed actors in previous decades. In 1857, the re-establishment of federalism and the proclamation of a progressive constitution polarised the tensions between "radical Liberal", on the one hand, and "moderate Liberal" and "Conservative" politicians, on the other.[48] During the subsequent "long" civil war (1859-1867), two alternative models — the National Guard and the regular army — had the chance to test their effectiveness in the battle field.[49]

During a first stage (1859-61), the coalition of "Liberal" provincial governors and their National Guard commanders were capable of defeating the regular army units of the Conservative opposition, through a combination of conventional and *guerrilla* warfare.[50] During a second stage (1862-64), the Republican army was defeated by French troops in conventional combats; and, during a final stage (1864-67), Republican government deployed militias and irregular armed forces against the French troops and their Mexican allies. Conversely, the short-lived "Mexican Empire" (1864-67) recruited dissatisfied communities, disbanded units of the regular army (defeated in 1861), and bandits, in order to harass the supporters of Republican government.[51]

The armed units that formed the Republican coalition, and that secured the victory against the regular army and the French, however, had been quite literally "improvised" during the war — in the words of President Juárez — with support from local and provincial governments loyal to the Republican cause.[52] These units reinforced the authority of provincial governors and political entrepreneurs with proven success as military organisers — many of whom had also developed strong

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[47] Already in 1834, President Bustamante complained that even the most miserable village "considered itself competent to comment on the appropriateness of changing the system of government" (Bustamante, 1834:7). After the creation of the National Guard this trend only increased, as regional and local politicians — not only provincial governors — discovered the advantage counting with autonomous armed forces in order to back their claim making and coalition building.

[48] The Republican coalition was composed of provincial governors backed by improvised *regional* National Guard units, with the support of rural communities and popular groups. The Conservative faction clustered together politicians and professional army units (trained in the new armed forces developed by centralist administrations), and was supported by remnants of the metropolitan elites (landowners, merchants, and industrialists). Both parties received support from foreign allies (respectively, the US and France), and the conflict became internationalised by a French military intervention (1861-67) through which Napoleon III sought to impose a monarchical government in Latin America, see Avenel (1996) and Hart (2002). For a narrative account see Roeder (2010) and the institutional analyses of the Republican coalition provided by Sinkin (1979), Perry (1979) and, more recently, Merino (1998) and Medina (2007).

[49] The fact that this conflict saw the greatest amount of lethal combat, as well as violence against civilian populations during long insurgency and counterinsurgency operations, illustrates the degree to which the contending factions were able to draw grassroots support from large segments of the civilian population.

[50] In 1861, in the aftermath of the conflict, National Guard units mobilised by key provincial governors and Guard commanders were institutionalised as a new national "Republican army"; while the regular army that had supported the Conservative faction, and had been strengthened by centralised policies in the 1830s and 1850s,was demobilised an eliminated. However, between 1861 and 1864 the Republican army was defeated in conventional combat by French troops, and was practically destroyed (Roeder 2010).

[51] "it is extremely important that we proceed to the complete elimination of the auxiliary guerrillas assisting the invaders" Letter from President Juárez to the governor of San Luis Potosí (24 December 1862) (Tamayo 1972, p. 327) in Tamayo (1972, p. 327). See also Vanderwood (2009, pp. 63-73). Regarding the extreme violence to which rural communities and civilian populations were exposed see Alvensleben (1867), Keratry (1986 [1865]), Moreno (1990), and Salm-Salm (1868).

[52] This army was created "on the go" and with the support from local communities. See correspondence of President Juárez in Tamayo (1972, pp. 326-91).

personal networks and regional influence as their forces marched and fought across the national territory.[53] Furthermore, the fact that the Republican coalition had retreated into a *guerrilla* war against the French, left behind innumerable irregular units and rural communities schooled in violent resistance. It is not surprising that after the "restoration" of the Republic in 1867, the country faced almost constant "low intensity" conflicts until the 1880s.[54]

During the 1860s and 1870s, the national government attempted to institutionalise its interaction — with recalcitrant governors, irregular armed units, and armed rural communities — on the basis of the extra-constitutional measures, political manipulation, fiscal centralisation, and repression. Nevertheless, the government remained weak and dependent on the political support from regional strongmen, provincial governors, and National Guard commanders.[55] The weakness of the government was made evident in 1876 when a rebellion led by a National Guard commander — and supported by regional politicians and National Guards who felt excluded from power — swiftly took power. The new President remained in power between 1876-84 and 1884-1890 and achieved a degree of centralisation previously and stability unknown in Mexican politics.

*Elimination of the National Guard and the professionalization of the Republican army (*ca.1880-90)

In the 1880s and 1890s, as government revenue and foreign investment increased, the national government began the demobilisation of the National Guard.[56] The new regime also succeeded in establishing a balance between national, local and regional authorities through the development of a "political machine" that incorporated key stakeholders at all levels (and from different political factions), while depoliticising the armed forces, and marginalising and eliminating those political entrepreneurs and armed challenges who resisted incorporation (Sinkin 1979, Perry 1979).

