

A GEOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF STATE FAILURE – MEXICO FROM

1521 TO 1848

A Dissertation

by

DANIEL BENJAMIN KEENEN

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Chair of Committee,	Jonathan Smith
Committee Members,	Kathleen O'Reilly
	Reyko Huang
	Courtney Thompson
Head of Department,	David Cairns

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a geographic interpretation of state failure using the case study of Mexico from 1521, when Cortés conquered the Aztecs, to 1848 when the United States defeated Mexico in the Mexican American War. This dissertation demonstrates that Mexico is an ideal case for utilizing the method of geographic interpretation on failing states because of Spain and Mexico's territorial contraction from the late 1700s until 1848. This geographic interpretation examines Spain and Mexico's failure by highlighting the geographic facts that influenced this process of decline that can be called Hispano-Mexican State Failure. Through examining the geographic influences on the historical events on the North American continent, this dissertation explains an old story in a new way. To assist in visually telling the story of Hispano-Mexican State Failure, maps are used throughout this dissertation to reinforce a fundamental idea of this project, that a state cannot evenly control its territory and that a state's power decays as it moves away from its capital. Lastly, this study assessed how well this geographic interpretation of state failure aided in teaching undergraduate students the basic concepts of political geography and state failure. The results from this learning experiment found that the maps used in the dissertation's geographic interpretation did not improve a student's learning outcomes when compared to using traditional images used to teach state failure and political geography.

DEDICATION

To Kate, for not letting me quit.

To Mom and Dad for getting me started.

To Mr. Wason for first showing me why where matters.

You'll Never Walk Alone.

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I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Smith. I would not have gotten to the end of the line without your guidance and mentorship. My flag would likely still be fluttering aimlessly in the breeze if not for your constant encouragement for me to firmly plant it in the ground.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE GEOGRAPHY OF STATE POWER

State failure is a vexing problem for scholars. It is a vexing problem because it does not have any easy answers. Not only is it difficult to agree on what constitutes a successful state but states themselves are not easy to study given that they are massive, complex social organizations with myriad actors inside and outside of them. Any study of a state's success or failure must make decisions on what parts of the state to study and which parts must be left for other scholars. No study could possibly tackle every detail of a state on its own. Studies must privilege certain evidence or theories over others to make the problem at hand manageable. This study will make the state manageable by interpreting its failure geographically.

The potential case studies for any project on state failure are many. One could study present-day examples like Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Yemen. History offers up many potentially lucrative subjects as well, from the fall of Rome, to the Mongols and, more recently, the Russian Empire. Similar to the diversity of failed states, the theoretical underpinnings of any such project are similarly varied. One could choose from feminist, to post-structuralist, or even anarchist theoretical perspectives to inform a project on state failure.

Given the diverse universe of options at play, this introductory chapter sets the theoretical and historical stage for the geographic interpretation of state failure that is to follow. The theoretical foundations will be robustly poured here, while the historical footings will be alluded to. The case study that this geographic interpretation of state failure focuses on is that of the Hispano-Mexican State from 1521 to 1848. The state is actually two closely related states, but is so called because the territorial contraction that underlines this dissertation's definition of state

failure spans the life of these two states, that of the colony of New Spain and the independent state of Mexico. I chose Mexico as the case study for this dissertation because Texas A&M's campus also rests on the geography of this failed Hispano-Mexican state. Texas A&M would not exist today if history had played out differently and Texas remained part of Mexico.

After this introductory chapter that outlines the theory of this dissertation, the second chapter will pour the geographic foundations of the rest of the document by explaining that the political geography of the Spanish state in the western hemisphere was driven by the need for Spain to control the Isthmuses of Tehuantepec and Panama, the most efficient routes between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The need to control these key pieces of terrain meant that other Spanish territorial holdings in the Western Hemisphere, namely everything north of the present-day US-Mexico border, was viewed as a buffer protecting more valuable territory to its south. In consequence, New Spain neglected its northern frontier. This strategically apathetic view of the northern territory, coupled with its distance from Mexican power centers to its south and the shape of the North American continent, meant that northern New Spain became a fragile sphere and a cartographic territory instead of a secure domain.

In chapter three, I explain that the young Mexican state was frequently challenged by regional rebellions. These rebellions stemmed from legitimacy failures of the Mexican state, which could not command obedience from its population. The young Mexican state could not deliver pain to defend its citizens from external threats (such as marauding natives), or to coerce obedience by those citizens. It also lacked the wealth to pay for obedience, as it lacked the prestige to compel obedience by the power of persuasion. Young Mexico was by any measure a failing state and its citizens consequently challenged its feeble sovereignty. Secession was the

aim of rebellions in the sphere that were far away from the Mexican capital, and where the already feeble power of the state was more affected by distance decay.

The only successful secession movement occurred in Texas, and this is the topic of chapter's four and five. The success of this rebellion was assured by the distance decay of feeble Mexican power, and the geographical facts of closer proximity and superior natural connections to the expanding United States. The friction of distance was great on the rocky road north from the Mexican core. It was small on the smooth natural highway of the Ohio, Mississippi, and Red Rivers. Mexico's failure to create a coasting navy and merchant marine exacerbated the imbalance, since the main track of Texas ran east to New Orleans and not south to Veracruz.

In chapter six the focus is on Mexican state failure in the Mexican-American War. The failure of Mexican state is evident in the fact that it lost the cartographic territory of its feeble northern sphere to the United States. The United States coveted the strategic Pacific port of San Francisco and could project overwhelming violence into the sphere—indeed into the very core—of Mexico. The United States thus withdrew its recognition of Mexico's sovereignty and asked the Mexican state to violently prove that sovereignty on the battlefield. Mexico, of course, failed to answer that challenge and failed to prove its sovereignty.

The patterns of these conflicts elucidate the recurring spatial pattern that is the key to a geographic interpretation of Mexican state failure. Mexico is a country that is geographically oriented along a north-south axis.¹ Governing Mexico and maintaining a successful Mexican state therefore requires an efficient main track running north to south. Nature has not provided

¹ Sauer, "The Personality of Mexico," 354-355 and 364. Sauer identifies this north to south relationship as the driving relationship behind Mexico's "personality."

such a track and the weak Mexican state could do little to correct this defect of nature. While the friction of distance on this north-south axis was therefore historically high, the friction of distance on the east-west axis north of the Gulf of Mexico was low. This is not the whole story, of course, but the story of the early-nineteenth-century failure of the Mexican state failure is not complete without understanding the relevant facts of strategic geography. And of these relevant facts the greatest is that it was, for reasons of geography, much easier to deliver overwhelming violence into the cartographic territory of the fragile Mexican sphere from the east than from the south.

And though there are recurring spatial patterns throughout this story of state failure, chapter seven will entertain a geographic counterfactual to demonstrate that the geography of this story, while important, was not *deterministic*. This hypothetical will consider the potential consequences if Spain and Mexico had developed connections with Texas via the Gulf of Mexico rather than overland through the Mexican Plateau. This thought experiment is undertaken to strike a balance between demonstrating geography's importance to this story of state failure, without suggesting that geography was the only factor at play in the story. The policy decisions made by human actors within the states of New Spain and Mexico mattered just as much as the geography these human actors had to contend with.

The last chapter of this project, chapter eight, proceeds in a style differently to those above. While chapters one through seven detail a geographic interpretation of state failure, written in the style of historical geography, chapter eight puts the interpretation offered in the first seven chapters into an undergraduate classroom. The aim of this chapter was to quantitatively assess how well a geographic interpretation of state failure teaches the state

failure's basic concepts to a class of undergraduates when compared to traditional interpretations of state failure.

The Geography of State Power

“Covenants, without the sword, are but words and of no strength to secure a man at all.”

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)²

The concept of a **failed state** is controversial. The term is viewed as pejorative by some, while others argue that it is too vague to be useful.³ While there is consensus that losing the monopoly on the legitimate use of force is a key marker of state failure, there is much less consensus as to other markers of it.⁴ Arguments can be made that a breakdown in education systems, a breakdown in road maintenance, consistent failure to pass legislation, widespread blackouts, or “weak institutions” are all markers of state failure.⁵ These are indeed markers but I maintain that they are incidental to the primary and essential failure, which is the state's failure to enforce its will throughout its territory.

My goal in this dissertation is to simplify the concept of state failure and thereby make it useful. I will simplify the concept by focusing on violence. My epigraph from *Leviathan* makes clear that violence, or the threat of violence, is the essential function of a state. I want to bring this grim truth to the study of state failure. Words without hard power to enforce them are just words. To maintain sovereignty over its territory a state must be able, or at least be perceived to

² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 87.

³ Ezrow and Frantz, 2013, “Revisiting the Concept of the Failed State: Bringing the state back in,” 1324.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1325.

be able, to deliver overwhelming violence throughout the territory that it claims to rule. A state that fails to do this is a failed or failing state.

The theory of the state that underwrites this geographic interpretation of state failure is Weber's theory of the state. This theory succinctly asserts that a state is an organization of people that has the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory.⁶ This theory is fundamentally geographic because it asserts that a state rules a *territory*. This theory is fundamentally military because it asserts that a state rules its territory with "a sword."

Weber's theory of the state underwrites the two basic assertions of my geographic interpretation of the state and state failure. My first assertion is that violence is the foundation of state power and a state's mastery of violence chronologically precedes internal and external legitimacy. My second assertion is that state power, especially hard power, suffers from distance decay. That is, it is harder to deliver violence farther away from the state's capital or center of power. This is why states normally begin to fail at their margins.

Weber's state theory is the starting place for this dissertation because this theory can be broken down into three propositions. (1) A state has a monopoly on violence. (2) A successful state has a monopoly on violence throughout the territory it claims to rule. (3) A successful state's application or threat of violence within its territory is legitimate in the eyes of its citizens (internal sovereignty) and other states (external sovereignty).

These three propositions put together mean that a successful state commands the obedience of all persons within its territory because its threat of violence is credible and legitimate in the eyes of its citizens and other states. Conversely, the commands of a failed or

⁶ Soifer, "State infrastructural power: approaches to conceptualization and measurement," 234.

failing state are flouted and ignored because its threat of violence is, as Shakespeare said in another context, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Before discussing the applications of this theory further, first I will outline the three forms of power that make up a state’s ability to obtain sovereignty and legitimacy.

Three Forms of Power

Before delving deeper into sovereignty and legitimacy, I must say a bit more about power. I do not propose a new definition of the term or a novel understanding of it. In this dissertation I lean very heavily on John Kenneth Galbraith’s book the *Anatomy of Power*. In this book Galbraith argues that there are only three forms of power. In this dissertation I call these forms of power: payment, persuasion, and pain. Galbraith calls them compensatory, (social) conditioning, and condign power.⁷

As these forms of power relate to a state, they mean that a state can pay its citizens for their obedience through provision of public goods and public subsidies. A state can persuade its citizens to obey through national propaganda, a nationalist history taught in public schools, or through the inertia of long usage and custom. Lastly, and as I have said most fundamentally, a state can deliver, or threaten to deliver pain. Disobedience is discouraged and, where not effectively discouraged, punished by police or military violence.

All three forms of power may be present at varying levels throughout a state’s history and territory. In some periods and places a state is more reliant on pain. For instance, a state is typically violent during its formation. In other periods and places a state is more reliant on persuasion. For example, domestic propaganda is pronounced during a time of war. In other

⁷ Galbraith, *The Anatomy of Power*, 4-6.

times and places a state may command obedience through public works and public subsidies. During the recent global pandemic, for example, the United States paid its citizens to stay home in the hope that this would limit the spread of the covid virus. Ideally, these three things work in concert with one another to produce a well-oiled, obedient, population for the state to govern.

In today's world, most stable, or well-functioning states do not have to use violence frequently to obtain obedience from their citizens. The United States and most of Western Europe fall into this bucket. These states use limited violence (and an unlimited threat of violence) to control their populations through well-functioning police and prison systems, but these successful states rely most heavily on persuasion and payment to gain obedience from their citizens. National education systems persuade most citizens that the state is legitimate and its commands should be obeyed, even when no one is watching. The manifold benefits of residing in a successful state, with access to public works, public institutions and public subsidies, also purchases obedience.

It is in states that are commonly labeled as rogue or failing that we typically see violence used more brutally, more frequently, and more openly. Violence in such states is usually tied to repression of a rebellion, an attempted secession, or some other contestation of state sovereignty. In these cases, the state is usually less able to widely use persuasion and payment to command obedience from its citizens. The reason such states are unable to tap into these two forms of power on a wide scale has to do with the fact that the state is still contesting its sovereignty.

The State Starts with Violence – State Formation, Sovereignty's Reliance on Violence

The state starts with violence. I make this assertion because state formation literature, especially the literature that focuses on European state formation, clearly indicates violence as

important to a state establishing sovereignty. States, to be successful and to successfully command obedience from their population, have to have sovereignty over the territory they claim to rule. States lacking in sovereignty, like Afghanistan and Somalia, are usually the first contenders to be labeled as failed states.

As this idea relates to Weber's state theory, I understand sovereignty to be empirically demonstrated as the state having a monopoly on violence. This condition is similar to that presented in the 4th edition of *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, which defines internal sovereignty as "a condition of final and absolute authority in a political community."⁸ By the same source, external sovereignty is defined as being recognized as sovereign by other states in the international system.

My definition of internal sovereignty, that a state is the highest authority in the territory that it claims to rule, is similar to *The Dictionary of Human Geography* definition because the authority that is "final and absolute" is backed and sustained by no higher authority. Taking ultimate to mean last, this means that the sovereign entity must control violence because violence is the form of power that is used when all other forms of power fail to achieve their desired outcomes.⁹

I have left out the idea of *legitimacy* for now because I will discuss that in the next section. I also want to clearly separate the concept of sovereignty from the concept of legitimacy because of the three forms of power that I discussed in the last section, even though some

⁸ Johnston et. al, *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 766.

⁹ Buisson, "State-Building, Power-Building and Political Legitimacy," 123 footnote 33. Buisson articulates that violence is used as a last resort by the state, meaning that the state uses it when its other forms of power have failed.

scholars have the idea of legitimacy tied to their definition of sovereignty.¹⁰ A state can exercise sovereignty without enjoying legitimacy if it can coerce a grudging obedience with the threat and exemplary exercise of violence.

The take-home message in this section is that a state's sovereignty comes before a state's legitimacy and a state's sovereignty depends on its ability to monopolize the delivery of violence within its territory. A state's sovereignty is most clearly tied to one form of power, violence. A successful state has to unquestionably rule its territory. Its unquestionable rule is proven by general obedience and general obedience is primarily obtained by a credible threat of delivering overwhelming punitive violence to every corner of territory that it claims to rule. Max Weber, himself, notes violence's fundamental importance to political order when he says:

“a political organization will be called a ‘ruling organization’ to the extent that its existence and the validity of its orders can be continually guaranteed within a given geographical area by the application and threat of physical coercion by an administrative staff.”¹¹

A “ruling organization” is not a “state” in Weber's political theory, but his subtle distinctions do not invalidate the point I am making here. Especially considering that, conceptually, there is often a difference between how ancient empires, like Rome, are discussed and understood when compared to a modern nation-state.¹² The point I am making here is that *whatever* is in charge of a territory (be it a state, an occupying army, a criminal gang, a warlord or caudillo, or whatever

¹⁰ This breakdown of Weber's state theory into Legitimacy, Monopoly on Violence, and Territory, is also used by Soifer, “State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement,” 233-234. Tyson, “The Strategic Foundations of Political Sovereignty,” 657. Tyson defines sovereignty as “the exclusive power, legitimacy, and authority to govern.”

¹¹ Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, 135.

¹² Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, 96.

else), it must enforce obedience to its rules with a credible threat, and when disobeyed with a chastening application, of “physical coercion” or violence.

Charles Tilly, a scholar who studied state formation in the European context, said that the development of the European state “began with the effort to monopolize the means of violence within a delimited territory.”¹³ Because the “delimited territory” of a state has spatial extent, this means that the state began with a monopoly over the power to *deliver violence to the limits of its territory*. Other work by Tilly outlines the two key tasks that every state must perform are the establishment of sovereignty, or state-making, in Tilly’s terms, as well as war-making, or defeating external threats. The state’s success in these tasks depends, as Tilly says, “on the state’s tendency to monopolize the concentrated means of coercion.”¹⁴ This means that a failed state without *sovereignty*, or a monopoly on violence in its territory, is unable to defeat internal challenges to its power and external threats.¹⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, referring the general task of war-making, put it slightly differently, saying that a state needs to guarantee its survival from enemies in an anarchic international system.¹⁶ State survival is guaranteed through control of the means of violence and the means of the delivery of violence to the limits of a state’s territory.

Brian Taylor and Roxana Botea summarize Tilly’s state formation process as proceeding in the following order, from war, to extraction of resources from the population, to repression of

¹³ Charles Tilly as quoted by Taylor and Botea, “Tilly Tally: War-Making and State-Making in the Contemporary Third World,” 172.

¹⁴ Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 181.

¹⁵ On this point, I do want to point out that I am assuming that the state has a monopoly on violence within some piece of territory it claims to control. The state does not have to have sovereignty over all of its territory, but it has to be sovereign over enough territory that it can extract resources from its population to pay for its state-making and war-making activities. Tilly’s paper, cited above, also notes the importance of resource extraction to a state’s success.

¹⁶Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, 3.

internal competitors to the state's power, to "state formation."¹⁷ I highlight these steps to segue into critiques of Tilly's argument that further support my position. Critics of Tilly argue that his model of state formation does not always apply to states outside of Europe, and that it can be understood to be leaning towards social Darwinism.¹⁸

One such scholar, Miguel Centeno, took to applying Tilly's argument to Latin America. The results of one of Centeno's studies asserted that war only benefited a nascent state when that state had already established sovereignty in its territory.¹⁹ So, the model is not as simple, as suggested by Taylor and Botea, since the state only gained strength as a result of war after achieving sovereignty. The state, as Centeno asserts, first has to have a monopoly on violence before it can benefit from war. Speaking of Mexico in the time period this dissertation will cover, Centeno also asserts that Mexico did not have such a monopoly until the start of the Porfiriato in 1876.²⁰

Joel Migdal, in his book *Strong Societies and Weak States*, also points out the fundamental importance of violence in a state gaining obedience from its population. He says that,

"at the most elementary level, the strength of the state rests on gaining conformance to its demands by the population. Compliance often *first comes* with the use of the *most basic* of sanctions, force."²¹ – emphasis added.

Providing further support to my argument is the following quote from Jonathan Hanson and Rachel Signman who say,

¹⁷ Taylor and Botea, "Tilly Tally," 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Centeno, "Blood and Debt: War and Taxation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," 1590-91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, 32.

“To perform other functions, including the collection of revenue, a state must possess the force necessary to contain threats throughout its territory or at least convince its rivals that this is the case.”²²

Lastly, this position is also bolstered by work done by Hillel Soifer and Jan Pierskalla. Soifer’s article, published in 2008, says that “political power predated...the state” and this “political power” is “protected by the application of force.” Over time, Soifer asserts, the state developed a monopoly on the application of force, or sovereignty.²³ Pierskalla’s work says similarly, that the state has a phase of ‘primitive accumulation of power,’ or the accumulation of the monopoly on violence, also known as sovereignty.²⁴

So, a state must first establish sovereignty over its territory. To do this it must defeat all rival rulers and recalcitrant rebels, since this shows that the state has the monopoly on violence and can successfully deliver that violence to the limits of the territory that it claims to rule. After the state proves its sovereignty through violence, then it can transition to using the other two forms of power, payment and persuasion. This is because the population it rules now knows, beyond all doubt, that the state decides how problems are ultimately resolved. The population knows that the state can kill them if they take up arms against the state.²⁵

Once a state has established its sovereignty through violence, it aims to engender the sentiment of legitimacy among its population. The three forms of power each play a crucial role

²² Hanson and Signman, “Leviathan’s Latent Dimensions: Measuring State Capacity for Comparative Political Research,” 1498.

²³ Soifer, “State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement,” 234.