In 1880s, the elimination of the National Guard marked the emergence of a new bargain between the national government, armed with a stronger coercive and administrative apparatus, and powerful allies at regional and local levels. Local governments and political prefects were backed by new military police units ("Rural Guard") under their command — but which was resourced and managed by a central bureaucracy and under the authority of the Interior Ministry. The dual system of authority was preserved; however, the national government finally achieved the necessary resources to fund this force without the participation of local and provincial government.[57] The "Rural Guard" also helped assimilating irregular armed units and demobilised Guardsmen. The formal observance of

[53] Military commanders, for example, imposed extraordinary taxes in order to finance their activities and simply informed the President for *post hoc* approval. The President was constantly requesting provincial governors not to retain those rents that belonged to the national government. Finally, in an extreme case of "armed" politics. In 1863, the state of Nuevo León invaded the neighbouring state of Tamaulipas (Tamayo 1972, respectively, pp. 341, 378, 348).

[54] Considerable swathes of territory remained under the virtual control of bandits, rebellious indigenous communities, rogue National Guard commanders and provincial governors (disappointed by their former allies in the national government), and or the remnants of "Conservative" and "Imperial" forces that turned into pillaging the countryside for a living. Consult Perry (1979) for a detailed account of the period.

[55] For example, in 1876 the National Guard counted with 70,000 troops, outnumbering the regular army by a ratio of three to one. This situation reflected the 1867 demobilisation policies that sought to reduce the threat posed by a central army, maintain regional balances, and the need to reduce the payroll. See Garner (2001, pp.110-12).

[56] Between 1879 and 1893 loyal guardsmen were gradually transferred to auxiliary or permanent army units (Carmagnani, 1983, p. 296). These measures produced resistance from some local battalions formed by artisans and labourers and among officers displaced. In certain cases, the disbanding of guard meant the loss of local autonomy; in other cases guardsmen resented the loss of tax exemptions **(**Hernández Chávez 1989, p.271). For specific examples, see Thomson (1990), Thomson and LaFrance 1999, p. 250-60).

[57] In the 1880s, Rural Guard units were placed in the hands of municipal authorities and political prefects to combat rural insecurity, promote social order, and serve as a first line of defence against violent unrest, with the backing of a professionalised — but not necessarily more effective — national army (Hernández Chávez 1989, pp. 271-72; Garner 2001, p.114; Vanderwood 2009, pp.119-38).

constitutional regarding elections and provincial autonomy, and the skilful use of political allies, secured a delicate balance between the national and provincial governments.[58]

At the same time, as new cases of communitarian and popular resistance arose in response to large-scale privatisation of natural resources and the expansion of commercial agriculture, the "Rural Guard" also became an effective instrument of repression that could be deployed by local politicians and regional elites in defence of their interests — as long as they were aligned with those of the state and political stability at large.

The basic mechanism entailed a combination of political negotiation and coercion that involved key regional and local allies — but which increasingly depended on the leadership and patronage of the President and national government institutions.[59] The new regime, thus succeeded in depoliticising "public violence" and centralising armed organisation, allowing for economic and political competition to be pursued through operators and intermediaries within the "political machine". *Recalcitrant* governors were deprived from their military resources in exchange and, in many cases, deposed with support of local opposition.

Local politicians, Rural Guard commanders and political prefects became increasingly depended on national government institutions, which practically eliminated the power and autonomy previously enjoyed by provincial governments. The the links between armed organisation and local political authority underwent significant changes. Nevertheless, some of the patrimonial networks that had emerged and adapted during previous periods of armed conflict (1850-60s) survived and thrived in civilian form — until a new widespread violence and civil war (1910-*ca.*1920) demonstrated, once again, that pre-existing structures provided a ready base for new forms of armed mobilisation (Knight 1987).

This summary illustrates the adaptation and persistence of pre-existing forms of armed organisation during periods of violent conflict and post-conflict institutional. Despite the deliberate attempt by national governments to implement top-down changes in the organisation of coercion in favour of greater centralisation; we illustrate the capacity of subnational governments and armed actors to derive benefits from accommodation. We also identified the recurrence of certain mechanisms — such as improvisation and short-term adaptation — that had an important impact on the implementation of reforms.

The re-emergence and accommodation of pre-existing "armed groups" into new institutional frameworks reflect the long-lasting impact of low government capacity — particularly at the national level — on the decentralisation of coercion. Indeed, the regional trajectory of some provinces illustrates how armed units served to harness the administrative capacity and political authority that *some* provincial governments had achieved, at least in part, on the basis of their success as military organisers.[60]

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[58] Efforts to resist centralisation were patent: Constitutional reforms that instituted the indefinite re-election of the president were met with protests in 1891 and 1892 (Garner, 2001: 83). Other policies, such as the privatisation of important tracts of land by surveying companies caused significant grievances, manifested as in previous cases through a combination of legal procedures, political bargaining and open rebellion. This process, which had begun in the 1860s and exploded as the construction of railroads led to speculation that in some areas had dispossessed peasant communities of communal lands and key resources (Coatsworth, 1974, 1988; Katz, 1988:470-76; Reina, 1998: x-xxiii).