²⁴ Pierskalla et al, “The Territorial Expansion of the Colonial State: Evidence from German East Africa 1980-1909,” 711.

²⁵ Radziwinowiczówna, “Violence that builds sovereignty: the transnational violence continuum in deportation from the United States,” 1095. I highlight this example from Radziwinowiczówna in particular because this author asserts that people who experience the state enforcing its sovereignty, those who are deported from the United States, self-regulate into staying away from the United States in the future. That is, the citizens recognize the state can enforce its rules and obey them voluntarily after the state proves to them that it is sovereign by deporting them.

in creating this sentiment of legitimacy. State violence protects obedient citizens from harm, state persuasion convinces the citizens of the state's virtues and foundational myths, and state payments deliver material benefits to those who belong to and obey the state. But, before a state can worry about its legitimacy, it must first prove its sovereignty.

Legitimacy and the Three Forms of Power

“Legitimacy has its source in sovereignty...” says Antoine Buisson.²⁶ A state has to secure its sovereignty before it can cultivate legitimacy. I will discuss the spatial disconnect that can happen between the territory that a state claims to control and territory that it actually controls in the next section, but for now, I will say that a state has to have sovereignty before it can have legitimacy. After a state establishes that it is sovereign, then it can gain the additional security of legitimacy by paying and persuading the citizens that live within its borders.

Legitimacy is granted *to* a state *by* the people living in that state. Hobbes might call this sovereignty, where citizens give up some of their power to be a part of the state and be protected by the state.²⁷ I agree with Hobbes' assertion but disagree with his terminology. The process Hobbes describes is better understood as the state gaining *legitimacy* from the people, not gaining *sovereignty*. The state establishes its own sovereignty, the people who live in the territory over which the state is sovereign grant that state legitimacy.

²⁶ Buisson, “State-Building, Power-Building and Political Legitimacy: The Case of Post-Conflict Tajikistan,” 123.

²⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 90-96. Hobbes here outlines a “commonwealth,” where sovereignty is vested in an assembly of some kind. He does say that the responsibilities of the sovereign are the same, whether in a monarchy or a democratic assembly of some kind. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 93. Mearsheimer notes that the idea of a nation governing itself is sometimes referred to as popular sovereignty, but even here, the majority of the national group has to give up their personal autonomy to a higher authority to help aid in their survival. Meaning, sovereignty is exercised by a higher authority, while that authority will be viewed legitimately or not, by the people that sovereign claims to govern.

The three forms of power all have a part to play in the state getting legitimacy from its people and states seek to be viewed legitimately by their citizens because “legitimacy is” a “stabilizing force.”²⁸ A state that is viewed as legitimate will face fewer rebellions against its sovereignty, and fewer occasions to threaten or apply violence, because its citizens voluntarily obey its rules. Indeed, some authors have said that “without legitimacy, government cannot rely on citizens to voluntarily comply with centrally mandated policies.”²⁹ Each of the three forms of power have a role to play in a state gaining legitimacy from its population.

The delivery of violence is important for a state’s legitimacy because the state’s citizens see that the state can defend them from external and internal threats. Again, I argue that this is the most basic task that a state has to perform before it will be viewed legitimately by its citizens. Citizens care most that their state can protect their lives and property against renegade violence. If the state chooses to provide public goods beyond security, that will likely be viewed as an added bonus.³⁰ But citizens who are not protected by their state are unlikely to view it as legitimate. This is the first and most basic layer of legitimacy because a state, by delivering violence in its territory, demonstrates its sovereignty and wins the gratitude that confers legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

The state can also pay its citizens in the form of direct compensation, subsidies, tax breaks, or provision of other public goods in addition to bare protection of life and property.

²⁸ Siegle, “Stabilising Fragile States,” 2; Bakke et. al, “Convincing State-Builders? Disaggregating Internal Legitimacy in Abkhazia,” 601-603. Bakke and her co-authors identify areas in their study that correspond with the three forms of power I have laid out here.

²⁹ Flückiger et. al, “Ebola and State Legitimacy,” 2064.

³⁰ Pegg and Kolsto, “Somaliland: Dynamics of internal legitimacy and (lack of) external sovereignty,” 194; Lake, *The Statebuilder’s Dilemma: On the Limits of Foreign Intervention*, 17. Lake says that “social order” precedes legitimacy.

Indeed, many states today have very costly burdens placed on them because their citizens expect the state to pay for a wide variety of public goods, from healthcare to electricity to regular trash service.³¹ In the United States, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this form of power was on display when the US Federal Government sent stimulus checks directly to American taxpayers to pay them to obey the state's stay-at-home orders. Additionally, other authors have found that public health provision and a positive response to an epidemic can increase a state's legitimacy.³²

Lastly, the state will use its power of persuasion to convince its citizens that it is their legitimate ruler and disobedience is immoral as well as illegal. The most obvious way this occurs is through fostering a national identity or creating a national education system for its citizens.³³ A common culture or national identity is hugely important for a state's legitimacy because it fosters a sense of collective identity that inspires obedience with respect to the state's rules. Indeed, as Mearsheimer points out in *The Great Delusion*, inspired, patriotic citizens who have been educated in a common, national language, are more willing to sign up to fight the state's wars.³⁴

It also helps a state to engender the sentiment of legitimacy when its presence is viewed as naturally "as the rivers and the mountains."³⁵ This last point is also one that is key to note, because, typically, the longer a state has been around, the more likely it is that it will have legitimacy from its population. We can call this type of legitimacy *historical weight*. In this instance, people give the state legitimacy simply because it is the only form of authority they have even known.

³¹ Gros, "Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti," 456.

³² Flückiger et. al, "Ebola and State Legitimacy," 2086.

³³ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 99-102.

³⁴ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 100.

³⁵ Migdal, quoted in Bakke et. al, "Convincing State-Builders?" 593.

So, legitimacy is closely tied to the material and spiritual benefits that a state's citizens receive for being citizens of the state. A state delivers the public good of security to its citizens to demonstrate its sovereignty and the benefits that accrue to obedient citizens of the state.³⁶ As articulated above, the state will also look to engender a national identity and provide other public goods so that its citizens see plenty of benefits for being a member of the state. However, since provision of these benefits enhances the legitimacy of a state, we must suppose that a state's legitimacy will diminish if these benefits are discontinued or curtailed.

The State Ends with Violence, Legitimacy Failures and Challenges to the State's (Internal) Sovereignty

When a state fails to provide benefits to its citizens, the citizens understand that the costs of citizenship, namely being conscripted into the army and paying taxes,³⁷ may begin to exceed the benefits of citizenship. In these situations, where perceived benefits of citizenship are less than the perceived or actual costs, the state usually faces eroding legitimacy. When a state loses legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens—when the sentiment of legitimacy wanes—I say there is *legitimacy failure*.

Legitimacy failure occurs when citizens perceive that the costs of citizenship have begun to exceed the benefits. Such failures typically precede more serious and violent challenges to the state's sovereignty and should be taken as a warning sign for the state that something is rotten in

³⁶ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 48-49. Here Mearsheimer provides a legible and concise overview of Locke and Hobbes' ideas that essentially say that people chose to live in a state to guarantee their safety. The state that only looks after its citizens security and functions as a "nightwatchman" to enforce society's rules is the most basic form of the liberal state. Bakke et. al, "Convincing State-Builders?" 593. Bakke and her co-authors also note the importance of a state delivering benefits to its citizens for engendering legitimacy in its population.

³⁷ These two things are noted as fundamental tasks for every state by Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 181.

the state of Mexico.³⁸ The state should take this opportunity to address the population's grievances, as leaving these concerns unaddressed can lead to escalations in the citizen's disaffection and acceleration in legitimacy failure.

These "escalations" can eventually grow into violent challenges to the state's sovereignty. For the purposes of this dissertation, the main "escalations" and violent challenges that I am concerned with are secessions, revolutions, and coups. Secession is when a group of citizens challenge the state's sovereignty by creating their own independent breakaway state. As we will see in the following chapters, the Texians did this when they gained independence from Mexico in 1836. Secessionist movements tend to happen in areas remote from the central government because power decays with distance and sovereignty is usually weakest at the outer limits of a state's territory. Revolutions and coups aim to seize control of the state and therefore normally focus on possession of the state's capital and core.

A revolution is a radical change in the rules and rulers of a state. An example is Russia before and after the Bolshevik revolution. The Russian state underwent a fundamental change in character when it passed from the Czarist to the communist regime. Though both regimes were autocratic, the foundations of the state's legitimacy shifted dramatically between the Romanov Dynasty and the Bolshevik party. The former was largely legitimated by what I called "historical weight," the latter was largely legitimated in grandiose promises about the future.

A coup, or more properly coup d'état, is a revolution in the rulers of a state without any dramatic change in the state's institutions or forms of power. Mexico was marked by frequent changes between federalist and centralist governments from shortly after independence until

³⁸ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. This is a reference to the oft quoted "something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

1876, but most of these changes in the rulers of Mexico were not accompanied by fundamental changes in the state's institutions, and are therefore more properly described as coups.

How a state responds to such challenges to its sovereignty determines whether the state is failing or not. Again, understanding violence as the basic determinate of state success means that a legitimacy failure does not mean the state is failing. When a state loses a challenge to its *sovereignty*, then the state is failing because it cannot deliver violence to territory that it claimed to control.

Challenges to a state's sovereignty usually follow a legitimacy failure because the citizens of the state believe that they would be better off without the costs and diminishing or nonexistent benefits of citizenship in the current state. Legitimacy failure also suggests a deeper weakening of a state's sovereignty—its ability to deliver violence to the limits of its territory—and this may invite open challenges to that sovereignty. Challenges to the state's sovereignty are violent and occur because, lacking legitimacy, there is little or no voluntary compliance from citizens and the state has to fall back on its most basic form of power: violence.

In these instances, where there is little or no legitimacy, the state issues a command and the response is “come and take it.” That is what the Texians said to the Mexican officials who asked the Texians to return a loaned cannon in 1835. The Mexican officials did not get their cannon back. I call this the “*come and take it*” principle, named in honor of the Texians at Gonzales who successfully challenged Mexican sovereignty when they disobeyed their state's command to return the loaned cannon.

A *weak state* then is one that is facing a legitimacy crisis or a *legitimacy failure*. In a weak state we are likely to see challenges to the state's sovereignty, or citizens asking their state

to “come and take it.” A state that wins these challenges to its sovereignty by violently enforcing obedience will retain the label of a weak state until it solves the crisis of legitimacy. A state that loses these challenges to its sovereignty is a *failing state*. A *failing state* is one that loses territory over which it was once sovereign to another state or a rebellious faction within their own state.

The state ends with violence because, when its legitimacy fails, it must prove its sovereignty with the most basic form of power, violence. Because a state’s success is so intimately tied with violence, it must contend with the geographic character of its territory and overcome the distance decay that makes it progressively more difficult to govern the further one is from the capital and core. But before I enlarge on this theme, I must note that rebels, separatists and insurrectionists are not the only ones who can challenge a state for control of its territory. A state must also prove to other states that it is the sovereign ruler of its territory by maintaining internal order and defending its outer borders. This is called external sovereignty.

The last stage of the process of state failure is a *failed state*. For this project, a failed state is a state that has lost control of all the territory it previously claimed or controlled with any or all of the three forms of powers. If one were to map this kind of state, it would not appear on the map because it no longer has any territory. In these cases, the reach of the state is effectively zero. Thus, for example, the Byzantine Empire was not a failed state until 1453. It had been failing and losing territory for centuries, it had long lingered as a feeble rump³⁹ of its former self, but it did not *fail* until 1453, when Mehmed II at last entered the capital, cut the head from the

³⁹ We have the important term “rump state” from the German *Rumpfstaat*. In German, the *Rumpf* is the trunk or torso, not the hindquarters or buttocks. Thus a “rump state” is what remains after an empire has been “dismembered” (i.e. it has been stripped of its domain and reduced to its core).

dead emperor, defaced the iconic Serpent Column, and installed a mullah in the pulpit of St.

Sophia. As an historian describes it:

“So the cry that God was great and Mohammed his prophet rang through the dome where thirty generations of patriarchs had celebrated the Holy Mysteries, and all Europe and Asia knew the end was come of the longest tale of Empire that Christendom has yet seen.”⁴⁰

Thus, a failed state is not able to enforce its claims to sovereignty anywhere within the territory it claims. I define state failure this way because I have defined state success as possession of both sovereignty and legitimacy within the territory it claims. The primary empirical measures for this definition of state success are verifying that the state has sovereignty and legitimacy, as well as verifying *where* the state has those characteristics. If a failing state does not have sovereignty within some part of its territory, that means a failed state can be defined as a state that does not have sovereignty *anywhere* within its territory.

The State Ends with Violence, Challenges to a State’s (External) Sovereignty

External sovereignty exists when other states recognize and respect a state’s internal sovereignty. The key here is to note that the determinant of external sovereignty is not the study state, but rather states external to the study state. A state with external sovereignty is “recognized” by other states. Mexico’s external sovereignty is not, for example, determined by anything that the Mexican government does or does not do. It is determined by the United States

⁴⁰ Oman, *Byzantine Empire*, 349-350

and other great powers.⁴¹ Mexico has external sovereignty when great powers recognize its legitimacy. Mexico loses external sovereignty if that recognition is withdrawn.

A state does not have to have internal sovereignty before it is granted external sovereignty. Again, a state does not control external sovereignty and its internal affairs may not affect its external sovereignty. For example, modern Somalia does not enjoy internal sovereignty, but its sovereignty is nevertheless recognized by external powers. Opposite to the case of Somalia, a state with external sovereignty but little internal sovereignty, is a *de facto* state. A *de facto* state exists when a state-like political organization performs the functions of a state but is not recognized by the great powers.⁴²

Because great powers give external sovereignty, they can also take it away. This means that the international system is still anarchic and states with larger armies are able to take territory from states with smaller ones if they so choose.⁴³ Given this reality of the inter-state system, a state must be prepared to violently prove its sovereignty to any external challengers who seek to invade its territory. This case, when a potential invader is aiming to conquer territory, is when the domestic affairs of a state matter for determining external sovereignty.

The best example directly relevant to this dissertation is the United States in 1846 withdrawing its recognition of Mexico's sovereignty over its northern sphere and invading

⁴¹ Riegl and Dobos, "Power and Recognition: How (Super)Powers Decide the International Recognition Process," 442. These authors find that the support of a super power is a sufficient condition for independence of a secessionist movement. Coggins, "Friends in High Places: International Politics and the Emergence of States from Secessionism," 433. Coggins makes a similar point. Fazal and Griffiths, "Membership Has Its Privileges: The Changing Benefits of Statehood," 79-81. These authors notes that the international norm against territorial conquest has led to more secessionist movements, as more groups seek to gain the benefits of being recognized as independent states in the international community. Jackson and Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist," 13. Jackson and Rosberg call external sovereignty "juridical statehood." But they are referring to a state's "territory" and "independence" being guaranteed by the international system.

⁴² Pegg and Kolsto, "Somaliland," 193.

⁴³ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 3.

Mexican territory with the aim of securing California. The best current example is Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine, an invasion that has seen Russia withdraw its external recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty over the Donbas and invade Ukrainian territory.⁴⁴ Ukraine, like Mexico in 1846, has had to respond violently in an effort to prove that it is the sovereign ruler of its far-eastern oblasts. As of the time of writing, this conflict is still ongoing. Mexico, however, lost sovereignty over its northern sphere to the United States.

Distance Decay of Hard Power

A state's sovereignty depends on its ability to deliver violence throughout its territory: therefore, the state's geography affects its success in maintaining its sovereignty. To say anything else is to deny that what geographers do matters. Geography does matter and a state's geography eases or complicates the task of proving its sovereignty.

Geography is an important factor in determining a state's ability to govern its territory. Some scholars call this the "reach of the state."⁴⁵ The work that focuses on the reach of the state has a clear touchpoint in Jeffery Herbst's 2000 book, *The State and Power in Africa*. Herbst was concerned with "the *fundamental* problem facing state-builders in Africa... project[ing] authority over inhospitable territories that contain relatively low densities of people."⁴⁶ He argues that Africa's geography makes it expensive to project hard power. The continent is varied, navigable rivers are not abundant, and it is a large landmass.⁴⁷ This unfavorable geography means that it costs the state more to try and extend its power across space in Africa than it does in Europe.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ BBC, "Why did Russia Invade Ukraine and has Putin's war failed?"

⁴⁵ Soifer, "State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement," 234.

⁴⁶ Herbst, *State and Power in Africa: The Challenge of State-building in Africa*, 11. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

Herbst's book also touches on another important idea that is echoed by scholars like James C. Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, which is that it is more expensive and resource-intensive for a state to apply power in the rough terrain of its periphery than in open plains closer to its capital. Scott calls this phenomenon the "friction of terrain."⁴⁹ I use the term conventional in geography and call it friction of distance. Friction of distance is the cumulative and highly variable cost of transporting anything from point A to point B. The friction is cumulative because cost grows as the distance increases. It is variable because cost varies with the nature of the country that is crossed. High friction (i.e. cost) is not simply a function of terrain, but is rather a function of terrain, technology, perception, and the support or hostility of the local population.

Friction of distance affects the transportation of violence just as it affects the transportation of everything else.

Power is projected from a center, most often a state's capital region or core. The friction of distance causes this power to diminish with distance, and to diminish most rapidly where terrain, technology and local hostility raise transportation costs to a high level. The distance decay of state power is graphically illustrated in D.W. Meinig's model of the state as three concentric subdivisions of core, domain, and sphere.⁵⁰ These three subdivisions would not exist if the state was able to project its power without diminution to the limits of its territory.

Studies have shown that a conflict that takes place further from a state's base of military power will last longer than a conflict that takes place close to that stronghold. This demonstrates

⁴⁹ Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 40-63.

⁵⁰ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 418-426.

the distance decay of state power.⁵¹ Other studies have indicated that a state's strength decays as it moves away from its capital; some of these studies have demonstrated that rebellions typically begin in the sphere and then, if successful, move towards the capital.⁵² Other studies back up this notion by pointing out that secessionist movements typically fight in areas that are furthest from the state's capital.⁵³

A state must have a robust logistics capacity to support its military, since longer supply lines reduce the combat power of the combat-oriented troops. Resources and manpower must be withdrawn from the fighting force in order to operate and defend lengthening supply lines.⁵⁴ Clausewitz calls this the "diminishing force of the attack."⁵⁵ Even piracy was more difficult to stop the further away from a state's capital it occurred.⁵⁶

The key point to make is that the delivery of hard power and violence is eased or complicated by the physical geography of the state, by technological modifications of that physical geography, and by the sticky or lubricious conduct of the local population. As the case study of this dissertation will show, the physical geography of a state particularly matters. Because of this fact shown in the literature, any theory of the state that considers hard power must also consider the physical geography of the state. Because a state's existence is predicated on its ability to deliver coercive power to the limits of its territory, every successful state must

⁵¹ Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala, "Geography, Rebel Capacity, and the Duration of Conflict," 544.

⁵² Buhaug, "Dude, Where's My Conflict?: LSG, Relative Strength, and the Location of Civil War," 108-110; Nakao, "Expansion of rebellion: From Periphery to heartland," 599 says "a rebel group farther away from the government's influence is harder to repress..."

⁵³ Buhaug and Gates, "The Geography of Civil War," 426.

⁵⁴ Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory*, 245-246; Baker, "Logistics and Military Power: Tooth, Tail, and Territory in Conventional Military Conflict," ix-x.

⁵⁵ Nakao, "Expansion of Rebellion: From periphery to heartland, 599 provides this quote from Clausewitz.

⁵⁶ Daxecker and Prins, "Enforcing Order: Territorial Reach and Maritime Piracy," 360.

master its geography, first by understanding the military meaning of its features, and then by building a military that is adapted to that meaning. Reflecting on “the importance of geography in a political view” in A.D. 24, the ancient geographer Strabo wrote,

“The sea and the earth in which we dwell furnish theaters for action . . . It is clear then, that geography is essential to all the transactions of *statesmen* . . .”⁵⁷

When we conceptualize a state in this way, the role that geography plays in modifying a state’s variable control over its territory is very clear. A successful state has mastered its geography. It has understood the military meaning of its features and built a military that is adapted to that meaning. A failing state has mastered its geography imperfectly, either because it fails to understand its geography or fails to adapt its military to that geography. A failed state has failed to master its geography and in consequence has been destroyed.

The Core, Domain, and Sphere, the Uneven Reach of the State

A state can be divided into three major regions based on where it can deliver violence and the other two forms of power, payment and persuasion. These three regions are the core, domain, and sphere. As we have already seen, these terms were first proposed by the geographer D.W. Meinig. Meinig’s model of core, domain and sphere is the basis of his geographic interpretation of the United States as an empire.⁵⁸ In Meinig’s model, the core is the inner ring, close and well connected to the national capital. He recognizes that some states have more than one capital based on the different forms of a state’s power. For example, New York City is the economic capital of the United States and Washington DC is its political capital. Through much of the

⁵⁷ Strabo, *Geography*, vol. 1, 15-16.

⁵⁸ Meinig, *The Shaping of America, A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History: Vol. 2 Continental America, 1800-1867*, 418-426.

nineteenth century, Boston was the cultural capital of the United States, home to its most influential authors and philosophers. The title cultural capital now belongs to the city of Los Angeles. The American arrangement is not the norm and most states combine the headquarters of economic, political and cultural power in a single city.

The core region is directly adjacent to the capital and in the core the state's three forms of power are strongest. This is why the core tends to be the politically loyal, economically prosperous, and culturally fashionable. For the purpose of this dissertation, the core is where the state can unquestionably deliver pain, payment and persuasion. It can do this because the friction of distance is low.

The domain, for Meinig, is a region similar to the core only less densely settled and not so perfectly expressive of the national ideal. For my purposes, the domain is marked by lower levels of economic activity and, as Meinig observes, greater regional deviation from the national culture.⁵⁹ Meinig says that the US South was an excellent example of a domain region in the US. In Mexico, the *Norteños* on the Mexican Plateau occupy the domain. The key feature of the domain based on my usage of the term is that a state is able to *dominate* its domain if its sovereignty is challenged there. Unless it is seriously failing, a state is able to deliver overwhelming violence to this part of its territory.

Together, the core and the domain make up a key type of territory for this dissertation. The core and domain, together, make-up the state's *actual territory*—the territory into which the state can successfully deliver violence if its sovereignty is challenged. This is important to note because a state's *actual territory* is not always coterminous with its *cartographic territory*. A

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 423.

state's cartographic territory is the territory it claims to control, and that it appears to control on the map.

The third region in Meinig's model is the outer zone of the sphere. Meinig named this region after the "sphere of influence" in geopolitical discourse.⁶⁰ This is the area within the cartographic territory of a state that is not dominated by any of the three forms of power. The state's ability to reward ("pay") people in the sphere is limited by their remote location. Persuasion falls of deaf ears because the national identity in the sphere is highly diluted. And the distance decay of power prevents the state from answering a challenge to its sovereignty with overwhelming violence.⁶¹ The sphere is within the state's cartographic territory, but at the utmost margin if not altogether beyond the *actual territory* of the state. State power in the sphere may be little more than what geographer Wilbur Zelinsky called a "polite cartographic fiction."⁶²

In an ideal case, where the distance decay effect is the only force acting on the state's power, the state's core, domain, and sphere would look like figure I-1, a perfect series of concentric circles. However, we know that this ideal does not exist in real life, and so I have created figure I-2, a map of the core, domain, and sphere in Mexico, to illustrate what these regions look like using an actual example. Both physical and cultural geographic factors affect the formation, advance, and contraction of each of these three regions.⁶³ As I said earlier, the

⁶⁰ Meinig, *Continental America*, 426.

⁶¹ Tollefsen and Buhaug, "Insurgency and Inaccessibility," 9. The authors provide a graphic that shows the point at which a state would be unable to beat rebels at a certain distance away from the state's capital. That point is where the sphere, in my model of state failure, would begin.

⁶² Zelinsky, "Vernacular Regions," 7.

⁶³ Tollefsen and Buhaug, "Insurgency and Inaccessibility," 9 and 10. These authors refer to this as a regions physical and sociocultural inaccessibility.

friction of distance is not simply a function of distance, but of distance, terrain, technological modifications of that terrain, and the sticky or lubricious conduct of the local population.

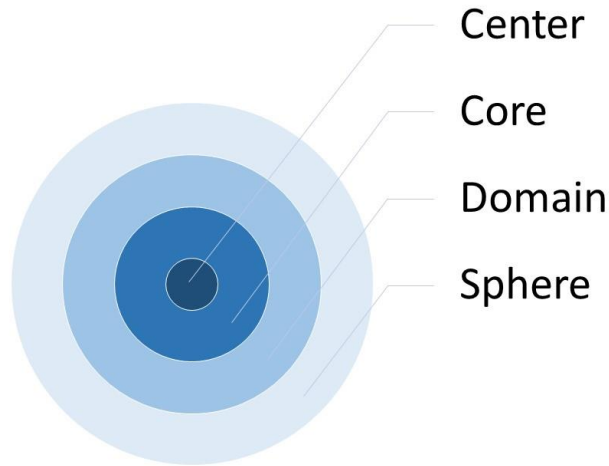


Figure I-1. A State's Ideal Core, Domain, and Sphere

The ideal spatial pattern of core, domain, and sphere if distance decay were the only force acting on a state's three forms of power.



Figure I-2. Mexico's Core, Domain, and Sphere - 1821

This map shows the core, domain, and sphere of Mexico as it gained independence in 1821. The sphere is primarily defined by areas that the state had a hard time reaching owing to their distance from the national capital in Mexico City. The domain was defined by the area that Mexico could successfully deliver violence to in order to demonstrate

its sovereignty. The core was marked by the well-traveled path between the Pacific port of Acapulco and the Atlantic port of Veracruz linked by Mexico City. This path was an important one for the Spanish in maintaining their globe-spanning empire between 1521 and 1821.

Main Tracks and the Growth of the State

States and their borders change over time based on their relative strength and weakness. Today, this might seem like a foreign concept because there has been a generally accepted international norm of fixed national boundaries. This norm means the international community will not typically sanction changes to national boundaries that occur by force or without the blessing of the UN Security Council.⁶⁴ For example, the western powers do not recognize Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. However, in past eras, territorial growth and contraction were common features of states and understanding these features is key to a geographic interpretation of state failure.

Friedrich Ratzel's classic article, "The Territorial Growth of States," outlines a few "rules," that help explain the growth and contractions of states over time. There are four rules: (1) a state sends cultural agents ahead of its armies; (2) a state expends energy to expand its borders; (3) a state expands its borders by sending out spurs or salients that contain more "energy" than areas around them; (4) a spur or salient normally advances along a line that is strategically advantageous or where the benefits of occupation exceed the costs.⁶⁵ This is why the frontier of an expanding and failing state so often assumes an interdigitated form.

⁶⁴ Atzili, "When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors," 139.

⁶⁵ Ratzel, "The Territorial Growth of States," 354-358; Pierskalla, "The Territorial Expansion of the Colonial State: Evidence from German East Africa 1890-1909," 717-718, 733. Pierskalla verifies this argument from Ratzel, and argues that the strategic value of the territory will influence whether or not a colonial state expands into a given part of its territory, even if that territory is remote or otherwise difficult to reach.

States do not have unlimited resources and have to pick and choose where they spend their resources. This is why they expand into terrain that is either strategically valuable or the easiest to occupy and send their cultural agents ahead of their armies. States send their cultural agents ahead of their armies because settling a territory solely with the delivery of violence is difficult and expensive. If the state can rely on compliant citizens to move in advance of its armies, this advanced guard makes the state's expansion easier. States then focus their cultural and military agents into an expansion salient, and this causes it to contain more energy. However, owing to the need to have defensible borders, and because the state's security depends on its ability to deliver violence to the limits of its territory, there comes a point where additional expansion costs more than it is worth. This is when consolidation and straightening of the interdigitated border occurs. The state pushes to occupy the gaps between its expansion salients because this shortens its border and reduces its defense expenditures.⁶⁶

Why does a state try to expand its borders? There are three reasons that a state will decide to expend the energy to expand its borders. One is to resist some form of geopolitical pressure. This is why Spain expended energy to actually control its cartographic territory in Texas after the French showed interest in the region in the 1680's and 1690's.⁶⁷ Meinig called this the stimulus of pressure. The second reason is that a state wants to establish contact with some near neighbor in order to facilitate trade or cultural exchange. Russian expansion to the Baltic and Black Seas

⁶⁶ Curzon, *Frontiers*, 7; Fawcett, *Frontiers a Study in Political Geography*, 75 both emphasize the need for the state to have defensible borders, thus it follows that the state would look to reduce its expenditures by attempting to consolidate several salients, as Spain had in its northern frontier, into one, unified, frontier. Fawcett calls this consolidation, that occurred for New Spain in 1776, a policy of "passive defense" because the state has decided that expansion is no longer worth the expenditure of resources.

⁶⁷ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 105 makes this point saying that "The appearance of ... St. Denis... touched off a series of events that led to the permanent [Spanish] occupation of Texas."

are an obvious example. Less obvious is the Spanish expansion into California to establish a series of stopover points for the Manila Galleons returning to New Spain.⁶⁸ Meinig calls this the stimulus of contact. Lastly, a state expands into a new area to extract material wealth from it. This reason explains Spanish expansion into the Mexican Plateau after the discovery of silver in the western Sierra Madre.⁶⁹ Meinig calls this the stimulus of resource reward.

A state must undertake constant cost-benefit analysis as it tries to figure out *where* and *along which lines* it should expand.⁷⁰ It must be selective about choosing expansion salients because it has limited resources. A state must also decide *if* it wants to expand. While Ratzel seems to believe that states must always be in a state of expansion or contraction, this is not necessarily true. A British geographer, Charles Fawcett, noted that states can decide to stop expanding, such as when the cost of expansion becomes too expensive relative to what the state is going to gain.⁷¹ The two reasons cited by Fawcett that drive up the costs are the “difficulty of the conquest or the remoteness of the territory.” “Remoteness of the territory” expresses the distance decay function—the ease or difficulty with which the territory may be accessed by state officials and their armies. These are two variables that the Spanish encountered when they tried to advance northward from the Valley of Mexico. The territory the Spanish advanced into was extremely harsh and was difficult to cross, given the technology of the time and the lack of navigable rivers.

⁶⁸ Sánchez, *El Camino Real de California*, 13.

⁶⁹ Don Meinig Lectures. My advisor, Dr. Jonathan Smith, studied under Dr. Don Meinig and told me that Meinig used these three reasons for explaining state expansion to Meinig’s geography classes. I have not been able to find written reproduction of this argument.

⁷⁰ Herbst, *State Power in Africa*, 23-24. Herbst provides a brief example of the concept here, outlining the idea that state leaders have to mobilize resources to extend their reach away from their capital.

⁷¹ Fawcett, *Political Geography*, 75. Fawcett argues that states have to establish military borders, or fortify their borders, in cases where they cease to expand.

Fawcett goes on to say that if a state chooses to stop advancing, it must establish a military frontier and guard against whatever threats appear on the other side of its border. As we shall see, this is what the Spanish did when they decided to stop expanding north into the widening North American continent in the 1760s.⁷² Their aim was to establish a defensible border that had little interdigitation and that ran the shortest possible distance from the northwest corner of the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific in Baja California. If energy is not expended in straightening and fortifying a stationary border, the border will likely collapse. The threat of collapse, usually in the face of another expanding state, is why Ratzel says states are always expending energy on expansion or on straightening and fortifying their borders.⁷³

When a state expands, it gains territory that it must protect, secure, and establish control over. Annexed territory is expensive to defend and govern because to hold that territory the state must be able to deliver violence to that territory.⁷⁴ New territory costs money to protect. Indeed, it is particularly costly because it lies at a great distance from the capital where the distance decay of power is very large. If the territory is especially vulnerable or resource poor, or if the state lacks the technology to extract its resources, then the new territory will be a financial burden on the state. A newly occupied territory that is a financial burden to the state is called a **parasitical frontier**.⁷⁵ It is a territory where the cost of expansion outweighs the benefit of

⁷² Haskell, "Rubi's inspection," 173

⁷³ Fawcett, *Political Geography*, 75. Fawcett argues that states have to establish military borders in cases where they cease to expand.

⁷⁴ Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 40-46.

⁷⁵ Cook, *The Floodtide of Empire*, 526 calls these territories "parasitical colonies" because these colonies cost more to keep control of than what the colony adds to the imperial budget each year.

occupation. Texas was a parasitical frontier because it was considered a financial burden by the government of Mexico.⁷⁶

A state will look to overcome the drain of a parasitical frontier by securing that territory more cheaply. The state may also try to secure its frontier by establishing closer connections with it, through a buildup of infrastructure, as the United States did when it constructed the transcontinental railroad to connect the eastern core to California. The core needs connection to the sphere so that it can deliver violence if its sovereignty is challenged, and an efficient connection also simplifies the delivery of payment and persuasion. Even though infrastructure investments are expensive, they knit the territory of the state together much more cohesively than if the state had not spent the money to reduce the friction of distance and the distance decay effect. The early political geographer Vaughan Cornish called such a well-worn path connecting an imperial center to some portion of its sphere a “**main track of empire.**”⁷⁷ A main track normally follows the natural line of most-efficient movement and is normally improved, so far as the state treasury allows, by the arts of engineering.

These main tracks serve as the paths of least resistance and enable the state to efficiently maintain contact with its sphere. Main tracks reduce the operating cost of the state and help keep the territory of the state knitted together. Main tracks or military roads are all the more important in a large and undeveloped country, where the distance to the frontier and the friction of distance are both very large. This was recognized by the American Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in a report he submitted to Congress in 1819.

⁷⁶ Barker, *The Austin Papers*, 387 and Cook, *The Floodtide of Empire*, 526

⁷⁷ Cornish, *Strategic Geography*, 66.

“There is no country to which a good system of military roads and canals is more indispensable than to the United States. As great as our military capacity is, when compared with the number of our People, yet, when considered in relation to the vast extent of our country, it is very small; and if so great an extent of territory renders it very difficult to conquer us, as has frequently been observed, it ought not to be forgotten, that it renders it no less difficult for the Government to afford protection to every portion of the community.”⁷⁸

When Calhoun speaks of the difficulty of affording “protection to every portion of the community” without “a good system of military roads and canals,” he is in effect speaking of the difficulty of delivering overwhelming violence without “main tracks of empire.”

Imagine the United States without railroads or an interstate highway system. That was the reality of the country before the intercontinental railroad was finished. The government overcame the vast distance and formidable terrain of the west with a dedicated investment in a “main track of empire”. Main tracks of empire are normally complemented by other policies that consolidate a state’s rule over its territory. But main tracks are important and distinctly geographic elements in the system of territorial control because they facilitate the state paying, persuading, and delivering pain throughout its territory.

A Synopsis of this Dissertation

This dissertation is a geographic interpretation of state failure. Its main claim to originality is its presentation of the early-nineteenth-century failure of the Mexican state in a manner that is historically accurate, sensitive to the relevant facts of strategic geography, and also easily understood by an educated but still amateur audience. The terminology and theory presented in this first chapter provide the foundation for my geographic interpretation of Mexican state failure. It is impossible to understand the collapse of the Mexico’s northern sphere

⁷⁸ Calhoun, “Report on Roads and Canals,” pp. 41-42.

between 1836 and 1848 without understanding the segmental geography of state power (i.e. core, domain and sphere) and the function of main tracks to deliver the three forms of power, but most especially violence, to the sphere. Because it is a geographic interpretation, the narrative that follows will focus largely on events at the strategic level. Tactical details of specific battles are usually omitted in favor of focusing on the strategic outcomes of these battles and the strategic reasons battles were fought where they were.

My goal in this dissertation is similar to D.W. Meinig's goal in his four-volume series *The Shaping of America* (1986-2004). The subtitle of Meinig's series is "a geographical perspective on 500 years of history" and Meinig's "geographical perspective" has deeply influenced my own. I am particularly influenced by his attention to the geographic structure of the American empire, and by his desire to explain this geographic structure and empire to readers who are not academic specialists. I diverge from Meinig, however, in laying more stress on military and strategic geography, a branch of political geography that is nowadays too often neglected or misconstrued. I deliberately use shocking phrases like "delivery of violence" and "delivery of pain" because I hope to convey the grim reality of hard power, and because I agree with Hobbes that covenants are but words of no strength "without the sword" to secure them.

Changes in military technology often change the details of strategic geography but they seldom change its great axioms or reduce its great importance. Having discussed the military career of the fourteenth-century conqueror Timur, popularly known as Tamerlane, one old military geographer quite rightly says,

“A study of his career, and a simultaneous study of the newspapers and magazines of today show that in strategic geography there is nothing new under the sun.”⁷⁹

I also diverge from Meinig and much modern academic geography in emphasizing the connection between political and physical geography. There are no doubt questions in political geography that need not take the face of the land into account, but questions of military and strategic geography are not among them. As the classic political geographer Halford Mackinder put it:

“Every civilized nation is related in two ways to the land which it occupies. Whatever the exchanges effected by trading, it is (1) ultimately dependent upon the past and present produce of its own territory, and (2) it must be prepared to defend that territory against the intrusion of covetous neighbors.”⁸⁰

I would only add that a state that does not wish to fail must also be prepared to defend its territory against the secession of disaffected citizens. Otherwise, Mackinder’s first point speaks directly to the geographic basis of state power, which is the state’s ability to extract wealth from its territory. His second point (with my amplification) speaks directly to the subject of this dissertation, which is the ability of a state to overcome the friction of distance imposed by the particular facts of its geography, and thus deliver overwhelming violence and pain to the limits of its territory. This is why this dissertation proceeds by drawing attention to a series of very obvious geographic facts.

Alternative Theories of State Power

To be clear, this dissertation diverges from other perspectives within present day literature. Notably, I am arguing that the *essential* function of a state is its delivery of violence.

⁷⁹ Maguire, *Outlines of Military Geography*, 316.

⁸⁰ Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, 309.

Other perspectives in the literature put much less emphasis on a state's ability to deliver violence. This means that, for these other perspectives, delivery of violence is just one of many functions that a state must carry out to be successful rather than *the essential* function. To use my terminology, these other perspectives assign more equitable, or altogether different, weight to the state's three forms of power.

In the field of political geography itself, Marxian, poststructuralist, and feminist perspectives of the state or politics are prevalent. In each of these cases, the theoretical framing of the state assigns different emphases across the three forms of power. Indeed, in these theoretical perspectives the state is also not necessarily the primary actor or object under study.

In the case of Marxist theory, as applied in World Systems Theory, the state is actually at the mercy of capitalists, who coopt the state using financial power.⁸¹ The state officials deliver violence and persuasion, to coerce or convince the proletariat into acting in the interests of capital. Indeed, Gramsci, in seeking to explain why mass proletarian uprisings never occurred, offered us the idea of *hegemony* that asserts the state is *convincing* its proletarians not to rebel through persuasive dominance.⁸² In this model, payment and persuasion most clearly determine sovereignty.

Poststructuralist (state) theory also places a great deal of emphasis on the state's ability to *convince* its population that its rules are worth following or its geopolitical aims are worth pursuing. I draw this point largely from critical geopolitical literature and its focus on texts and

⁸¹ Taylor, "A Materialist Framework for Political Geography," 15 and 24.

⁸² Gallaher, *Key Concepts in Political Geography*, 60.

discourse.⁸³ Though, in addition to emphasis on persuasion, the latent anarchy within this theoretical camp attempts to argue that the state is an extremely mutable category with no essential functions. Consequently, some poststructuralist scholarship attempts to expose the “unnatural” historical construction of the state and its power dynamics that find themselves under poststructuralist critique.⁸⁴ Thus, when not focusing on the state’s persuasive power, poststructuralists often question the utility of the state itself.