[59] The obvious question — "*what made the radical increase in centralisation and the relative monopolisation of coercion possible in the 1880s and 1890s*?" (at least until a revolution and civil war broke out in 1910-15) — remains one of the greatest puzzles of Mexican history. Here the goal is simply to identify how in this final set of post-conflict institutional reforms in the 19th century, we see the reappearance of pre-existing organisational models and armed actors, as well as the reproduction of governance mechanisms and political practices that had characterised previous arrangements

[60] These regional asymmetries, however, seemed to have had a negative impact on the development of state institutions at large. Today, some of the regions were powerful citizen militias were organised by competent governments see highest development standards (for example Nuevo León). While, at the same time, regions were peasant armies and "private" patrimonial forces predominated see much lower indicators of human development (UNDP 2015). At present, many self-

5. Post-conflict institutional reforms as statebuilding

While Tilly privileged a top-down approach in which self-interested state makers are the driving force of state formation: "supplying" government to passive consumers (despite occasional resort to popular resistance).[61] 19th century Mexico illustrates the degree to which armed actors served as drivers of governance and conflict dynamics, as well as an increasing "demand" for local order, in a context of low institutional capacity. From an "armed actor" perspective, a *weak* national government — resulting from some of the *hybrid* forms of war making and state making that we have described — was not necessarily a failure but a reasonable short-term adaptation strategy. Short-term bargaining and accommodation "between a [weak] 'political center' and subunits … [which *lacked*] high levels of state rationalization, state institutionalization, and embeddedness of the state in society" (Ziblatt 2006, p. 13), we argue, explains the process of negotiation and bargaining, in 19th century Mexico. Armed actors, in particular, were interested in reproducing the forms of order through which they operated — and institutionalising them as part of the state apparatus.[62]

A strong state capable of providing affordable protection, representation and impartial conflict resolution to local and regional constituencies would have been — in theory — an *optimal* outcome (*cf.* Bates, Coatsworth, and Williamson 2007). In practice, the prospect of a strong state also presented local communities and regional elites — that did not trust each other, or Mexico City for that matter — with the unpalatable threat of a tyrannical government capable of depriving them from their newly acquired prerogatives after independence. For many rural and indigenous communities, which did not readily embraced the modernising project of modern statehood, in particular, a strong central state represented not only a threat to their livelihoods but to their *way of life*.

The imposition of new taxes — the most patent form of state intervention in the countryside — often led to revolts and created a culture of deep anti-statism among rural constituencies which clearly marked political culture in the 19th century: whether in the sophisticated rendering of federalist constitutions or the recalcitrant parochialism of intermittent rural rebellion (Escalante, 2011:55-74,189-206; Knight, 2002:225-26, 242).[63]

As liberal politician Ignacio Ramírez noted in 1868, in the experience of the common folk, state strength often correlated with private losses:

> The tax collector arrives and he pays; the recruiter arrives and he marches to war; the ministry of public works arrives and he is forced to work; the police arrives and he goes to jail; the executioner arrives and he dies; and they do not understand that it is by virtue of their *right* [as a *sovereign people*] that these adventurers periodically appear to torment them.[64]

From the point of view of many local actors, in particular those with access to armed resources, a weak state open to negotiation and accommodation, was a perfectly acceptable choice. A brief overview of the way in which Tilly's mechanisms — *war making, state making, protection* and *extraction* — played out in 19th century Mexico, illustrates the benefits that decentralised systems of

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defence organisations, alongside drug-trafficking and criminal networks, continue to operate in regions, such as Guerrero and Michoacán, which were known for the proliferation of irregular armed units in the 19th century.

[61] For a critique of top-down approaches see Bliesemann and Kühn (2013), Boege *et al.* (2009) and Roberts (2013).

[62] This case provides an ideal scenario to test Daniel Ziblatt's arguments regarding the origins of state formation in 19th century Germany and Italy. Ziblatt offers a sophisticated framework to explain the impact of local governments on the structure of state formation. The emphasis on the strength of regional institutions (parliaments, constitutions, systems of public administration), however, assumes that they are the defining element in local/regional governance systems.

[63] In 1834, President Bustamante bitterly complained that even the most miserable village "considered itself competent to opine on the appropriateness of changing the system of government" (Bustamante 1834, p.7).

[64] Ignacio Ramírez in *El Semanario Ilustrado*, 6 November 1868, my *italics* (Ramírez 1985, v. II, p. 403). See also Tilly (1990, pp. 96-103).

"armed (dis)order" provided to subnational constituencies; as well as the different forms in which these mechanisms became part of emerging state institutions.