Feminist state theory’s primary argument with my conception of the state, would likely not necessarily be along the lines of the three forms of power, but rather in scale. Feminist political geographers prefer to focus on the politics of the “everyday” rather than undertaking national scale studies like this dissertation.⁸⁵ Other feminist political geographers even investigate the construction of scale itself.⁸⁶ Though, violence is important, the gruesome realities of defeated rebel bodies are more likely to be the subject of a feminist study of a state’s violence rather than the detached manner in which I discuss defeated rebels. Or, as demonstrated by Jennifer Fluri’s work, the focus may be on citizen resistance to the state’s violence.⁸⁷

These kinds of perspectives lend to studies that eschew the state’s necessity to master delivery of violence, and instead focus on the individual scale, discourse, and the politics embedded in the “natural” concepts of the state.

Political scientists, on the other hand, are more amenable to a realist interpretation of the state. However, I too diverge from some schools of thought within this discipline. Again, the

⁸³ Power and Campbell, “The State of critical geopolitics,” 243-245.

⁸⁴ Newman, *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought: New Theories of the Political*, 1-2.

⁸⁵ Dittmer, “Everyday Diplomacy UKUSA Intelligence Cooperation and Geopolitical Assemblages,” 606.

⁸⁶ Fluri, “Geopolitics of gender and violence ‘from below,’” 259; Coleman, “State power in blue,” 76.

⁸⁷ Fluri, “Geopolitics of gender and violence ‘from below,’” 261.

weight that other scholars assign to violence's importance is not the same as the weight I am assigning to it. For example, Brambor et. al, write that the state's success is underwritten by its ability to enforce its rules. However, the state's ability to enforce its rules is not ultimately underscored by its ability to deliver violence, but rather, its ability to "know" information about its population.⁸⁸ This school of thought echoes James C. Scott's book, *Seeing Like a State*. In citing Scott, Brambor et. al, acknowledge that the state must make its territory legible before the state can govern it.

Indeed, Santa Anna's attempt to put down a rebellion in Texas failed in no small part due to his *mis*-delivery of violence in the Texas domain. He did not understand the type of people he was dealing with and what his ruthless application of violence would do to them. Santa Anna's state did not have the correct information about the constitution of its Texian rebels.

Additionally, Hillel Soifer offers us infrastructural power as another interpretation of state success or strength.⁸⁹ Soifer clearly differentiates between a state's infrastructural power, or its power to receive and monitor information, and its despotic power, a state's power to punish or deliver pain.⁹⁰ I cited Soifer earlier in this introduction, focusing on this very despotic power. However, Soifer understands violence as just another policy that the state can use to achieve its ends within its territory. Though Soifer does point out that something called "political power" predated the state, this is no longer the *fundamental* aspect of a state.⁹¹ Rather, Soifer places

⁸⁸ Brambor et. al, 176-179.

⁸⁹ Soifer, "State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement," 231-232.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

more weight on a state's ability to achieve its policy objectives through its bureaucrats' actions, or its infrastructural power.

To highlight Soifer's emphasis on a state's infrastructural power, I will use an example of a state's policy being "delivery of violence," or specifically, genocide. So, for Soifer, even a state enacting a policy of genocide upon its population is simply demonstrative of the state's "radiating institutions that allow the state to exercise control of society."⁹² Soifer argues that the Rwandan state's policy of genocide was enabled, not because of its ability to deliver violence to its territory, but because of its "findable" or knowable population.⁹³ The state was deemed to be successful because its policy objective was genocide, and the state achieved it aim. The state was not deemed successful because it delivered violence to its territory to prove its sovereignty.

The ultimate aim for Soifer is to explain how a state controls its population, and this is not limited to, or based solely on, a state's delivery of violence, but rather based on the state producing its policy objectives in its territory. For Soifer, this control is exercised through a state's "infrastructural power," and, like Brambor et. al, must include knowledge about the state's population to be successful. Again, violence is just another policy option available to states to control their population.

Indeed, even other scholars, like Robert Rotberg, who edited a benchmark book on state failure, do not assign such important weight to a state's ability to deliver violence. Rotberg asserts that, while delivery of violence is the most critical public good, the modern state exists to "provide a decentralized method of delivering political (public) goods to persons living within

⁹² *Ibid.*, 236-238. Quote from page 237.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 238.

designated parameters (borders).”⁹⁴ So, according to Rotberg, strong states are differentiated from weak ones based on how well they perform across all aspects of public good delivery, not just the delivery of violence.

Thus, my project diverges from the literature in important ways, most notably in the importance that I assign to violence as a form of the state’s power. However, I acknowledge this theoretical difference and have chosen my perspective, in part, to try and make the concept of state failure more useful to academics and educated laypersons alike through a simple focus on violence.

Methods

As outlined above, this is a work of geographic interpretation. Geographic interpretation is a qualitative method in the field of geography that emphasizes geographic facts that have influenced historical events. Carl Sauer was a notable practitioner of this method, and his work, “The Personality of Mexico” as well as his “Foreword to Historical Geography” are good examples of this type of geographic approach. In “The Personality of Mexico,” Sauer is seeking to find a fundamental relationship that has driven Mexico’s national history.⁹⁵ He paints the country with a broad brush to help generalize very complex realities into a distilled story of Mexican history that highlights the role of Mexico’s geography in that history.

Geographic interpretation focuses on the interplay between geography and the humans creating history who are living in that geography. As Sauer says this is “the art of seeing how land and life come to differ from one part of the earth to another.” As applied to this study, I was

⁹⁴ Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States, Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair,” 3.

⁹⁵ Sauer, “The Personality of Mexico,” 353.

practicing the art of seeing how the state's land, life, and control of territory comes to differ from one state to another and within the same state itself.

For the purposes of this project, I interpreted this geography through the methods described below. I utilized an outline provided by Don Meinig for assessing the geography of an empire.⁹⁶ His outline broadly aligns with the theory I have laid out above and helped me assess the growth and contraction of the Hispano-Mexican State. At each stage below, my aim was to look for evidence of each stage in the landscape. So, a state establishing sovereignty would look like a victory in a major battle and subsequent establishment of a permanent military garrison. Both the victory, and the garrison, would leave marks of the landscape. Those marks are the empirical evidence that forms the basis of a geographic interpretation.

First, the state exercises sovereignty over its subjects or citizens. A state will expand its sovereign borders by delivering violence outside of its existing borders and overthrowing or coopting any existing political structures in the territory its expanding into. This expanding empire will place military forces in strategic locations so that they can continue to deliver violence to territory they now claim. In the case of Spain's expansion into Mexico, this imperial expansion began with the overthrow of the Aztecs in the valley of Mexico and slowly marched northward.

Second, after the expanding state establishes its sovereignty, its administrators will seek "the allegiance of the conquered people" or its administrators will seek legitimacy for the state.⁹⁷ The state will do this through the delivery of the three forms of power and will attempt to deliver

⁹⁶ Meinig, "Geographical Analysis of Imperialism," 72-73.

⁹⁷ Meinig, "Geographical Analysis of Imperialism," 73.

these forms of power regularly by establishing regular contact between themselves and their recently conquered territory. In the landscape, we will look for “visible” displays “of imperial presence.”⁹⁸ These displays are things like government buildings, forts, and public infrastructure as larger examples. The caminos reales, presidios, and missions are the best examples of the expanding Spanish state in this story.

Third, the state extracts resources from its population and territory. This extraction is especially true of states expanding for the stimulus of resource reward. However, states expanding for either of the other two stimuli, contact or geopolitical pressure, will also leave evidence of their activity on the landscape. A state expanding because it was stimulated by contact may leave a customs house in a forward location – to extract tax from trade –, or one expanding to meet a geopolitical rival might station a capital at the limit of their reach – to prevent a rival’s extraction of wealth from the state’s own territory.

Fourth, if the state is successful in propagating its persuasive power, there will be cultural changes among the dominated group. In our case of New Spain, we saw the march northward of ordered Spanish towns with grided streets, changes in agriculture and the expansion of ranching. These changes in cultural patterns will dominate the core quickly, and then become less densely distributed as one moves into the domain and sphere.

However, this framework was just that, a framework. To fill in the framework with appropriate detail, I drew on both primary and secondary sources to establish the “where and why there” of the details in this project.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

Several reports by Spanish and Mexican Officials over this time period were very helpful for better understanding what the places under discussion looked like. That is, these primary accounts helped provide me with the visual record of a landscape I could no longer see. These accounts helped me see the landscape and the evidence of the state's activities in that landscape that my method emphasized.

Notably, reports from Juan Almonte and General Terán were especially helpful as these were the assessments of administrators who were attempting to cement control over a potentially rebellious territory. These primary sources were invaluable as these diaries provided this project with rich detail by actual observers of the events under discussion. Secondary literature was used to gather additional historical detail, as well as to aid in interpreting primary sources and ensure that my conclusions were speaking to analysis by other historians and geographers.

This primary and secondary literature also provided empirical data that helped me produce the maps that are found throughout the project. I produced maps because, as Sauer states in "Foreword to Historical Geography,"

"The ideal formal geographic description is the map."⁹⁹

Cartographic Methods

To my knowledge, none of the maps I created for and present in this dissertation existed in a GIS prior to this project. Because of this, I georeferenced and digitized the majority of the map layers seen in this project by myself. For example, to create Figure II-1, I uploaded an image found on the internet into ArcGIS Pro, georeferenced it, and then traced the boundaries of Spain's territorial claims from that image. After creating that layer, I was then able to turn it into

⁹⁹ Sauer, "Foreword to Historical Geography," 6.

the maps seen in Figure II-1. I repeated the georeferencing process with images depicting territory controlled by the Spanish at various points in history.¹⁰⁰

Not all of the maps I created were “novel,” insofar as some of my maps were more referenced-based and were shown to orient the reader to the area under discussion. These reference maps were informed by maps that had been produced by other scholars depicting areas like the Republic of the Rio Grande. Maps produced by other scholars provided helpful data like locations of towns and contemporary political boundaries. In other cases, authors of books would describe an area, but provide no map. In these cases, I would use their description of the territory to digitize and create a layer of that territory in ArcGIS Pro. The prime example of this is Figure II-4. I drew the high northern frontier without a map of the area, just basing it off of Jones, Jr.’s description of the area.

Most of the novelty in the maps used in this project stems from their use in a geographic interpretation of history. Most maps found in works of history show *where* things happen. These maps are similar to some of the more reference-like maps produced in this project, like those appearing in Chapter 3. However, great maps will also try to tell their reader *why* something happened where it did. That is why Sauer says the map is the ideal form of geographic description.

Thus, I took advantage of ArcGIS Pro’s ability to adjust transparency of various layers, so that readers could better see the mountainous terrain that made up the Mexican Plateau to highlight the impact that the friction of distance had on this story. I also adjusted the cartographic

¹⁰⁰ Please see the Map Sources Annex for specific citation information for map layers.

size of Mexican forts and customs houses to emphasize that Mexico created a box around Texian settlements in an effort to better extract resources from them.

Additionally, these maps put information together in novel ways. For example, previous scholars had mapped Rubí's presidio line¹⁰¹ but using that line to delineate between a state's domain and sphere, had not been done before. Similar maps of the conflicts under discussion have also been produced, notably with the Texas Rebellion, but not without the background of a state's core, domain, and sphere. The point that Mexico was shrinking and the United States was expanding in the 1800s is not novel, but producing a map to show that the present-day Southwestern United States was once part of overlapping spheres, is.

So, these maps, much like the larger project itself, often put information together in new ways utilizing the layers that I created for this project. I leveraged the fundamental aspect of any GIS, the ability to layer information, to tell my geographic interpretation of state failure.

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¹⁰¹ Christiansen, "Presidio and the Borderlands: A Case Study," 31.

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CHAPTER II

THE GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT FOR MEXICAN STATE FAILURE: THE INITIAL PATTERNS OF NEW SPAIN

Spain's Territorial Expansion and Contraction in North America

“The design of New Spain was drawn during the sixteenth century and has persisted to the present.” – Carl Sauer, “The Personality of Mexico” (1941).

“The Spanish advance [to the north] depended on three institutions: the mine, the mission, and the presidio” – Alan Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era* (2002).

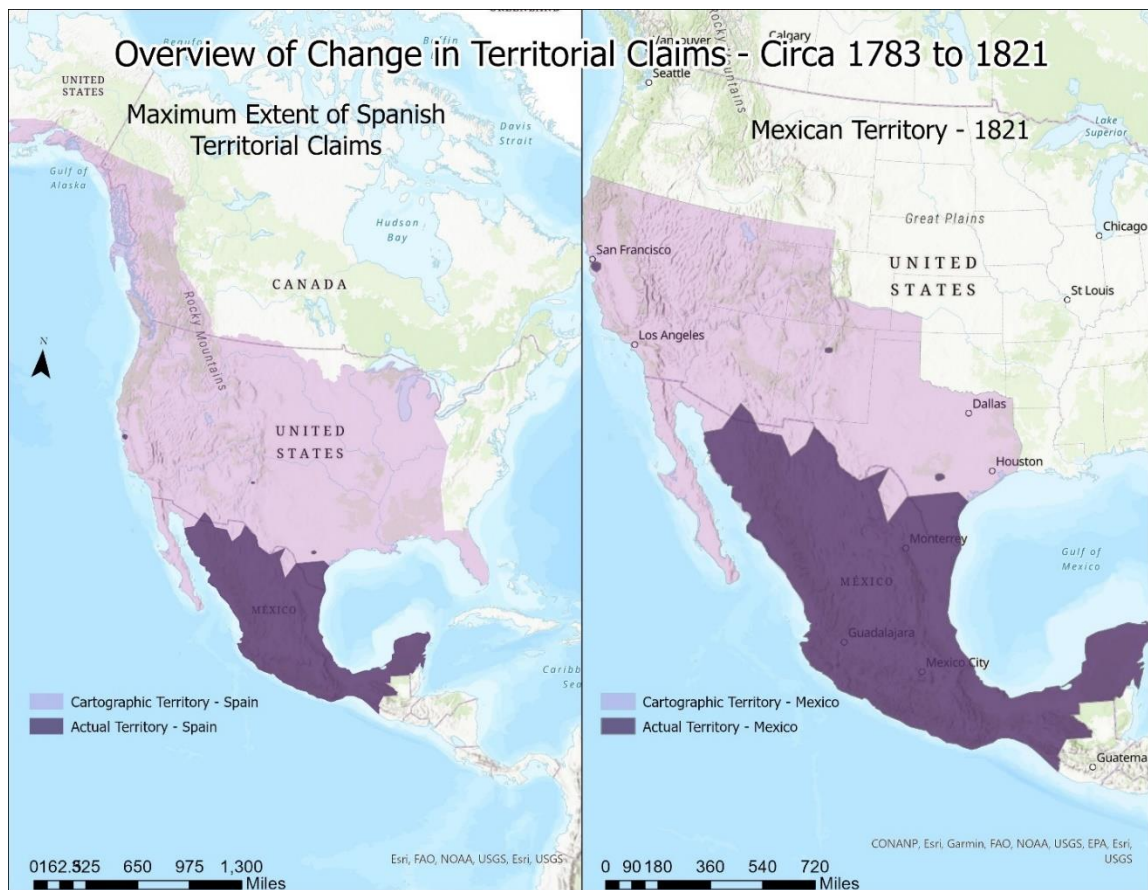


Figure II-1. Overview of the Change in Spain's Territorial Claims Circa 1783-1821

These maps show the comparison between the territory that Spain laid claim to in 1783 at the negotiating table ending the American Revolution in Paris. From this moment onward, Spain's holdings in North America would decline to the territory held in the map on the right in 1819 after negotiating the Adams-Onís Treaty with the United States. As an additional note, New Spain did extend south of the present-day border between Mexico and Guatemala in 1819, however, since my concern is the northern sphere, I have simplified New Spain's territory and excluded everything south of that border.

Spain once laid claim to all of North America (see figure II-1). After signing the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Spain ostensibly possessed all territory west of 46 degrees and 37 minutes west longitude, and thus was sovereign over the whole North American Continent.¹⁰² This was, however, a cartographic fiction and, with the exception of Portugal, no other aspiring colonial powers recognized this vast claim. Spain's cartographic North American empire did not have external sovereignty. Consequently, a mere sixty years after the Treaty of Tordesillas, France challenged Spanish sovereignty in North America, and England and the Netherlands soon followed.¹⁰³

Spain's subsequent struggle to enforce its claim and convert cartographic territory into actual territory illustrates the fact highlighted by the epigraph at the head of chapter one. Claims to territory are meaningless when they are not coupled with the capacity to enforce those claims through military might.

Spain had an exceptional disparity between its *actual territory* and its *cartographic territory*. Spain was able to deliver violence to only a small portion of the territory that it claimed in North America. It was therefore powerless to dispute English claims to the eastern seaboard and French claims to the Mississippi basin. By the time of the Adams-Onís treaty in 1819, Spain's North American Empire had contracted, almost entirely without bloodshed, to the southwest quarter of the continent. Spain's rivals had realized how fictional most of Spain's claims to its cartographic territory were and had therefore chipped away "Spanish" land in quarters of the continent where Spain could only dream of delivering overwhelming violence.

¹⁰² "Tejano Talks #35," Texas A&M Kingsville, 2017.

¹⁰³ Deeds et. al, *The Course of Mexican History*, 123-125 and 201.

These large encroachments by England and France had reduced the difference between Spain's cartographic and actual territories, but even under the terms of the Adams-Onís Treaty, Spain's actual territory remained much smaller than its cartographic territory.¹⁰⁴ Excepting some minor outposts farther north, the actual territory of New Spain ended at a line that ran from near the mouth of the Rio Grande, at the northwest corner of the Gulf of Mexico, to the Pacific Ocean near the head of Baja California. The position of this line was fixed by Spain's desire to maintain the shortest frontier from sea to sea, and place that frontier far enough north to protect its vital silver mines.

South of this line was the Spanish domain, where obedience to the state was generally achieved through some combination of persuasion, payment, and pain. North of this line was Spain's sphere, which was everywhere feeble and, in many places, fictional. Owing to the distance decay of power, the extreme friction of a harsh terrain, and the strength of geopolitical rivals like the Apache and Comanche Indians, Spain could not violently enforce its territorial claim north of this line.

It must also be noted that the cost of northward expansion of Spain's actual territory would have risen very sharply simply because the North American continent widens just north of the Rio Grande. The actual frontier, from the northwest corner of the Gulf to the head of Baja California, was at least one thousand miles shorter than the cartographic outer frontier of the Adams-Onís Treaty. Because of these insuperable physical constraints on power projection,

¹⁰⁴ I am basing this assessment primarily on the French's advances in Texas that occurred towards the end of the 1600s that are discussed later in this chapter. As for the British, that assessment is primarily based on the date of transfer of Florida, in 1763, though it is likely that the British were challenging the Spanish on the waters of the Gulf before that.

Spain made the strategic decision to halt its northward advance and concede that most of its North American territory was in effect *a terra nullis*, or no man's land, that provided a spatial buffer for their silver mines. This decision left the Spanish with a large imbalance between their actual territory and their cartographic territory, a condition that would begin rectifying itself in the 1780s as Spain began to lose the fringes of this cartographic territory to their geopolitical rivals.

This chapter will explain the differences between the two maps shown in figure one and set the stage for better understanding the territory, cartographic and actual, that Mexico inherited when it won its independence in 1821. This story starts with explaining the deliberate northward expansion of the Spanish state along three *main tracks*. This expansion was halted by a determined enemy in the Apache and Comanche Indians, by the decay of power with increasing distance from the capital, by the abrupt widening of the North American continent, and by the absence of the material incentive of great *resource reward*. Spain's inability to expand its actual territory north of a line that approximates the present-day US-Mexico border created the wide discontinuity between their actual and cartographic territory on the North American continent.

The Pacific Spanish Empire, The East to West Axis



Figure II-2. The Pacific Backbone of the Spanish Empire

This map shows the Pacific backbone of the Spanish Empire. The key to their imperial operation was holding the Isthmus of the continents, what I labeled as the “Isthmus Transportation Triangle.” This transportation triangle formed the “interoceanic pivot” which means these trade routes which ran through the transportation triangle pivoted from one ocean to the other at the narrowest point of land in the western hemisphere. See sourcing statement for map layer sources. The cartographer is the author.

The Spanish state in the Western Hemisphere was a Pacific phenomenon (figure II-2).

The Spanish state was a Pacific phenomenon because it primarily fronted the Pacific Ocean.

Because they actually controlled the great New World isthmus that stretches from the Rio Grande south to Darien, the Spanish actually controlled the fastest and most efficient way from Europe to the East Indies and East Asia. The Isthmus of Panama in particular was crucial for maintaining the global Spanish Empire because it was by far the shortest overland passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. This east to west pattern of movement mattered to the Spanish because they had to connect three poles of activity: Manila, Mexico City, and the capital, Madrid. In the centuries before the Panama Canal and transcontinental railroads in the United States, the Isthmus was the fastest way between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Because Spain

controlled the Isthmus, their rivals were forced to seek a nonexistent northwest passage, to cross through the Amazon jungle, to trek across the broad expanse of North America, or to sail around Cape Horn the southernmost tip of South America. All of these routes took more time and resources than crossing at the Isthmus.

The backbone of the Spanish empire in the Western Hemisphere was the Pacific Coast from Mexico to Peru. The pivot of the backbone was the Isthmus of Panama because this narrow strip of land was indispensable to Spain's silver trade.¹⁰⁵ The most prominent mine was located in Perú, near Potosí, "deep in the cordilleras of the Andes,"¹⁰⁶ while other notable silver mines, like Parral and Zacatecas, were located on the Central Mexican Plateau of New Spain. While silver extracted from the mines in New Spain was exported through Veracruz or Acapulco, under the direction of Spanish state officials in Mexico City, Potosí exported through Lima on the Pacific. Peruvian silver was then shipped north along the coast, to Panama or Acapulco, on the west coast of Mexico. From these places it was hauled over the Isthmus by mule train and then forwarded to the Imperial capital in Spain.

Mexico had an established trade route from Acapulco to Veracruz via Mexico City, so the movement of silver extracted from the mines on the Mexican Plateau easily tied into the movement of silver from Peru back to Spain. Panama is the narrowest point in the great New World isthmus, and thereby the least expensive point to move silver from one ocean to the other

¹⁰⁵ Abad and Palma, "The Fruits of El Dorado: The Global Impact of American Precious Metals," 116 calls mining the "backbone of the colonial enterprise" with the institutions of the colonial state focused on extracting silver from the ground. These authors, on page 97 of the same chapter, estimate between "85,000 and 150,000 metric tons of silver were produced between 1500 and 1800 in Spanish America..." Hamilton, "Imports of American Gold and Silver Into Spain, 1503-1660," 464. Hamilton estimates total imports of "treasure," taken to mean gold and silver from 1503-1660. The "treasure" imports in Spain peaked at a value of about 14 million pesos from 1591 to 1600.

¹⁰⁶ Cobb, "Supply and Transportation for the Potosí Mines, 1545-1640," 25.

without sailing around the tip of South America. It was vastly easier and less expensive for the Spanish to bring their extracted silver home, either by tapping into the imperial trade route that ran from Manila through Mexico City to Madrid, or by taking the shorter overland portage through Panama.¹⁰⁷ Because of these spatial patterns of the silver trade, New Spain functioned as an East-West oriented “bridge” connecting far-flung Manila with the Spanish core in Madrid.¹⁰⁸

The vital elements of Spain’s New World empire were the silver mines of Mexico and Peru, and the two trade routes across the great New World Isthmus. The backbone of New Spain was on the Pacific coast of the Isthmus because the west coast of the Isthmus is higher and healthier, and because it was harder for European pirates to sail to the Pacific than the Caribbean.¹⁰⁹ The great Isthmus had additional strategic importance to Spain because, under the terms of the Treaty of Tordesillas, it afforded the only convenient route to the Spanish colony in the Philippines.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Mehl, “The Spanish Empire and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans: Imperial Highways in a Polycentric Monarchy,” 10 describes the Manila Galleons’ general trade pattern between Manila and Acapulco. This author describes this route as the “foundation of a trans-Pacific trade route.” This author adds on page 12 that the Veracruz-Acapulco route was the routine route for passing communication through New Spain from the Spanish Capital to Manila.; Cobb, “Supply and Transportation for the Potosí Mines, 1545-1640,” 33-36 discusses the movement of silver out of the Potosí mines and mentions Panama as the point the silver crossed the continental land mass.

¹⁰⁸ Mehl, “The Spanish Empire and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans,” 12. Mehl says “the Mexican viceroyalty functioned as a *communication bridge* through which peoples, goods, ideas and religions travelled between Europe and Asia.” Emphasis added. This idea of New Spain functioning as a bridge is one which supports the overall idea that the Main Track of the Spanish Empire, how they extended their authority, ran through Acapulco-Mexico-Veracruz.

¹⁰⁹ Gurpegui, “The Coast of California as the long-projected hub for the Spanish Empire in the Pacific, 1523-1815,” 234 notes that piracy, for example, was not an issue in the Pacific Ocean until the start of the 18th century.

¹¹⁰ Gurpegui, “The Coast of California,” 235-241 discusses Spain’s own quest for a northwest passage. Spain was long interested in establishing a port on the Alta California coast because their galleons traveling from Manila typically sailed to this coast owing to the prevailing trade winds in the Pacific Ocean. They would then sail south from Alta California to Acapulco. This same source, on page 234 says that the Spanish were searching for this Northwest Passage because they were barred from sailing back to Spain via the Indian Ocean because of a treaty with Portugal. This treaty necessitated a focus on the Pacific, and the Pacific Coast to facilitate trade with the “Indies.” La Follette and Deur, “Views across the Pacific: The Galleon Trade and its Traces in Oregon,” 163, This pattern of movement is called this the “Urdaneta’s Route” because of the first Spaniard to sail back from Manila this

The Continental and Amazonian Buffers, the Origins of the Northern Sphere

After conquering the Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico in 1521, Spain emphasized their strength on the Pacific Coast and quickly secured large sections of the western coast between Panama and Sonora by 1539.¹¹¹ Some scholars who have studied this period have even called the Pacific Ocean a “Spanish Lake,”¹¹² because of Spain’s outsized early influence in the Pacific Ocean during this period. Control of the Pacific Coast was important because Spain’s Manila Galleons sailed down the Californian Coast on their return trip from the Philippines, following the prevailing winds and ocean currents.

But even with this dominance on the Pacific Coast, Spain was still faced with geopolitical threats that were based in the eastern part of North and South America. Because of the location of these threats relative to the Spanish silver mines, which were located close to Spanish strongholds along the Pacific Coast, Spain needed geopolitical buffers to protect their primary source of wealth from the encroachment of these rivals.

In North America this protection was at first provided by the *Continental Buffer*. The Continental Buffer refers to the vast amount of space on the North American Continent between enemy colonies on the Atlantic Coast and Spain’s vital silver mines in the central Mexican Plateau. The physical geography of North America thus at first abetted the strategic geography of New Spain. Farther south Spain controlled the Gulf of Mexico, the most efficient route into

way, Adrés de Urdaneta, in 1565. Additionally, The Manila Galleons found help in California in the form of supplies and places to offload sick sailors, see Polzer and Sheridan, “Protecting the Peninsula from Indian Rebellion and Aiding the Manila Galleons (1733-1735),” 67-70 Cabo San Lucas is mentioned as one place the sailors found refuge, this port is on the southernmost tip of the Baja California peninsula.

¹¹¹ Gurpegui, “The Coast of California,” 236. This author is not specific with what was meant by “conquer” or how far up the coast the Spanish made it, but Gerhard’s maps of territory under Spanish control reached just north of Culiacan in 1600.

¹¹² This is the title of O.H.K. Spate’s book on the history of the Pacific Ocean.

Mexico, by maintaining control over Cuba and Florida. By controlling both Cuba and Florida simultaneously, the Spanish were more easily able to control naval traffic seeking to enter and exit the Gulf of Mexico.¹¹³

The sheer size of the continent long served to keep the French and English away from the Spanish silver mines on the Mexican Plateau. This buffer was natural and required little active maintenance from the Spanish, as they were protected by the great distance that separated their silver mines and their enemies' colonies along the Atlantic Coast. This buffer was largely made up of the cartographic territory, for Spain could not deliver violence to the heart of the Mississippi Valley, but nature made up for the want of armies when it supplied a trackless waste.

Blinded by their very limited knowledge of the geography of the interior of North America, the Spanish may have thought that the Mississippi River Basin would be a more effective barrier to French encroachment than it actually was.¹¹⁴ Instead of providing an enduring barrier, however, the Mississippi and its tributaries eventually furnished the highway that brought French interlopers to the very doorstep of New Spain.

Although it is far removed from the focus of this dissertation, it is worth noting that Amazon River Basin provided a similar, more effective buffer, between Spain's Peruvian treasure chest and the Portuguese colonies on the east coast of South America. Through much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the basic strategic geography of the New World can be pictured as rich Spanish colonies fronting on the Pacific, covetous rivals in the far east of North and South America, and these great Continental and Amazonian Buffers separating the two.

¹¹³ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 24. Meinig notes the strategic importance of Florida because of its proximity to the Gulf Stream Current and shipping lanes.

¹¹⁴ Weddle, *The French Thorn*, 6-9 and 307-310; Weddle, *The Spanish Sea*, 221 and 232-33.

Because Spanish territory north of the present-day border between the United States and Mexico was primarily a buffer, and because it offered no obvious inducements of resource reward, there was little incentive for Spain to people and defend it. Spain had to strike a balance between doing too little to maintain a reasonable buffer between its silver mines and the European threats in eastern North America, and doing so much that its whole northern sphere became a vast parasitical colony that drained the Spanish treasury.¹¹⁵

Thus, Spain's extension of the actual territory of New Spain reached a point in its northward advance where the cost of acquiring and defending new territory exceeded the benefits of controlling it. The place where Spain's actual territory stopped advancing is where the North American continent starts to widen significantly. This widening made every step north beyond this line significantly more expensive by increasing the size of the territory that would have to be conquered and the length of the frontier that would have to be defended. It was to avoid this exorbitant expense that Spain had only isolated outposts of actual territory north of the line traced by the present-day border.

This territory north of the border, was cartographic territory because it was distant from the core of Spanish power around Mexico City, because it was valuable to Spain only as a buffer, and the intervening terrain was difficult to traverse and so magnified the friction of distance. These factors determined the distance decay of Spanish power. These factors meant that it was nearly impossible for Spain to deliver violence to the Continental Buffer. Consequently, the continental buffer was lightly defended or not defended at all. Because Spain was unable to

¹¹⁵ Cook, *The Floodtide of Empire*, 526 "parasitical colonies" are colonies that cost more to keep control of than what the colony adds to the imperial budget each year.

deliver violence its northern sphere, it found it very difficult to settle loyal colonists in that dangerous and uncertain land. As we will see, Spain could temporarily project a modicum of power into its northern sphere when this was absolutely necessary, but most of this territory was Spanish only on the map. Because of the distance decay effect, this territory was too expensive to defend and supply.¹¹⁶ Spain maintained it as cartographic territory because it functioned as a buffer zone for their silver trade that took place in the domain.

Furthermore, Spain did not work to integrate New Spain on a north-south axis because their primary concern was moving goods from ocean to ocean on an east-west axis. Spain, from an administrative standpoint, was governing an empire that required them to move goods over vast distances on an east-west axis—between the Philippines and Peru and old Spain. That is why it placed so much emphasis on the Isthmus of Panama and the road from Acapulco to Veracruz. These narrow strips of land enabled Spain to keep its empire together. While it was important to integrate the silver mining districts of the Mexican plateau with the core of New Spain, everywhere north of that was serviced with only enough infrastructure to ensure that a military force could be moved there if necessary. And, as the so-called Chicken War with France demonstrated, any European power who challenged Spanish sovereignty in its northern sphere

¹¹⁶ Two biggest examples are colonization efforts in California and Texas. Cook, *Floodtide of Empire*, 41 agrees that Spain did not take a real, sustained interest in exploring the Pacific Northwest until it was threatened by rival powers and that Spain wanted to protect its “more valued regions in New Spain.” Spencer-Hancock and Pritchard, “El Castillo de Monterey Frontline of Defense,” 230 also assert that the Russian thrusts southward from Alaska motivated Spanish activity in Alta California between 1760 and 1790. Additionally, Servin, “The Instructions of Viceroy Bucareli to Ensign Juan Perez,” 237. This source agrees that the Viceroy was interested in California, specifically, as a buffer colony and sent expeditions northward to try and stop Russian advances southward.

would be operating at a great distance from its own base of power, so it was not necessary to move massive formations to defend the borders.¹¹⁷

The Spanish frontier policy created geographic patterns that help to explain Mexico's *failure* to defend its sovereignty over its northern sphere when this sovereignty was challenged by Texians and Americans in the 1830s and 1840s. Overland lines of north-south transportation were poorly developed, while the maritime link of the Gulf was entirely neglected. The limit of actual territory lay hundreds of miles south of the limit of cartographic territory. Outside of some very small and isolated outposts in Texas, New Mexico and California, Spanish power was entirely fictional, while within these outposts the neglected and unprotected colonists felt very limited loyalty to whoever might hold the reins of power down south in the Mexican core.

The Advance of Actual Territory, Three Main Tracks of New Spain, Governing North to South

New Spain did not expand north vigorously, but it certainly did expand. The Spanish advanced along three key axes. The first was the central main track, from Mexico City to Santa Fe and Taos on the upper Rio Grande. This main track passed through some of the main silver mining districts of central Mexico, and this silver provided the *stimulus of resource reward* for expansion of the imperial state along this salient. The second axis was the eastern main track, from Mexico City to Los Adaes, between the Sabine and Red Rivers in what is now western Louisiana. This developed in response to the French advancing up the Red River and applying the *stimulus of pressure* to the Spanish frontier. The third axis was the western main track, from

¹¹⁷ Weddle, "Chicken War." This conflict was between France and Spain in western Louisiana and the soldiers involved in it numbered in the tens.

Mexico City to California. As I mentioned earlier, growth along this axis was partly stimulated by the need to supply the Manilla galleons after they had made the long passage east over the Pacific Ocean from the Philippines. This provided the *stimulus of contact*. This stimulus was amplified by the *stimulus of pressure* when Russian, British and American fur traders appeared in the Pacific Northwest. A more detailed discussion of each of these main tracks will demonstrate how distance decay affects a state's ability to deliver pain to its territory, how Spain and its settlers changed the landscape as they advanced northward from the Valley of Mexico, and how New Spain grew its actual territory.¹¹⁸

1521-1600 – Establishing Control, Finding Silver, The Central Main Track Advanced through the Gran Chichimeca

The first main track to develop was the central main track (figure II-3). Once established it was known as *camino real de la tierra adentro*, which meant the “king’s inland road”. You should not suppose that a *camino real* was necessarily fit for a king, since many in New Spain were little more than mule tracks. The title denoted an imperial connection between the central power in Mexico City and a provincial capital like Santa Fe or Las Adaes.

¹¹⁸ Meinig, “Geographical Analysis of Imperialism,” 71-78. This whole short chapter is about analyzing geographic change brought about by the expansion of empires and the methods for analyzing it.



Figure II-3. Caminos Reales of New Spain Circa 1790

Map showing the three branches of the Camino Real starting in Mexico. These roads are the physical manifestation of the main tracks of the Spanish colonial state in North America.

When the Spanish discovered silver on the Mexican Plateau in the 1550s, they had the stimulus needed to expend the energy expanding their state northward from its core in the Valley of Mexico. Though the costs were high, in the form of resistant Native American tribes, the benefits of advancing north onto the plateau were higher. Spain’s expansion along the central track was thus a response to a stimulus of resource reward, which is why the geographer Carl Sauer called it the “Trail of Silver.”

The Spanish faced significant resistance in their march northward from nomadic and semi-nomadic Native groups, but overcame this resistance with a combined system of “church and state,” “cross and sword,” “mission and presidio.”¹¹⁹ The Spanish converted the Gran Chichimeca of the Mexican Plateau into an obedient domain by delivering pain through force of arms, persuasion through the Catholic Church, and payment through economic development and trade.¹²⁰ Indeed, the new landscape of presidios, churches, pueblos, and king’s highway was the physical manifestations of the northward march of the Spanish state. But we must not suppose that the appearance of a church, or a pueblo, or even a presidio, ensured that any given location was a permanent addition to Spain’s actual territory. Some presidios and missions, like the one established at San Saba, on the river of that name in Texas, were destroyed by recalcitrant natives soon after they were established.¹²¹

Spain conquered the Aztec Empire in 1521, took possession of the territory and people controlled by this empire, and on this foundation built the Spanish empire in North America.¹²² The centralized and sedentary political and social organization of the Aztecs and their rival Tarascans expedited Spanish control of the Central Core of Mexico.¹²³ The Spanish simply placed themselves atop the extractive, imperial tribute system created by the Aztecs.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, 194.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* and Powell, *Soldiers, Indians & Silver: The Northward Advance of New Spain, 1550-1600*, 203. On this page Powell highlights the “peace by purchase” policy employed by the Spanish.

¹²¹ Dunn, “The Apache Mission on the San Saba River; Its Founding and Failure,” 379.

¹²² Sauer, “The Personality of Mexico,” 361.

¹²³ Sauer, “The Personality of Mexico,” 361; Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era*, 9-10 and 62.

¹²⁴ Sauer, “The Personality of Mexico,” 361.

The Aztecs and Tarascans lived in the higher elevations of Mexico, known as the *tierra fría*.¹²⁵ The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, is now called Mexico City, and it has been for centuries the center of power on the Mexican Plateau. While they retained power the Aztecs and Tarascans relied on subject peoples to supply agricultural products that could be produced only at lower elevations, in the *tierra caliente*, where cities like Veracruz, would later be located. The subject peoples that the Aztecs and Tarascans dominated were located in a civilized band that ran east to west from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. This band did not extend south of the present-day city of Oaxaca, or very far north of Mexico City and the Valley of Mexico. These dominated tribes of this civilized band practiced sedentary agriculture, unlike the nomads of the arid tableland of the Gran Chichimeca farther north.¹²⁶ So, the Aztec empire dominated other sedentary tribes, but did not extend northward into the Gran Chichimeca because these tribes were more difficult and less profitable to subjugate because of their nomadic lifestyle.

The Spanish authority in these regions was underwritten in two ways. First, they violently overthrew the previous rulers, the Aztecs and Tarascans, and proved their sovereignty through the delivery of violence to Aztec territory. Second, recognizing that they were vastly outnumbered and needed help in governing the territory they just claimed, the Spanish coopted Native leaders. These Indians were called *caciques* and helped the Spanish to assert themselves over the newly conquered lands by acting as intermediaries between the Spanish and the conquered natives.¹²⁷ The aim for the Spanish was to tap into existing legitimacy by retaining these *caciques*. Essentially the *caciques* were to act as force multipliers by persuading the native

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 359.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

¹²⁷ Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era*, 10-12.

tribes to obey the Spanish state via the *cacique*, thus disguising the Spanish state in native clothes.

Not all tribes in this area were conquered easily, though, and the Spanish had to continually prove their sovereignty violently because their political structure did not yet have legitimacy, even with the help of the *caciques*. For example, groups in Chiapas effectively resisted Spanish advances. Though formally conquered, groups in Chiapas maintained some degree of control over their own lives, a trend that has continued to the present day.¹²⁸ Another example of an early challenge to Spanish sovereignty was the Mixtón War from 1540 to 1542. This war served to check early Spanish advances northward and occurred prior to the discovery of silver on the plateau.

Spanish progress across the continent was not always even. The many fertile river valleys along the West Coast of Mexico that held agriculture enabled the Spanish to move up the Pacific Coast faster than the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. These agricultural valleys likely contributed to Spain's fast progress northward because they functioned as waystations on the way further north. Cities like Culiacan were founded as stops between initial jumping off points like Querétaro and Guanajuato, which lay north and west of Mexico City, and the high northern frontier.¹²⁹ For example, Nuño de Gúzman ventured into the modern state of Durango in 1531, crossing the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains, after founding the city of Culiacan on the west coast, a city

¹²⁸ I am of course referring to the Zapatista movement and the EZLN in Chiapas, Mexico in 1994/1995. See *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* by Neil Harvey for more information. Information relating to early resistance to Spanish rule comes from Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era*, 4.