As Bøås has recently argues, city-states, commercial networks, and clan-based orders — even amid the general failure of state institutions — can provide "islands of functionality" as building blocks for new of administrative state structures (Bøås 2013; Egnell and Haldén 2013, p. 7).[65] We now turn to the question: how were these "islands" integrated into statebuilders efforts towards the monopolisation of coercion and the centralisation of authority?

War making and state making: Eliminating external and internal rivals

In Tilly's account of early modern Europe, *external* (war making) and *internal* (state making) armed conflict played a catalysing role in state formation.[66] While in early modern Europe, these four mechanisms formed a virtuous cycle leading to the formation of centralised bureaucratic institutions; in 19th century Mexico, however, as in many other post-colonial societies, the persistent weakness of the national government and its coercive apparatus meant that "war making and state making" depended heavily on shifty alliances with regional and local actors.[67]

In the aftermath of the two main periods of civil war, the federalist war (1832) and the *Reforma* civil war (1859-61), the national government and elites, first addressed the problem of "divided sovereignty" posed by a federal system in which provincial governments counted with autonomous armed units.[68] Subsequently, the creation of the National Guard sought to incorporate heterogeneous units that were organised and mobilised as virtual "private armies" in the hands of provincial governors into a national framework of "shared authority" — in which state sanctioned authority prevailed over private interests and political agendas.

However, such as in 1830s the elimination of the provincial militias only enhanced the power of rogue military commanders, the ascent of the National Guard in the 1860s also increased the autonomy of provincial authorities *vis-à-vis* the national government.

First, the *Reforma* civil war (1859-61) and the French intervention (1861-67) entailed few conventional battles and, on the contrary, depended on widespread *guerrilla* operations across the country. Armed conflict therefore empowered local forms of organisation while leaving little institutional capacity behind at the national level. Secondly, the dependence on informal forces and *guerrilla* operations meant that post-conflict demobilisation and re-integration of combatants constituted a near impossible task. Besides a weak nucleus of loyal and semi-professional National Guard units — rather than the centralised military and an effective bureaucracy that Tilly might have predicted — the "organisational residue" of the great civil war (1859-67) consisted of a plethora of

[65] Tilly himself noted that the distinctions between *state* and *nonstate* providers of coercion, as well as that between legitimate and illegitimate users of violence, "came clear only very slowly, in the process during which the state's armed forces became relatively unified and permanent" *and*, as states reduced their reliance on indirect rule (Tilly 1985, p. 173).
[66] Respectively, war involved "eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force"; similarly, state making was defined as the process of "eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories" (Tilly 1985, p. 181)
[67] In Mexico, "armed mobilisation" during the first decades of independent life (1820-1870s) entailed a combination of rural violence, regional rebellions, caste wars, banditry, and military uprisings. After the violent separation of Texas (1836) and a short but devastating war in 1847, over half of its territory was lost to the United States. Spain made a failed attempt at recovering Mexico (1828) and France militarily imposed inflated reparations for damages caused during the first decades of instability (1838) (Avenel, 1996:21-26; Gaulot, 1906; Schloessing, ca. 1862).
[68] In 1832, the centralist government and loyal military commanders, in an alliance with the remnants of colonial elites (merchants, landowners, industrialists and moneylenders), fought a civil war against the federalist provinces and emerging regional elites (mostly merchants and landowners excluded from the colonial networks of patronage). In 1835, the centralist government succeeded in eliminating provincial government's "private armies" and reducing their autonomy through the deployment of state agents.

recalcitrant provincial governors and irregular armed forces across the country (dissatisfied National Guard units, and disbanded Conservative and Imperial forces turned bandits).

Provincial governments with considerable pre-existing institutional capacity saw impressive growth in their local military and fiscal apparatus.[69] They also developed more efficient *local* bureaucracies and standards of public administration (Medina 2015). Confronted with these islands of prosperity and good governance. The Republican government employed its "emergency powers" — in particular the authority to declare provinces under state of "siege/emergency" and to substitute their governors — and alliances with local opposition in order to keeps these "muscular" provincial governments in check (Sinkin 1979, Perry 1979).

Protection

In Tilly's account of modern Europe, war making, statemaking and protection not only complemented each other but were causally interdependent.[70] In 19th century Mexico, however, the decentralisation of coercion posed a significant problem for the provision of protection. First, the judicial system built on the basis of pre-existing (colonial) institutions operated in parallel, or even opposition, to the *de facto* authority structures created by armed actor dynamics.[71] Secondly, while the national state was unable to offer protection through formal institutions — armed actors had incentives for privatising the provision of protection, further promoting the decentralisation of armed force.

The violent civil war between insurgents and royal counterguerrillas leading to Independence (1810-21) had weakened civilian authorities and judicial structures: depriving government institutions

[69] For example, the state of Nuevo León — situated near the US border — developed significant infrastructural capacity during this period: administering the custom houses along the border, importing weapons and supplies, and establishing close links with finance and business interests in the United States, which harnessed its incipient industrialisation and economic development (Medina 2015).

[70] Protection, for example, "relied on the organization of war making and state making but added to it an apparatus by which the protected called forth the protection ... notably through courts and representative assemblies" (Tilly 1985, p. 181). Following Frederic Lane, Tilly argued that, in a context of geopolitical competition, successful war / state making required statebuilders to provide protection to their clients at a reasonable cost.

[71] While modern concepts of statehood are characterised by a territorial logic, Spanish imperial governance had emphasized the government of *populations* on the basis of corporate identities and judicial privileges (Bishko, 1956; McAlister, 1963). Rather than a monopoly of legitimate coercion, so to speak, the crown held a "monopoly of legitimate profit and privilege" which depended for "ultimate sanction and operability on the *legitimacy* and *authority* of the monarch" (Wiarda 1998, pp. 29, 27-35). The crown therefore served as a "moderative power" that complemented the autonomy and relative strength of overlapping corporate bodies and territorial jurisdictions (whose claims to authority in many cases ante/pre-ceded the Crown's). Wiarda (1998, pp. 29, 27-35) provides a summary worth quoting *in extenso:* "The corporate ordering of society was closely bound up with the formative period as well as the successes of the early Spanish state. ...[the challenge was that] many of the corporate units over which they sought to rule had a longer temporal existence than did the new states of Iberia; and ... some of them, such as the church and religious orders had strong claims to having a legitimacy *above* that of the state ... [Therefore] the notion of 'rights' in Iberia , and by extension in Latin America, tended historically to imply group or corporate rights (autonomy, self-government, *as a group*) over the more individualistic notions ... 'freedom' and 'democracy' were largely defined in terms of the existence and protection of these corporate group rights ... [and] 'constitutionalism' in Iberia (less so in Latin America) was based on an 'equilibrium' between the monarchy on the one hand and the independent regional kingdoms, social groupings, and corporate bodies on the other." See also Wiarda and Kline (1995), and, concerning the case of Mexico in particular, Wiarda (1995:119-37).

from an ultimate "enforcer"[72] and, at the same time, promoting the proliferation of decentralised armed organisations.[73]

In fact, for most of the 19th century, decentralised militias remained the predominant form of military organisation.[74] These *ad-hoc* units were dependent for men, sustenance and leadership on communal contributions and/or patronage from local and regional elites.[75] The decentralisation of coercive resources was, therefore, *both* cause and consequence of state incapacity, since national governments were dependent on pre-existing institutional arrangements and local governance mechanisms controlled by networks of armed actors. In the short-term, the "private" provision of security and enforcement by subnational armed actors was "cheaper" and "more effective" than investing in a national state apparatus.

National governments and military commanders also encouraged local authorities — ranging from municipalities to provincial governments — to recruit, train and organise armed forces, in order to maintain public order and assist the regular army in case of need. [76] In 1857, an overwhelmed Minister of War personally complained to the Minister of the Interior about the constant demands for military intervention at the local level made by provincial governors and political prefects: If [on every request] it becomes necessary to deploy the army … no armed force will ever suffice and the available troops will be distracted from their true purpose.[77]

Rural communities also organised locally-funded armed units in order to combat banditry and resist the abuses of predatory military commanders and regional governments, as illustrated by municipal records.[78]

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[72] The counter-insurgency strategy led to a militarisation of society and, as John H. Coatsworth and Leandro Prados de la Escosura have argued, paved the way for a century of civil wars. Like much of the rest of Latin America, in the period since independence in 1821 "Mexico plunged into a half century of political, social and international warfare" (Prados de la Escosura 2000, p. 465). Hamnett (1987) suggests that the war of independence witnessed the increasing substitution of 'civilian' with 'military' authorities at the local level, as well as the practices of extortion and expropriation, as well as repressive violence, that would become leitmotivs of political expediency for the rest of the century at the local level. Since the days of royal counter-insurgency military authorities were authorised to collect taxes and administer justice, which according to Hamnett (1987) and Vázquez (1984, 1994) led to the formation of local strongmen (*caciques*).

[73] See Archer (1981, 1998); Guedea (1985); Hamnett (1978 and 1986); Katz (1988); Reina (1998); Rodriguez (1989, p.7, 1992). For a similar regarding post-independence Spain, see Canal and González (2012) and Lempérière (2004).

[74] Irregular or guerrilla warfare was the preferred strategy during the 19th century, this is explained in part as an institutional inheritance of the war of independence and its impact on military doctrine and practice, as well as its practical utility of "light troops" in combating rural insurrections and banditry (Kahle 1997, pp. 140-141). Local 'defence forces' emerged in many regions, either in support of the counterinsurgency or as communities sought to protect themselves against military incursions and bandits (Guerra 2007, p.133; Hamnett 1986, p.185; Vanderwood 2009, p. 23-34).