¹²⁹ Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era*, 62.

that sits on a river bearing its name.¹³⁰ Durango roughly occupies the space between the high northern frontier and the Gran Chichimeca in figure II-4.



Figure II-4. The Northern Frontiers of New Spain - 1549

A map showing the Aztec Empire's areas of control overlaid with Spanish areas of control from 1521 to 1600. The area under Spanish control from 1521 essentially shows the Central Core of the Mexican state at this period in time, with areas laying beyond their control, like the Gran Chichimeca and the High Northern Frontier, constituting the nascent sphere into which the Spanish were expanding.

¹³⁰ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*, 18.

1611-1700 – The Central Main Track Advances into the High Northern Frontier

With Spanish sovereignty demonstrated and legitimacy burgeoning in the Gran Chichimeca, Spain's actual territory had advanced beyond the territory they took from the Aztecs. The Spanish advanced past the Aztec limit of advance and established a foothold on the plateau, putting important silver cities like Zacatecas more firmly in their actual territory or domain (figure II-5). The next Spanish target were the areas in the high northern frontier, the area roughly between the present-day border and Spanish outposts like Parras and Saltillo. This advance was bloody as the state delivered violence to assert its sovereignty. The northern frontier was known as the *tierra de Guerra*, or the land of war.¹³¹ The Spanish were pulled onto the plain by silver, the rumors of advanced native civilizations, and to spread Catholicism. With these three goals in mind, the advance of the colonial state depended on three entities, “the mine, the mission, and the presidio”, or payment, persuasion, and the delivery of pain.¹³²

¹³¹ Sauer, “The Personality of Mexico,” 356.

¹³² Knight, *Colonial Mexico*, 128; Jones Jr. *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*, 18.

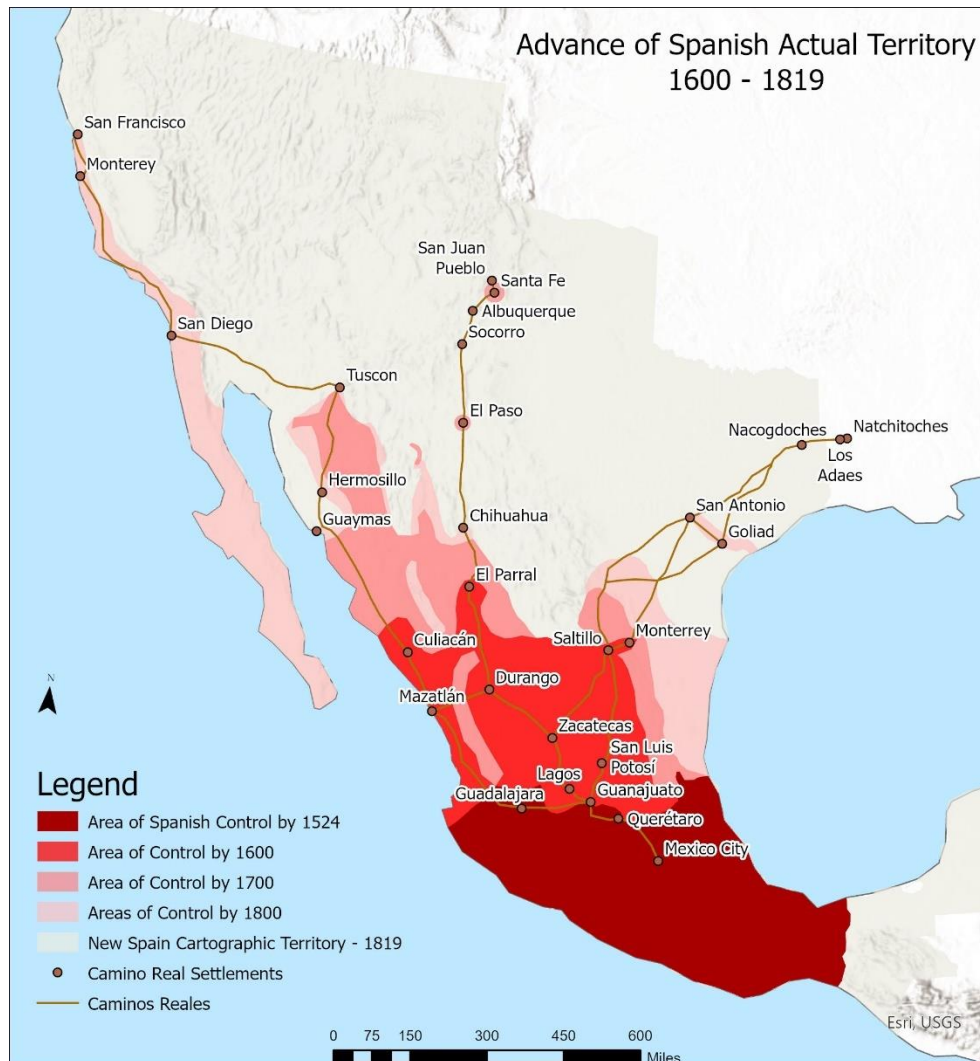


Figure II-5. Advance of Spanish Actual Territory – 1600-1819

Shows the expansion of Spanish Actual Territory between 1600 and 1819. The purpose of this map is to show that Spain did not fill out its borders perfectly. The areas and phases of expansion are drawn from Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, pages 6-8 and Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*, page 8. The Presidio line does not match perfectly with Gerhard's assessment of the northern extent of New Spain's actual territory. The notable differences largely occur in the drier areas of the continent. Notably in the central area between Chihuahua and Monterrey the Chihuahua desert dominates the gap between the central and eastern main tracks.

Oakah Jones Jr., a scholar of Mexican history, discusses in great depth the conflicts that occurred within the kingdom¹³³ of Nueva Vizcaya on the far northern frontier. Nueva Vizcaya is

¹³³ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*, 1. Jones Jr. notes that the technical term for Nueva Vizcaya was a *kingdom* or *province* during the Spanish colonial period.

basically the modern-day states of Durango and Chihuahua. Its western border is roughly the Western Sierra Madre and its eastern border is in the desert of the the Bolsón de Mapimí.¹³⁴

During this period the easternmost boundary of Nueva Vizcaya was Saltillo, located at the edge of the Eastern Sierra Madre. From 1610 to 1690, Nueva Vizcaya was the northern sphere of New Spain, as the Spanish sought to extend their state northward. This northward advance was facilitated by the creation of the central main track and the *camino real* that terminated at Santa Fe and Taos in northern New Mexico. The Spanish focused on advancing this central main track because they were not yet stimulated to push main tracks into Texas and California.

The central main track and *camino real de la tierra adentro* eventually traced its way from Mexico City to Santa Fe. The road originated in the 16th century.¹³⁵ The road expanded in two phases, the first, from Mexico City to Santa Bárbara, taking place between 1521 and 1580. By the year 1580, the “King’s Inland Road” began in Mexico City and ran through the towns of San Juan del Rio, Querétaro, Celaya, Silao, León, San Juan de los Lagos, Aguas Calientes, Zacatecas, Fresnillo, Sombrerete, Nombre de Dios, Durango, to terminate at Santa Bárbara.¹³⁶ The second phase of the “King’s Inland Road” took place between 1580 and 1610. The trail extended from its previous northern terminus at Santa Bárbara to Santa Fe, New Mexico, following the route of Don Juan de Oñate’s expedition to Santa Fe in 1598. This route broke away from the original route to Santa Fe that followed the Rios Conchos and Grande.¹³⁷ The

¹³⁴ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*, 4.

¹³⁵ Moorhead, *New Mexico’s Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail*, 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

camino real de la tierra adentro was the focal point of Spanish expansion into the far northern sphere and was the essential basis of the central main track.

The seventeenth century was a violent period for the Northern Frontier. Spain's problems with the native populations were not solved with their pacification of the Chichimecs. The Spanish found themselves having to fight equally difficult wars against groups like the Xiximes in Northwestern and western Durango, the Tepehuanes in Western and northwestern Durango, and the Tarahumaras in western and eastern Durango, as well as in southern Chihuahua.

The Tarahumaras, specifically rebelled around the mining outpost of Parral between 1648 and 1652. Parral itself had been established in 1631. This initial rebellion illustrates the fact that these towns on the northern plateau were still "isolated and threatened" even in the middle of the 17th century.¹³⁸ The Tarahumaras rebelled again in 1690. This time, the rebellion took until 1698 to fully put down.¹³⁹

The Tarahumaras were typical of other semi-nomadic tribes who lived in the northern sphere of New Spain. They were typical because they more fiercely and violently resisted the advance of the Spanish state's sovereignty than sedentary tribes like the Yaqui.¹⁴⁰ The Yaqui Indians lived in what is today Western Sonora, in the Yaqui river valley, and practiced sedentary agriculture. The western areas of Sonora, and Sinaloa are primarily north-south oriented territories that are regularly cross-cut by rivers that run west to the Gulf of California. These

¹³⁸ Knight, *Colonial Mexico*, 134-135.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁴⁰ Though more peaceful, the Yaqui Indians were not without their own rebellions or troubles. The Yaqui rebelled in 1740 but the Spanish were able to quell that rebellion in 1741. Because the Spanish were able to put down the rebellion, I have elected to forgo an extensive discussion of this event, it also occurs *after* Spain expanded its territory to the north. Furthermore, because the Spanish relatively quickly delivered violence to put down the rebellion, this violence was not unpunished by the state. See Meredith, "The Yaqui Rebellion of 1740," 222-261.

river valleys were home to sedentary agricultural tribes because of the availability of water. The sedentary agricultural tribes of Sonora and Sinaloa were much more easily subdued than the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes of the dry central plateau around Chihuahua.¹⁴¹

The Tarahumaras and other nomadic tribes, like the Apache, were typically more violent and intractable. They refused to be settled in pueblos where they could be “civilized” by Spanish missionaries. Sedentary tribes like the Yaqui were generally much more docile because their ways of life were easily adapted to the Spanish mission system. The mission system required native tribes to settle in organized pueblos, and this goal was much easier to achieve if the tribe already led a life centered on sedentary agriculture.

Furthermore, this divide, between more violent semi-nomadic tribes, and more peaceful sedentary ones, is what we would expect to see empirically based on the theories of stateless people put forth by James C. Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed*. The semi-nomadic tribes were stateless people and practiced a way of life that did not lend itself towards easy integration with a state. These tribes seasonally migrated and lived in dispersed communities in isolated areas. They were thus textbook examples of the type of people who most vigorously resist integration into a state. But, despite the resistance they put up against the Spanish, their resistance was “ultimately unsuccessful” in the face of the overwhelming violence and advancing sovereignty of the Spanish state.¹⁴²

Even the sedentary tribes were not always peaceful. Colonial authorities had to put down a revolt of the sedentary Pueblo Indians of New Mexico in the aptly named the Pueblo Revolt at

¹⁴¹ Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 4.

¹⁴² Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 136.

the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁴³ This rebellion temporarily made the outpost of Santa Fe and New Mexico (i.e. the upper Rio Grande valley) mere cartographic territory, and necessitated a Reconquista of New Mexico, or a re-extension of Spanish sovereignty.¹⁴⁴ The Spanish were not able to deliver enough pain to Nueva Vizcaya until 1700 to quell the rebellions of all of the native populations and demonstrate their sovereignty. Jones Jr. says of this situation:

“By the end of the [17th] century Spanish authorities had succeeded in restoring some degree of stability and peace to the far northern frontier of Nueva Vizcaya. In the process, the rebellions of the Conchos, Sumas, Mansos, Tarahumares, Julimes, Janos, Tobosos, and Cocoyames had been subdued either by force of arms or peaceful persuasion, and often by a combination of policies...most of the Amerinds were subjugated by 1700...”¹⁴⁵

After the dust settled around 1700, places like Parral, were squarely in the domain or actual territory of the Spanish colonial state.¹⁴⁶ The policies that eventually pacified the frontier hinged on settling loyal colonists who recognized the legitimacy of the Spanish state in frontier towns like Parral, Saltillo and Santa Fe, and delivering overwhelming violence to peoples and places that openly challenged Spanish sovereignty.¹⁴⁷ With these strategies, along with some peaceful negotiations, or persuasion, and gift giving, or payment, the Spanish proved their sovereignty and engender their legitimacy in Nueva Vizcaya. By 1700 the Spanish state

¹⁴³ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*, 92.

¹⁴⁴ Deeds, *Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians Under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya* 86

¹⁴⁵ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya*, 115.

¹⁴⁶ Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 387. Gerhard notes that the northern limit of control for the Spanish in 1640 was identified as being the 27th degree north parallel. This line of latitude is roughly where Parral sits. The rebellions of the Tarahumaras in the mid-1600s do seem to illustrate that the Spanish were, despite continued contestation, exerting their force successfully in this area. Gerhard then has the area under Spanish control expanding primarily north and west along the mountains to reach a high point in 1700 roughly where the city of Nogales, Sonora is today. See page 7. Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya*, 115. Jones Jr. indicates that the line of control reached the Nogales area around 1700 because of the defeat of the Tarahumaras, who occupied the eastern edges of the Sierra Madre Oriental range.

¹⁴⁷ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya*, 113.

commanded obedience from its subjects there. Legitimacy backed by an ability to deliver violence, made Nueva Vizcaya into actual Spanish territory or the Spanish domain.¹⁴⁸

But the actual territory of the Spanish became much patchier and more uncertain as one advanced farther north along the *camino real de la tierra adentro*. North of Parral a traveler on that road quickly entered cartographic territory or the northern sphere. This cartographic territory was here and there punctuated with islands of actual territory like El Paso and Santa Fe, but most of it was beyond the reach of Spanish power. Advancing northwest, following the eastern edge of the Western Sierra Madre, a traveler could stay within actual Spanish territory to the latitude of El Paso.¹⁴⁹ This patchy pattern of Spanish control was the result of the distance decay of Spanish power. This was the ragged edge of Spanish domination where the domain ran into the sphere. The Spanish domain had been successfully extended north from the old Aztec domain to a line just south of El Paso and Janos, Janos being one of the northernmost points of Spanish occupation in Nueva Vizcaya.¹⁵⁰

By 1700 the Spanish had advanced the ragged fringe of their domain to the present-day Mexican border along the central main track and “King’s Inland Road.” They had established frontier presidios at Janos and El Paso that would later become units de Rubí’s great presidio line. But this was a ragged, patchy fringe and only part way to becoming actual Spanish territory. El Paso and Janos were still outposts of control.¹⁵¹ In fact, based on Peter Gerhard’s assessment

¹⁴⁸ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya*, 114-115; Deeds, *Defiance and Deference*, 57.

¹⁴⁹ Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 7. Gerhard’s analysis and map of the “extent of Spanish control in 1700” is the primary source for my own assessment.

¹⁵⁰ Jones Jr., *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*, 109.

¹⁵¹ Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 7.

of Spain's limits of control, these presidios would remain outposts even until 1800. New Mexico was a distant island and very far from secure.

Despite Spain's steady, but halting advances, the resistance of refractory Apache Indians and the inconvenient shape of the North American continent soon checked northward advance of the Spanish domain. This ensured that independent Mexico would later inherit much more cartographic territory than it could ever hope to control.

1690-1790 – Reaching the Limits of Advance, Salients in California and Texas

“As the Spanish frontier extended northward, however, resistance stiffened. With each step northward the expanse of land broadened, and as the frontier widened the line of Spanish settlement became thinner. With each advance the climate became progressively more arid and the soil less productive. Finally, with each push northward the natives became more nomadic, and Spanish military control became correspondingly less effective.”¹⁵²

This quote from borderland historians Max Moorhead illustrates the basic geographical problem the Spanish faced as they advanced northward. The North American Continent widened. That simple geographic fact greatly complicated Spain's effort to extend its actual territory northward to the distant limits of its cartographic territory.

Moorhead's statement that the “line of Spanish settlement became thinner” refers in part to the less densely settled areas at the ragged fringe of the domain on the central main track, but it also can be taken to refer to the development of two new branches of the main track of New Spain. Until 1700 the salient of Spain's northward expansion was essentially one unified push up the Mexican Plateau, between the Eastern and Western Sierra Madre. After 1700 Spain's

¹⁵² Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier: Jacobo Ugarte and Spanish-Indian Relations in Northern New Spain, 1769-1791*, 11.

northward expansion was complicated by the two new branches projecting into Texas and California.

The pressure of French encroachment stimulated the projection of the second main track into Texas. In the west, the pressure of Russian encroachments and the need to provision Manilla galleons stimulated the projection of a third main track into upper California. So, instead of one unified front advancing northward along the “King’s Inland Road,” the Spanish had three separate northward salients. The widening continent forced the Spanish to break their northern frontier into three separate salients. And, adding complication to complication, these three salients were separated by wide tracts of aggressively hostile territory.¹⁵³ It is convenient to think of the aggressively hostile tract between the California and New Mexico salients as Apacheria and the aggressively hostile tract between the New Mexico and Texas salient as Comancheria.¹⁵⁴

Spain faced a very expensive problem in the northern sphere. Looking beyond the boundary of its actual territory, it stared at an enemy that was even more formidable than the Chichimecs. In addition to the formidable obstacle of the Apache, the Spanish could see no serious resource rewards in further advance of their sovereignty. California and Texas appeared to lack the material benefits that had stimulated the Spanish to advance north across the Mexican

¹⁵³ Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier: Jacobo Ugarte and Spanish-Indian Relations in Northern New Spain, 1769-1791*, 13. Moorhead says “When Spanish settlements reached the Apache frontiers, they encountered a similar barrier. This time, however, there was no economic incentive to invade the hostile domain. No fabulous silver strikes, no farming or grazing lands lay beyond to attract covetous settlers.”

¹⁵⁴ Apacheria was named by the eighteenth-century French geographer Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville. The name first appeared on his map titled *Amérique Septentrionale* (1746), where it indicates the large tract of desolate country that stretches from the headwaters of the Gila in today’s Arizona to the lower Pecos in today’s Texas. Comancheria may be the coinage of the nineteenth-century Mexican historian Manuel Orozko y Berra, who used the name to indicate the high plains of west Texas in his book titled *Geografía de las lenguas y carta etnográfica de México* (1864). The name Comancheria was introduced to English readers by great historian of Texas Herbert Eugene Bolton, who referred to the high plains of west Texas as “the Comancheria” in *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century* (1915).

Plateau.¹⁵⁵ When they met the Apache and Comanche in the northern sphere, the Spanish realized that they had found an enemy to whom they could not deliver overwhelming violence. The Spanish realized that the Apache and Comanche could not be subdued and rendered obedient at such a long distance from the center of Spanish power in Mexico City.¹⁵⁶

The Eastern Main Track to Texas

The Spanish did not perceive Texas to be worth colonization until they learned the French were interested in Texas and could easily get to it by way of the Gulf and Red River. Spanish interest in Texas was first ignited when René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, set up a French fort on Matagorda Bay in 1684. This was two years after he navigated down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁵⁷ Spanish interest in Texas was further inflamed in 1714, when a second Frenchman named Louis Juchereau de St. Denis appeared in the frontier settlements on the south bank of the Rio Grande. St. Denis had crossed Texas from a new French fort at Natchitoches on the Red River, and the appearance of this interloper convinced the Spanish that they must enforce their claim to Texas or lose that territory.¹⁵⁸

The main track into Texas was thus a response to the stimulus of pressure. But owing to the great overland distance from Mexico City to Texas, the Spanish had difficulty establishing a foothold in this part their northern sphere.¹⁵⁹ They made three abortive attempts before they

¹⁵⁵ Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier*, 11.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, 70; Galán, *Los Adaes the First Capital of Spanish Texas*, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Galán, *Los Adaes the First Capital of Spanish Texas*, 25.