[75] Other locally-organised armed units during the first decades of independence included "*veintenas*": small armed contingents of residents (*vecinos*), under the authority of political prefects (*jefes políticos*), municipal authorities, or rich merchants and landowners (*notables*) (Hernández Chávez 1989, p. 266). Security policies in 19th century Mexico, like in many parts of Africa today were not "population-centric", but rather patrimonial and political imperatives took precedence. State responses against banditry or rural protests, often included "civilian repression and selective mobilisation of local militias, which developed in symmetry with increasingly fragmented rebel forces" (Day and Reno 2014, p.106).

[76] *Cf.* Memoranda and correspondence between War and Interior Ministers concerning the formation of private guards (1857), in particular, letter from Interior Minister to Governor of Aguascalientes, authorising the creation of a 100-strong "National Guard" unit financed by a private estate (2 April 1857) (AGN/Gobernacion/Sin Seccion/Caja 460/E4/18). See also the correspondence between the Minister of War, the Minister of the Interior, the Governor of San Luis Potosi and the district prefect, concerning uprisings in El Venado and Chacas, the role of local political authorities and the use of force, May 1857 (AGN/Gobernacion/Rurales/Sin Seccion/Caja 460/E4/18).

[77] The provincial governor retorted that provincial forces, as well as the regular army units in the region, were insufficient to impose order and requested the deployment of National Guard units (presumably from other provinces).[77] These "National Guard" units were raised by provincial governors or local authorities but could be temporarily seconded to the national government. Correspondence between War and Interior Ministers, Mexico City, April-June, 1857 (AGN/Gobernacion/Rurales/Sin Seccion/Caja 460/E4/18).

[78] Observing the proliferation of ... threats to the security and possessions of its inhabitants ... it was decided [by the members of the municipal government, merchants, and proprietors] ... to establish a garrison of armed citizens ... and to sustain this force on the basis of a common fund ... We will henceforth take measures to keep an armed force under the authority of the mayor, having secured the necessary arms and ammunition." *Acta del ayuntamiento y comerciantes de la*

In other words, in a context of prevalent of armed mobilisation, widespread insecurity, and state weakness, a wide range of social actors had incentives to behave in ways and to develop institutions that further promoted decentralisation. First, defending access to key coercive resources, in the short term, increased local actors' capacity to face immediate challenges (such as bandit incursions and government repression). Second, these investments in coercive power were also a political investment: they reinforced local authority structures, patronage networks, and their bargaining power *vis-à-vis* regional and national governments.[79]

Armed actors were also capable of promoting conflict, or the *threat* of conflict, in order to increase their autonomy and the potential gains derived from serving as potential *spoilers* or *intermediaries*. At the local level, the small forces ("*guardias"*) organised by municipalities and landed estates (*haciendas*) in order to combat bandits and to secure the roads, became salient during political crises. At times, political sponsors could strengthen them in order to challenge the National Guard units commanded by provincial governments. [80] Thus, even local "security" forces — legitimately developed to secure the roads and combat banditry — could be suddenly transformed into a serious threat to political order and private property, or tilt precarious balances between governments and armed opposition.

Finally, since many of these armed entities were "public" in character — even though they were often controlled by patronage networks and used coercive resources in pursuit of private interests —, public/private boundaries and territorial jurisdictions became blurred. During rebellions or armed conflicts, it was near impossible to determine who had *effective* control over a given army or National Guard unit: the municipality that provided funds and men; the provincial government that provided weapons and logistical support; the political prefect or commander that served as its patron; or the national government invoking prerogatives under national legislation.

Extraction

While it is often quite difficult to trace the institutional configurations of irregular armed groups, political economy offers additional tools to observe the "important continuities between wartime and 'postconflict' economies and authority structures ... and, the continuing salience of economic and political violence in statebuilding processes and war-to-peace transitions" (Berdal and Zaum 2013, p.3). In 19th century Mexico, the lack of institutional capacity of provincial and national government incentivised short-term extraction of resources with little bureaucratic or institutional residues.[81] Moreover, these "alternative systems of power, profit and protection" proved extremely resilient to change.

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ciudad de Cholula (Puebla, 14 July 1834). Another example is offered by the *Acta de Temascaltepec del Valle* (Estado de Mexico, 6 September 1832).

[79] Provincial militias, for example, defended the political rights and authority of provincial governments against possible arbitrary measures from the national government. They also provided enforcement and control over rural populations and municipalities, and protected the property rights of regional elites by enforcing — to some degree — social order, combating banditry, and securing key economic activities in the countryside. However, from the point of view of the local communities, provincial militias also represented a threat to their autonomy: allowing provincial governments to impose arbitrary policies that violated the rights and property of rural communities, such as (illegal) forced conscription, the privatisation of communal property, and the imposition of new taxes and contributions. Often local communities sought the intervention of the national government against the abuses of provincial authorities before resorting to open rebellion

[80] During these periods, both local and regional armed actors acquired a significant strategic value: A few armed men were capable of paralysing a region by blocking key roads, ravaging isolated rural communities, or capturing the sources of government income (a custom house, a mint, or a tobacco factory).

[81] Centeno (2002a, 2002b) provides a good survey of the mechanisms through which fiscal weakness operated through most of Latin America during this period. However, the subnational "fiscal pacts" and the local-level mechanisms for extraction have not received sufficient attention.

The 1824 Federal Constitution left most of the former royal rents in the hands of provincial governments, who were supposed to transfer a two-fold contribution (of *men* and *money*) to support the national government. Such contributions were not only relatively small but, more often, were not paid at all.[82] Centralist and federalist administrations alike were forced to beg regional administrators, "as a kind of favour", to pay their respective contributions (Mora 1836, p. 530).[83]

In order to offer further incentives to moneylenders, the national government also authorised direct payments at custom houses and other sources of government income. However, custom houses, mints, and tobacco factories, were regularly targeted by rogue military commanders or provincial governors (Flores Caballero 1969, p.154; Tenenbaum1995, p. 281). Moneylenders also secured monopolistic concessions, such as the right to administer highways, mints, or the profitable tobacco monopoly (Ludlow 2002, p.165-69; Tenenbaum 1986, p. 71). This system reproduced the oligopolistic pacts between government and a select group of privileged interest that had characterised fiscal policy during colonial times.

But there were also significant differences. First, the Spanish Crown had maintained its supremacy and provided a relatively stable administration; the Republican governments, on the other hand, were weak and lacked exit options: In more than one occasion, moneylenders helped overthrow a government simply by refusing loans to meet urgent salary payments and military expenses.[84] Second, capitalists in 19th century Mexico were much less interested in the maintenance of political stability than the old merchants and miners had been. After all, their *new* privileges and status lacked formal recognition and — as governments rose and fell at alarming frequency — their own survival was at stake.[85]

During the 1850s and 1860s, Finance Ministers put forward initiatives to counter provincial governors' hold on fiscal resources and national rents. For example, they reorganised the debt contracted by provincial governors and National Guard commanders during the *Reforma* civil war (1859-61) and reformed tax collection to increase national government oversight. Nevertheless, government's efforts to abolish internal sale taxes ("*alcabalas*") and other federal taxes which had fallen in the hands of provincial authorities, National Guard commanders, and former revolutionaries, were unsuccessful (Guevara Sanginés 2002, pp. 335-337).[86]

It was much easier to get Congress to draft a new Constitution than to wrestle the political and financial resources away from those people on the ground on which factual *rule* depended. A summary of the fiscal crisis offered by a resentful Finance Minister (*ca*. 1855) provides a powerful illustration of this situation:

> Taxes ... require some coercive force that makes them effective ... If the national government's [coercive force] ... cannot directly fall upon individuals, but only on the federal states, then resistance will be greater ... Federal states, with a few notable exceptions, have never paid their contributions voluntarily and consistently; and the national government, unwilling to implement the necessary coercive means, has seen this budget line become entirely fictitious (Guevara Sanginés 2002, p. 341).

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[82] Provincial governments' contributions oscillated between 2 to 18 per cent of the federal income between 1821 and 1856, but fell below 6 per cent during a third of this period (Stevens 1991).

[83] As former royal revenues fell in the hands of regional elites and provincial governments, national authorities grew dependent on taxes on foreign trade — which oscillated between 40 and 70 per cent of total tax revenue — and public debt for revenue to meet growing deficits (Hamnett 1993, p.109; Tenenbaum1979, p. xii; Stevens 1991)

[84] Justo Sierra, an important intellectual and politician at the end of the century, summarised the situation with the following aphorism: "when salaries are paid, revolutions fade" (Stevens 1986, p. 648).

[85] Many of them were also foreigners, or closely associated with foreign interests, and capable of internationalising their disputes with the Mexican State (for illustrations regarding the activities of British and French merchants/consuls, *see* Tenenbaum (1979).

[86] See also Guillermo Prieto, "Circular a los gobernadores," *Siglo XIX*, 10 December 1855, and Dublán and Lozano (1876-1912, vol.7, pp.573-574).

Revisiting post-conflict reforms and statebuilding in historical perspective

In the aftermath of violent conflicts in 19th century Mexico, armed groups often managed to integrate pre-existent forms of governance into formal state institutions — for example, informal mechanisms of intermediation and indirect rule — despite formal institutional reforms. Intuitively, one could argue that this process empowered those local and regional governance mechanisms that delivered results: and thus forced national governments to negotiate with them rather than to attempt to eliminate them (however, much more detailed data is needed to substantiate this claim).

In the 1830s, after the elimination of provincial militias, the national government empowered military commanders and regular army units in an attempt to dominate local and regional political dynamics and to centralise authority over coercive and fiscal resources. However, since regular army units continued to function as "private armies" and military commanders continued to interfere in regional and national level politics, these armed actors did not allowed for the effective centralisation of coercion nor political authority that had been expected.