¹⁵⁹ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 110-112. Weber provides similar analysis, asserting that the Spanish policy in Texas was driven by French threats there. He also notes on page 112 that Spain had to concentrate on “vital areas,” because the territory it claimed was too vast to try and equally defend.

finally established a presidio at Los Adaes in 1721.¹⁶⁰ Texas was for Spain a defensive buffer against French expansion and attracted very few colonists “in the absence of minerals.”¹⁶¹

Activity in Spanish Texas was centered around the eastern branch of the *camino real*, the “King’s Road” to the imperial outpost at Los Adaes. In Texas the *camino real* ran from Monclova, to San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande, northeast to San Antonio, and then northeast to Los Adaes, just opposite the French fort at Natchitoches on the Red River.¹⁶² A second settlement was made at La Bahia, a town originally located at Matagorda Bay and subsequently moved northeast to a site on the lower San Antonio River. The locations of these two towns makes clear that they were responses to the stimulus of French pressure. La Bahia guarded the point where La Salle had entered Texas from the Gulf; Los Adaes guarded the point where St. Denis had entered Texas from Red River.

Though remotely located more than a thousand miles from Mexico City, Los Adaes was made capital of Texas in 1729.¹⁶³ East Texas historian James McCorkle Jr. tells us, Los Adaes was an “isolated Spanish settlement” that was connected overland to the rest of New Spain by the mere “path” of the *camino real*.¹⁶⁴ Los Adaes was located in the piney woods, was prone to flooding, and was proximate to generally peaceful, sedentary native tribes like the Caddo.¹⁶⁵ It was at first defended by a small garrison, but the cantonment was soon weakened by the same pen stroke that made Los Adaes the Texas capital. Troops were cut from Texas as a whole by the

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶³ McCorkle Jr., “Los Adaes.”

¹⁶⁴ McCorkle Jr., “Los Adaes.”; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 115. Weber describes this eastern Texas site as “inaccessible by sea and over six hundred miles from the Rio Grande over a difficult land route.”

¹⁶⁵ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 113-115.

Reglamento of 1729, as Spain looked to lessen the costs of defending its frontier.¹⁶⁶ The settlement had a presidio and a mission, but it was not by any measure robust.¹⁶⁷ Also, as a result of its isolation, illicit trade with neighboring French Louisiana was a common way to survive.¹⁶⁸

San Antonio and La Bahía were the other two notable settlements in Texas. These were in a wholly different geographic region than Los Adaes, this region being much more similar to neighboring Coahuila than the piney woods that Los Adaes found itself in. San Antonio was established with the foundation of a mission on the San Antonio River in 1718,¹⁶⁹ while La Bahía was founded in 1721 by a member of the Aguayo expedition.¹⁷⁰ Like Los Adaes, both of these settlements were small and feeble. Although closer to the Spanish domain south of the Rio Grande, their survival was uncertain owing to frequent attacks by the Apache and Karankawa Indians.¹⁷¹

Overall, Spanish Texas was very sparsely populated, and Spain's actual territory never reached the tiny outpost at Los Adaes. Indeed, the provincial capital was moved to San Antonio in 1770, seven years after Spain's acquisition of Louisiana removed the need for a defensive "forward capital."¹⁷² When the geopolitical pressure of French settlements on the Gulf and Red River was removed, Spain was lulled into a false sense of security. The fear the Spanish felt when La Salle and St. Denis demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the Continental Buffer was

¹⁶⁶ Jackson, *Imaginary Kingdom: Texas as seen by the Rivera and Rubí military expeditions, 1727 and 1767*, 61-64.

¹⁶⁷ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 125.

¹⁶⁸ Galán, *Los Adaes*, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Jasinski, "San Antonio, TX."

¹⁷⁰ Roell, "La Bahía."

¹⁷¹ Galán, *Los Adaes*, 34.

¹⁷² The concept of a "forward capital" was first applied to the northern frontier of New Spain in Spate, *Monopolists and Freebooters*, 297.

alleviated when Spain acquired the Louisiana Territory from the French in 1763. Because the stimulus of pressure was removed, the Spanish state no longer sought to enforce its sovereignty in Texas. Louisiana seemed to restore the continental buffer, and to thereby insulate Spanish territory from the advances of the British.

The pressure of French expansion stimulated Spain's advance into Texas. When this pressure was removed in 1763, Spain reverted to neglect of its remote border colony. When geopolitical pressure resumed, after the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory in 1803, the Spanish Empire had begun to fail, in Europe and abroad, and was therefore unable to spare much power to enforce its sovereignty in Texas. The inhabitants of Texas developed illicit economic ties with American traders in New Orleans and on Red River, thereby weakening their already tenuous ties to the Mexican core of New Spain. The failure of the Spanish to meld Texas to the rest of its territory would become a major problem for the Mexican government when it won its independence from Spain.

The Western Main Track to California

The Spanish advance into California settlement was also stimulated by external pressure, however it was in this case encroachment by the Russian bear that caused the Spanish to enforce their sovereignty on the Pacific coast.¹⁷³ By the later 1700s, it was no longer a question of "if" but "when" the Spanish would establish a permanent settlement in California.¹⁷⁴ The Spanish had been interested in Alta California ever since the fleet from Manila had begun to use the mid-latitude westerlies to cross the Pacific Ocean from the Philippines. The westerlies brought the

¹⁷³ Gurpegui, "The Coast of California as the Long Projected Hub for the Spanish Empire in the Pacific, 1523-1815," 233.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

Manilla galleons to the coast of California, where they caught that south-flowing California Current to Acapulco.¹⁷⁵ This route of the Manilla galleons gave the Spanish a detailed knowledge of the California coast before the end of the 1600s. For example, the Spanish identified Monterey Bay as an excellent port and potential settlement site.¹⁷⁶ The stimulus of contact with Asia was, by itself, insufficient to draw Spain into California.

Expansion north along the Pacific coast was retarded by the barrier of the Sonoran Desert and the difficulty of sailing north against the California Current. For example, sailing from San Blas to Monterey could take three or four months, a similar length of time to a trans-Atlantic crossing.¹⁷⁷ So Spain did not settle California until the stimulus of Russian and English pressure compelled it to colonize the remote and inaccessible land of Alta California.

Spain undertook this colonization in two major advances. The first advance was the Portolá expedition, which was organized by Jose de Gálvez, in 1769.¹⁷⁸ This expedition established California's first mission, at San Diego, in 1769. This expedition was also responsible for establishing four other missions, one of which was in Monterey Bay, between 1770 and 1772.¹⁷⁹ These outposts relied on a tenuous maritime link to New Spain. The mission at Monterey Bay particularly relied on the annual supply ships for the majority of its foodstuffs.¹⁸⁰ Overall, these first missions were poorly connected to the core of New Spain, and owing to

¹⁷⁵ The Treaty of Zaragoza was signed by both countries in 1529 and, among other things, prevented the Spanish from sailing westward, back to Europe, from the Philippines. See *Ibid.*, 238 for a brief overview of the treaty.

¹⁷⁶ Gurpegui, "The Coast of California," 234.

¹⁷⁷ Kittle, *Franciscan Frontiersmen: How Three Adventurers Charted the West*, 78.

¹⁷⁸ Sánchez, *El Camino Real de California: From Ancient Pathways to Modern Byways*, 29.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 164-165; Kittle, *Franciscan Frontiersmen*, 78.

Spain's inability to deliver pain to California, were nothing more than tiny specks of sovereignty in Spain's cartographic territory.

The Anza Expedition of 1776 established an overland route to the missions in Alta California. It even succeeded in reaching San Francisco Bay and establishing both a mission and a presidio there.¹⁸¹ This expedition proved that neither the Apache, the unfavorable winds and currents, nor the Sonoran Desert could keep the Spanish from connecting their California outposts to the rest of their territory.

Despite these successes, Spain converted very little of California from cartographic to actual territory. A western main track and *camino real* were created, but there was no corresponding advance in the boundary of the Spanish domain. While Monterey, the provincial capital, was an isolated outpost of Spanish sovereignty, most of California remained mere cartographic territory. Spain owned California on the maps but could not, throughout most of California, enforce its sovereignty by reliable and quick delivery of violence. The road from Mexico City to Monterey was twice the length of the road from Mexico City to Los Adeas, and the friction on that road was in many places very high. Thus, like New Mexico and Texas, California was nothing but detached islands of Spanish dominion set in the cartographic fiction of the Spanish sphere. The coterminous actual territory of New Spain did not extend north of Rubí's presidio line.

¹⁸¹ Sánchez, *El Camino Real*, 142 and 165.

The Northern Limits of Advance



Figure II-6. The Presidio Line and the Caminos Reales

This map shows the caminos reales that ran into the northern sphere in New Spain. The Presidio line that was created as a result of the Spanish reorganization of the northern sphere is shown in brown. This line was the effective limit of advance for Spain. North of this line, the Spanish state could not reliably deliver violence, and consequently, could not establish sovereignty.

Spain set the limit of its coterminous actual territory in 1772, when it reorganized the line of its northern Presidios (figure II-6.). This line ran from the Gulf of California to the Gulf of Mexico and separated the domain and sphere of New Spain. By drawing this line, Spain confessed that a large part of its sphere was effectively a *terra nullis* into which it could not reliably deliver overwhelming violence. Spanish power was severely decayed north of the Presidio line, so Spanish sovereignty was confined to enclaves and even there it was uncertain.

The establishment of the Presidio line was effectively an acknowledgment that Santa Fe, San Antonio and Monterey were outposts—“islands of actual territory in a sea of cartographic territory.”¹⁸² Spain drew the Presidio Line because it was unable to enforce its sovereignty north of this line, and because it had very little hope of converting this fictional territory into the “domains of the king.”¹⁸³

North of this line the Apache and Comanche could often defeat decayed Spanish power, and this made resettlement with an obedient population both dangerous and costly.¹⁸⁴ The Presidio line was also the first attempt by Spain to shorten its interdigitated front and connect the three “fan-blades” of the main tracks into its northern sphere.¹⁸⁵

It is important to note that there were large gaps between the presidios in this line. Marauding parties of Apache and Comanche often penetrated the line to despoil Spanish settlements farther south. But marauding south of the line was discouraged by the fact that a flying detachment from one of the presidios might catch and slaughter the raiders, burdened with plunder, when they attempted to return to their sanctuaries in Apacheria and Comancheria. With this line of presidios, Spain was attempting to create interconnection that would consolidate the outer edge of its domain. The aim of the line was to unify the frontier defenses and create an effective shield for the domain.

¹⁸² Cortés y de Olarte, José María, and Elizabeth Ann Harper John, *View from the Apache Frontier: Report on the Northern Provinces of New Spain*, 25.

¹⁸³ Haskell, *Rubi's Inspection of the Frontier Presidios of New Spain*, 177.

¹⁸⁴ Deeds et. al, *The Course of Mexican History*, 201.

¹⁸⁵ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 24.

The three main tracks, into New Mexico, Texas and California, had been products of an expansion frontier.¹⁸⁶ The Presidio Line of 1772 had a different meaning because, like the ancient Roman Lines on the Rhine and Danube, it signaled Spain's shift from expansion to preservation. When it made the Presidio Line, Spain changed the expansion frontier at the outer edge of its northern domain into what Fawcett called a "military frontier."¹⁸⁷

When it made the Presidio Line Spain also officially conceded that the territory north of this line was less valuable to the Spanish crown than the territory south of it. The silver mines lay to the south. Geopolitical buffers lay to the north. Spain had seemingly done enough to ward the Russians and the British away in California, at least for the time being, and had managed to remove the pressure of the French by acquiring Louisiana. But, as will be shown in later chapters, Spain's decision not to integrate the northern sphere into the domain of the state set up a major problem for the newly independent Mexican state.

1790-1821 – Unquestionable Decay, Overview of Territorial Loss

The apex of Spanish territorial claims was achieved briefly in 1783, at the negotiating table for the Treaty of Paris. At that time Spain claimed territory as far east as Georgia, but its outlandish claims soon started to fall apart. Excepting the small islands in New Mexico, Texas, and California, Spain's actual territory lay south of Rubi's presidio line. Everything else was mere cartographic territory. And it was in 1783 that the pretense of this cartographic territory was exploded and the Spanish state in North America began to conspicuously fail.

¹⁸⁶ Haskell, *Rubi's Inspection of the Frontier Presidios of New Spain*, 173.

¹⁸⁷ Fawcett, *Political Geography*, 75. Fawcett argues that states have to establish military borders, or fortify their borders, in cases where they cease to expand.

First, Spain yielded its claim to territory east of the Mississippi River, with the exception of Florida.¹⁸⁸ The United States rejected the Spanish claim because it knew that Spain could not hope to enforce the claim by delivery of overwhelming violence. Spain yielded its claim to the Nootka territory in 1790 because it recognized that the British could deliver overwhelming violence to what would soon after be known as British Columbia.¹⁸⁹ In 1803 Spain returned the vast buffer of the Louisiana territory to France, which immediately sold it to the United States. The United States further circumscribed Spanish territory with the Adams-Onís treaty of 1819. Demonstrating the failure of the Spanish state, New Spain’s cartographic territory was slowly being erased. Its boundary on the map receding towards the Presidio Line. Cartographic reality was replacing cartographic fiction because Spain could not deliver violence to the majority of the territory it claimed in North America. Its geopolitical competitors were no longer willing to cede external sovereignty and had decided to carve up Spain’s cartographic territory for their own benefit.

On the eve of Mexican independence, the map of New Spain resembled the map on the right in figure one. Spain’s cartographic territory had been significantly reduced because competing world powers recognized the *failure* of the Spanish empire. Hispano-Mexican state failure was well underway. The actual territory of New Spain was the district of the silver mines and the Pacific backbone connected with the Asian trade. Spain extended its actual territory far enough north to protect its lucrative silver mines from native raiders and European rivals, but it did not advance beyond the Presidio Line because of increasing costs and decreasing benefits.

¹⁸⁸ Devine, “Territorial Madness: Spain, Geopolitics, and the American Revolution,” 106 and 115-116.

¹⁸⁹ Clayton, “The Creation of Imperial Space in the Pacific Northwest,” 331-333.

The Asian trade pattern also necessitated the hold on California. Here, the failing Spanish empire was aided by the continental buffer, the decay of Russian power at such a great distance from the Russian core.

In this geographical interpretation of state failure, it is significant that Spain first lost its cartographic territory in the east, in what it had viewed as its continental buffer. As vigorous competitors established and entrenched their claims to eastern portions of the continent, a weak Spanish empire receded before their advance. By the time the Adams-Onís treaty was signed, the head start that Spain had in colonizing North America had been wiped out, and Spain's northern sphere—north of the Presidio Line—was under a dire and growing threat from an expansionist United States.

Even under the terms of the Adams-Onís treaty, there was a very large mismatch between the cartographic and actual territories of New Spain. Mexico took charge of this unstable geography when it gained its independence in 1821. This meant that the Mexican state had to quickly figure out a way to make these two territories, cartographic and actual, congruent with each other, preferably by expanding its domain and actual territory to reach the borders of its cartographic territory. The Mexican state's failure to bring these two territories together is the subject of the next four chapters of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER III

CHALLENGING MEXICAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE SPHERE, REBELLIONS FROM 1835 TO 1840

“Many frontiersmen came to question the *legitimacy* of leaders, laws, and institutions that seemed unresponsive to their needs and to doubt the *value* of a continuing relationship to the metropolis.” – David Weber, *The Mexican Frontier* (1982) [emphasis added]

The Lack of Legitimacy in the Sphere, Roots of Territorial Disintegration

Mexico faced an integrity problem after it gained its independence from Spain in 1821. Its integrity problem sprang, not from morally deficient individuals, but rather from the over-large expanse of the territory it inherited from the crumbling Spanish Empire. It was a problem of *territorial* integrity. Mexico inherited the same problem the Spanish had faced and failed to solve: how to defend a very large territory at long distances from the capital city against hostile native populations and expansionist neighbors when the state was short on money, motivated subjects or citizens, and military might.

New Spain had long left inhabitants of its northern frontiers to fend for themselves, and generally neglected the *norteños*. This neglect was equally welcomed and resented by the *norteños*. It was welcomed because it meant that the federalist central government would allow them to run their own affairs. The neglect was resented when their cries for help in defending themselves against marauding Indians went unanswered. These unanswered cries eroded the state’s legitimacy in the north because defense of life and property is the first duty and primary justification of the state.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Dealey, *The State and Government*, 48.

It was in this mixed climate that Mexico's previously "unresponsive" central government tried to impose its will upon its northern territories after the core descended into a series of power struggles between centralists and federalists. Given their political ideology, the centralists tried to govern the north with a stronger hand, especially after Santa Anna overthrew the federalist government in 1835. The *norteños* resented the strong hand because it seemed to increase the costs of belonging to the Mexican state without simultaneously providing any benefits, particularly the benefit of protection from hostile Native Tribes.

The resentment built in the north and the state lost its legitimacy. This legitimacy failure resulted in several challenges to the state's sovereignty, or rebellions, in the sphere from 1836 to 1845. The first state to rebel was Zacatecas, which did so over its unwillingness to comply with a central government mandate to reduce the size of its civil militias.¹⁹¹ Zacatecas, a state in the domain, while not aggrieved to the same degree by depredations from external threats, resented the possibility of losing its armed force. This rebellion was unsuccessful because it was defeated by pain delivered by Santa Anna and the central government's armies.

Citizens successfully challenged the state's sovereignty and seceded in Texas in 1836. This was the only successful rebellion in the sphere. There were unsuccessful rebellions in California, in 1836 and 1845, and in New Mexico in 1837.¹⁹² The Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Coahuila unsuccessfully challenged the state's sovereignty in 1840, although they briefly

¹⁹¹ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 44.

¹⁹² Here I am defining success of the challenge to sovereignty, or a rebellion, primarily on if the central government was able to reassert control over the territory. The challenge to sovereignty is deemed successful if the central government *fails* to defeat it. Texas was clearly successful because it seceded, the cases of California and New Mexico are less clear cut because secession was not necessarily a *goal* of the rebellion, but both states remained inside of Mexico, though the central government did not have much, if any, formal political control over them after their rebellions.

formed the Republic of the Rio Grande. The state of Sonora rebelled after a disaffected general who made a name for himself during the Texas Revolution, General Urrea, (re)discovered his taste for power.

This chapter seeks to identify geographic reasons for the variations in the rate of success of these rebellions. The rebellions in the sphere of Mexico, particularly those in New Mexico, California, and Texas, had similar geographic situations, insofar as these were the furthest from the center of Mexico. However, only one of these three, Texas, seceded successfully. While this initially seems to put the theory of distance decay of the state's power into serious doubt, the geographic situation of each of these three units were not quite the same. In addition to being distant from the Mexican core, Texas was closest to the expanding United States. By 1830 Texas was in the sphere of both Mexico and the United States and it had closer cultural and economic ties to the latter. This was partly because of the increasing Texian¹⁹³ population in the state but was also because the friction of distance was lower between Texas and points east. The Mexican core was not linked to Texas by navigable rivers and Mexico neglected the potential maritime link by way of the Gulf. Additionally, other factors, like the loyalty or conditioned compliance of local citizens in California and New Mexico, prevented any serious secessionist movement from succeeding there.

The unsuccessful rebellions in the Republic of the Rio Grande, Zacatecas, and Sonora, support the theory of the distance decay of power because each of these areas was close enough to Mexico City for the Mexican state to effectively deliver violence, crush the rebellion, and prove its sovereignty. These areas were in the domain of Mexico. These areas were more tightly

¹⁹³ Meaning white immigrants to Texas from the United States.

integrated into the core of Mexico and were therefore effectively dominated by the delivery of violence from the central government. California and New Mexico were clearly in the sphere, as they were part of what was called the *provincias internas*, or interior provinces, but their rebellions nevertheless failed for reasons that will be discussed in this chapter. This chapter provides an overview of the failed rebellions in California, New Mexico, Sonora, and the Republic of the Rio Grande, and thus sets the stage for a detailed account of the Texas rebellion in the next two chapters.