Subsequently, the National Guard institutionalised the power of district prefects (*jefes politicos*) with oversight over political and military affairs and who became key intermediaries between local, state, and federal authorities. Commanders of the National Guard extended their operations during the conflicts in the 1850s and 1860s, and formed political alliances among commanders, prefects, and local elites across several states. Therefore, the dissemination of Guard units created strong linkages between political and military mobilisation that facilitated the transition to civilian rule in the 1880s and 1890s — but also consolidated the patrimonial control that these actors had over the political and economic activities in their regions (Hernández Chávez, 1989:269; Palomo, 2003).

Similarly, during the 1880s, rather than the desired centralisation of political authority, the substitution of the regular army with a network of local politicians and paramilitary police units ("*Guardia Rural*") promoted the creation of powerful provincial governors and political cliques with autonomous sources of power. This network of political bosses, deeply embedded in regional contexts even while placed under the authority of the Interior Ministry, provided the basis for the electoral and administrative "machine politics" that emerged after the restoration of peace and the consolidation of the national government 1890s (Thomson, 1990:36; Perry, 1978:204-207).[87]

Throughout the 19th century — despite their nominal allegiance and obedience to state institutions — the national government had to negotiate its fiscal subsistence and essential military support from regional governors who enjoyed significant autonomy. In the 1880s and 1890s, even after the institutionalisation of a small professional army and the empowerment of loyal political prefects, backed by a national military police, the national government did not achieve direct control of armed coercion — but, rather, a tenuous right of arbitrage over a delicate balances of local and regional political factions and interest groups. Public administration and political organisation, at national, regional and local levels, continued to follow a patrimonial model and the federal institutions — though dutifully observed on paper — were not respected in practice (Rabasa 1912, Medina 2007).

The mutual empowerment between armed actors and the state over periods of armed conflict did not allow the state to secure effective control through new institutions and reforms — but rather, through the "politics" and "traditional practices" that this interaction generated—, even when clear strategies to *co-op*, *integrate*, *neutralise*, or *eliminate* armed actors were continuously deployed. In sum, if we follow Tilly in defining legitimacy as "the probability that other authorities will act to

[87] "In peacetime, no guard company could assemble, arm itself or mobilise without instructions from the civil authority (the lowest level with such powers was the *Jefatura Política*" (Thomson 1990, p.36).

confirm the decisions of a given authority" (Tilly, 1985, p. 171-2), the state in 19th century Mexico was legitimate only insofar as it reduced the probability of being challenged in its daily interaction with (armed) actors over which it had neither ownership nor control, despite its constitutional decision-making authority. Post-conflict institutional reforms in 19th century Mexico have been often described as deliberate but *unsuccessful* efforts toward the centralisation of coercion and the imposition of direct control over subnational armed actors. In the long term, however, statebuilding appears rather as a set of contradictory unintended outcomes arising from armed actors' effort to accommodate into a "statist" framework — as they were re-configured and re-organised after periods of violent conflict.

6. Conclusion

Studying post-conflict institutional reforms under the light of historical state formation offers a novel approach for analysing the relationship between armed actors, subnational governance and statebuilding outcomes. At the national level, statebuilding appears as the integration of local governance systems, in which armed actors played an important role, as they became integrated into shifting regional and national frameworks. At the local level, statebuilding efforts drove the re-configuration of local arrangements, many of them supported by autonomous armed forces, through their interaction with state institutions.

In 19th century Mexico, armed actors contributed to the development of formal state institutions while reproducing pre-existing governance mechanisms. As drivers of violent (dis)order they often derived significant benefits from their interaction with statebuilders — in detriment of civilian authority, the rule of law, and civilian populations. Despite important efforts to overcome persistent "state weakness" through improvisation and privatisation, institutional reforms often had the effect of legitimating the "armed politics" of key political actors such as regional military commanders, National Guard commanders, and local politicians. The creation of the National Guard and the professionalization of the national army sought to address this problem by (1) aligning government and armed configurations, on the one hand, and (2) decoupling armed mobilisation from political and economic competition at the national level.

More that the monopolisation of legitimate violence or the centralisation of authority *per se*, statebuilding required the integration of local and regional actors into an institutionalised framework for bargaining and conflict resolution. While in early modern Europe these two processes were interdependent and mutually reinforcing, we have shown that this might not be the case even when similar mechanisms and incentives are at work. In 19th century Mexico, for example, these efforts contributed to the institutionalisation of forms of political and economic accommodation that superseded recurrent violent conflict and armed mobilisation — even while *monopolisation* and *direct control* were not strictly achieved.

In conclusion, these long term trajectories of "armed order" suggest that — rather than the product of deliberate institutional design or top-down imposition — statebuilding also depends on the unintended processes through which local actors, particularly those developing institutional capacity from their experience in the organisation of armed force, become integrated into an empowering — and progressively — "statist" framework in exchange for short-term gains (such as greater autonomy, access to resources, or stakes' at national political institutions). On this basis, further micro-level comparisons and historical analysis, along these lines, can help us illuminate the paradoxical institutional choices faced by developing societies confronted with high levels of violence and armed (dis)order today.

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