The following quote from David Weber's *The Mexican Frontier*, summarizes the general conditions facing the Mexican sphere in the 1830s and 1840s, and provides a backdrop against which the events and geographies described in this chapter took place. Weber says of the Mexican sphere,

“Powerful centrifugal forces—regionalism, isolation, and foreign influence—began to swirl the frontier out of the Mexican orbit in the years following independence while the central government seemed unable to exert a countervailing force to pull the region back again.”¹⁹⁴

Weber means that the Mexican government did not have the necessary resources to command obedience from its citizens. The state could not persuade, pay, or deliver pain to its citizens to either engender or coerce their obedience. This weakness allowed each of the three states in the northern sphere to develop its own regional identity as it remained isolated from the core of Mexico. These areas were not close enough, nor well-connected enough to the core or domain to strongly identify as Mexicans, meaning the state had little persuasive power among this population. Couple these separate identities and economies with the central government's

¹⁹⁴ This quote appears on page 242 of this book.

patchy internal sovereignty, as demonstrated by attacks from Native American tribes like the Apache and Comanche, and it's easy to see why the Mexican State was faced with territories that threatened to "swirl" away from it.

Though not every rebellion was successful, and each had its own cast of characters and local context, one common thread joining the rebellions in the northern sphere was the fact that these territories were too far away from Mexico's power centers to identify strongly as "Mexican," or to benefit from being part of Mexico. The state's legitimacy failed because in the northern sphere citizens did not identify with their distant rulers. Nor did they consistently receive protection or other material benefits from being part of the Mexican state. So, when political tides from the center swept against the *norteños* and the central government demanded more from its northern citizens than its northern citizens felt it was due, the failure of the state's legitimacy resulted in violent challenges to the state's sovereignty. The outcomes of these challenges revealed the degree to which Mexico was a failing state. These stories illustrate the principle of distance decay, since even though Mexico was able to retain the sphere territories of New Mexico and California, they were largely cartographic territories. Territories closer to the core, like the Republic of the Rio Grande and Sonora, were cemented to the core as actual Mexican territories.

Texas 1836, The Successful Secession

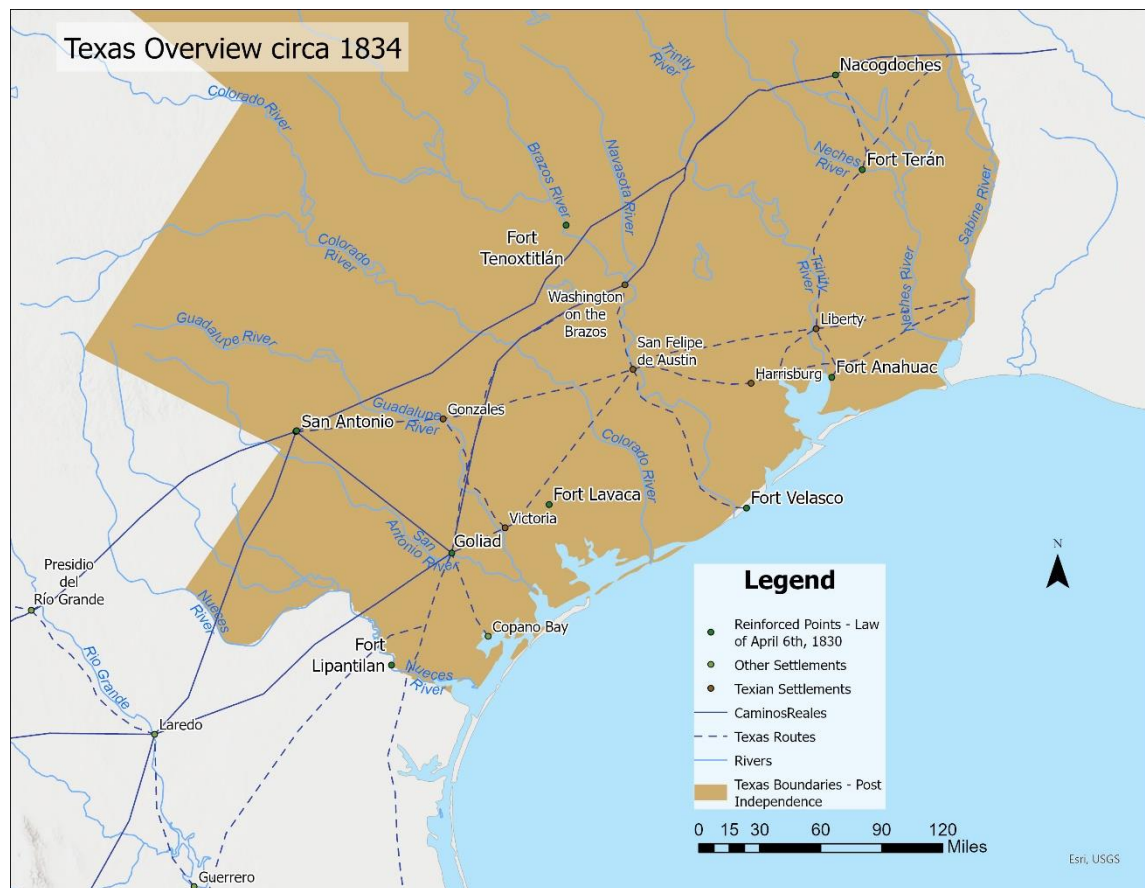


Figure III-1. Texas Overview Circa 1834

This map is an overview of Texas circa 1834. Its purpose is to help familiarize the reader with Texas's geography.

Because Texas was the only successful rebellion, it will be discussed in greater detail in the next two chapters. In this chapter I will just sketch the outline of this rebellion. Texas had long been at the fringes of the Spanish Empire and was untouched by Spain until the early 1690s. Texas attracted attention because the Spanish government felt the stimulus of French pressure when the French explorer René Robert LaSalle established a colony at Matagorda Bay, southeast of present-day Victoria, on the coast of Texas, in 1685 (figure III-1).¹⁹⁵ The stimulus of pressure

¹⁹⁵ Weddle, "La Salle Expedition."

was increased thirty years later when the French explorer Louis Juchereau St. Denis established a fortified trading post at Natchitoches, on the Red River, and then walked across Texas to the Spanish outposts on the Rio Grande. This concern over the French is evident in the placement of Texas' first capital, Las Adaes, just west of Natchitoches in 1722.¹⁹⁶ Also by the placement of Nuestra Señora de Loreto de la Bahia Presidio on the former site of La Salle's colony in that same year. But Spain's interest in Texas was never consistent and Texas was always poorly connected to the core of New Spain.

The subjects of Texas, the Tejanos, were therefore culturally and politically different from Mexicans closer to the center of the country, and this difference led to "continuing tensions" with Mexico City.¹⁹⁷ Further weakening the connection to the Mexican core was the ongoing, illegal, trade between Texas and Louisiana. This established geographic lines of movement that the Texians¹⁹⁸ would expand once they arrived in Texas and began looking for markets for their cotton.¹⁹⁹ Smuggling and "isolation contributed to an 'independent spirit'" that was further encouraged by "minimal interference from the [Spanish] Crown."²⁰⁰ Added to this was the fact that the "Tejanos understood they could not rely on support from the south," so that "they became accustomed to defending themselves from Indians and other hostile forces." Taken together these factors make clear why the Tejanos became a very self-reliant people who felt that they did not owe loyalty to the Spanish and later the Mexican state.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ Poyo, "Community and Autonomy," 2.

¹⁹⁷ Tijerina, "Under the Mexican Flag," 33.

¹⁹⁸ Generally white American immigrants to Texas.

¹⁹⁹ Poyo, "Community and Autonomy," 11.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰¹ Tijerina, "Under the Mexican Flag," 36.

Texians lacked any culture similar to the Mexican core, so their arrival in Texas compounded the problem of integrating Texas.²⁰² Now, instead of appearing at least nominally Mexican, as places like Los Adaes or Nacogdoches had before Texians arrived, east Texas was overwhelmed with Texians.²⁰³ East Texas was so overwhelmed that General Terán, a high-ranking Mexican official sent to investigate the border between Texas and the United States in 1824, remarked, “as one travels from Bejar to this town [Nacogdoches], Mexican influence diminishes, so much so that it becomes clear that in this town that influence is almost nonexistent.”²⁰⁴ Add to this lack of cultural and political cohesion a population “constantly” under attack by the Comanche and other tribes, and it is evident that Texas was little more than cartographic territory in Mexico.²⁰⁵ The state could not deliver violence to defeat the Comanche, so its sovereignty was in question. Because its sovereignty was in question, the state’s legitimacy never blossomed, especially after immigrants that the state had little hope of persuading began crossing into Texas in greater numbers.

The state could not persuade this isolated group to obey. The state could not deliver violence to protect them from hostile external threats. Payment, through exemption from customs duties, seemed somewhat effective, but when the Mexican government tried to put Texas under its thumb by extracting taxes and establishing military bases, according to the Law of April 6,

²⁰² Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*, 184. Torget highlights that many of the Texians still identified as Americans. Santa Anna in his Manifesto after the Texas Rebellion also noted that immigrants of any nation who were brought to Texas would be more likely to have loyalty to their home country than Mexico. This statement is in Castañeda, *The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution*, 66.

²⁰³ Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 184. Torget gives the Texian population as 30,000 compared to a Tejano population of 3,400 in late 1836.

²⁰⁴ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 97.

²⁰⁵ Almonte, *Almonte’s Texas: Juan N. Almonte’s 1834 Inspection, Secret Report, and Role in the 1836 Campaign*, 133.

1830, Texians and Tejanos began to openly question the legitimacy of the Mexican government.²⁰⁶ The Texians complained that they would have to pay taxes from which they had previously been exempt,²⁰⁷ and this to a government from which they did not receive any benefit—most especially the benefit of protection from the ravages of the Natives.

Eventually these discontents boiled over into a violent challenge to the state's sovereignty in 1836, with a subsequent successful campaign for independence by the Texian and Tejano Army. Texas asserted its independence after defeating Santa Anna at the battle of San Jacinto in April of 1836 and sending the defeated Mexican Army back to Mexico. The rebellion succeeded because the Mexican Army failed to deliver overwhelming pain to Texas. The overland friction of distance was simply too great. Despite the advantage of a numerically superior army, the Mexicans had to retreat in the face of a recalcitrant opponent that took every strategic advantage available to it, and that decisively defeated a sleeping enemy at the Battle of San Jacinto, leading to an independent Republic whose sovereignty was proven on the battlefield.

California 1836-1846, Isolated from Two Capitals

“...It is an undisputed fact, that every General whom the people have revolted against in California, have been obliged to retire, and such must be the fate of every future one who may be sent here.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Stephen Austin actually argues, initially, that the Texians should be thankful for the additional military presence in Texas, as he thought that the troops brought by Terán would help to keep the Texans safe from Native attacks. However, this proved not to be the case and the forts built for the purposes of enforcing the laws largely stood empty by the time Almonte was in Texas in 1834. Austin's argument can be found on page 351 in Volume II of *The Austin Papers*.

²⁰⁷ The Law of April 6, 1830 did not impose these taxes, but the period of free of taxation was due to expire this year and the Law of April 6, 1830 did seek to set up customs duty collection points backed by military garrisons. The citizens in Texas ended up remaining exempt, as Almonte notes that they are still exempt from import duties on pages 213-214 of *Almonte's Texas*. Johnson, *A History of Texas*, 62 calls these forts and customs duty houses the “military measures” that Terán proposed to help enforce law in Texas.

²⁰⁸ Thomas Larkin quoted in Richards, *The Texas Moment: Breakaway Republics and Contested Sovereignty in North America, 1836-1846*, 386-387.

This quote by Thomas Larkin, US consul to Alta California, clearly illustrates that the Mexican state was unable to deliver pain to California. Bolstering this judgement is an assessment by historian Thomas Richards, who states that “the Mexican state was clearly powerless in California.”²⁰⁹ As in Texas, the Mexican state was not given legitimacy from its citizens in California and therefore faced challenges to its sovereignty. This section will outline the established historical details that prove this point, as well as explain the geography facts that forced the Mexican state to leave California as mere cartographic territory.

Like Texas, California was geographically isolated from the core of Mexico.²¹⁰ A permanent mission was not established in California until 1769, and the continued existence of the mission was in question owing to poor connections with supplies and officials in the center.²¹¹ Because of California’s overland isolation from Mexico, it was primarily accessed through ports on the Pacific coast. Because of this, the coastal mountain ranges were the primary determinants of California’s political geography. The colony was oriented along a north-south axis, following the similarly oriented Coastal Ranges. The coastal mountains just east of places like Los Angeles, Monterey, and San Diego, largely confined Spanish settlements to the coast, with routes into the interior being more difficult to develop (figure III-2).²¹² In addition to being barriers to movement towards the interior, the mountains further constrained Spanish settlement

²⁰⁹ Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 386.

²¹⁰ The geographer Alexander von Humbolt calculated that the straight-line distance between Mexico City and Monterey is the same distance as that between Philadelphia and Mexico City. This fact is found in Von Humbolt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, 230.

²¹¹ Chapman, “The Alta California Supply Ships, 1773-76,” 184.

²¹² Von Humbolt, *Political Essay*, 231, notes that it took the Spanish a long time to develop routes between New Mexico and California, at the time of his writing in 1821, “no traveller [sic.] has yet come from New Mexico to the coast of New California.” Chapman, “The Alta California Supply Ships,” 184 mentions overland routes being used for the delivery of supplies to Alta California, however, he also asserts that Alta California would likely have been abandoned had it not been for the supplies coming to it from the port of San Blas.

to their western slopes by concentrating rainfall there due to orographic lift. The eastern slopes of the California Coastal Ranges are much drier and agriculture would have been more difficult in the interior valley where rainfall was less abundant.

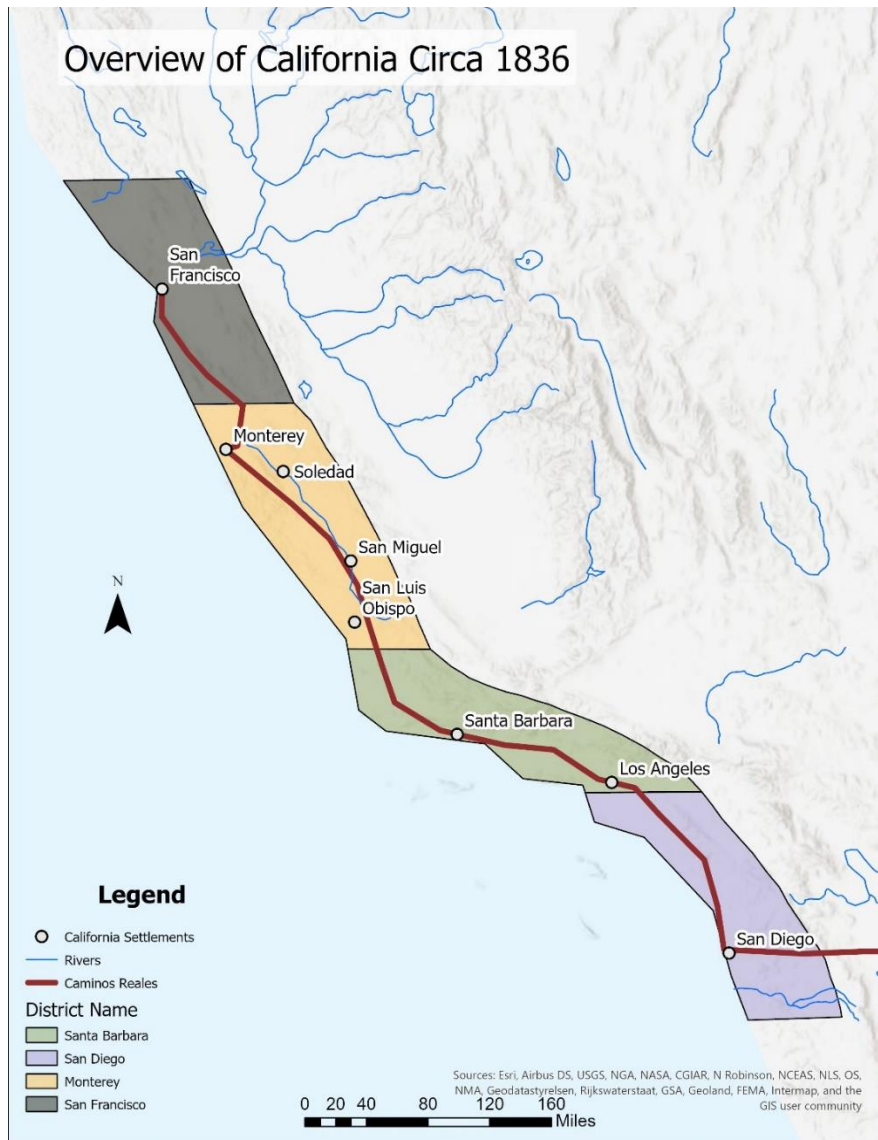


Figure III-2. Overview of California Circa 1836

This map depicts the coastal character of California in the 1830s. It is based off the one produced by José Mariá Narvaez in 1830. The fact that the political districts do not extend eastward past the coastal mountain ranges indicates the coastal character of California's Spanish, and Mexican, settlement.

As in Texas, this isolated, coastal existence stimulated the development of a regional identity among the Californios, paralleling the Tejanos in Texas. This regional identity

developed, in part, because of infrequent contact with officials and countrymen and women from the core. For example, with the development of the hide and tallow trade in the 1820s, Californio supplies came from tallow traders instead of Mexican merchants or the Mexican government.²¹³ The primary orientation of political movement was north to south, and sub-regional variation identities followed that same pattern. Based on the development of “northern” and “southern” sets of Californios, north-south commerce and movement was limited even within California. Though infrastructure certainly existed to move troops and supplies overland between Monterey and San Diego, these avenues were not used frequently for commerce.²¹⁴ Commercial activity was primarily directed towards the coast, with the Californios trading with people coming into their ports. From the east, Californios would occasionally see New Mexicans and would frequently see raiding Natives.²¹⁵

In addition to the hide and tallow trade, wheat was grown and traded to the Russians to the north.²¹⁶ After the secularizations of the missions in 1834, the ranchos became the primary economic drivers of California.²¹⁷ Like the missions, the ranchos were confined to the California coast, where rainfall is more abundant and trails to the ports are shorter.

“The interior” was an important part of California’s geography at this time. Mexican California was primarily a coastal society, with the settlements like Monterey and Santa Barbara

²¹³ Broadbent, “Conflict at Monterey,” 87; Wright, Introduction to Jose Bandini’s “A Description of California in 1828,” vi.

²¹⁴ Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History,” 13, talks about Governor Alvarado marching his troops to the south to try and put down potentially rebellious *sureños* as well as Federal Mexican forces marching northward to Monterey from an unmentioned southern location.

²¹⁵ Broadbent, “Conflict at Monterey,” 87. Phillips, *Indians and Intruders in Central California, 1769-1849*, 92.

²¹⁶ Wright, Introduction to Jose Bandini’s “A Description of California in 1828,” vi.

²¹⁷ Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 343 mentions the importance of the ranchos to the California economy and that this activity replaced the mission system. Phillips, *Indians and Intruders*, 160-61 also discusses the importance of the rancho to the local economy.

tightly hugging the Pacific shoreline. East of the Coastal Ranges was “the interior,” formally called the San Joaquin Valley, and this was “Indian country.”²¹⁸ The interior was ungoverned by Mexico and was home to largely hostile Native tribes. With this ungoverned area sitting right over their shoulders, the *rancheros* were extremely exposed and sitting very much on the edge of civilization.

Another clear admission by the Mexican government that it did not control any land in California’s interior was a map produced by José Mariá Narvaez in 1830.²¹⁹ This map delineates four political territories in Alta California. Although Alta California officially extended deep into the interior of the continent, the boundaries of these four political subdivisions did not extend past the Coastal Ranges. That the cartographer did not extend the borders of these political subdivisions past the Coastal Ranges suggests that the government knew that it could not enforce its sovereignty in the interior. The mountains proved an insurmountable obstacle to the projection of Mexican power, leaving the Californios as a coastal society.

Governor Figueroa, who was in charge of California from 1833 to 1835, further illustrated the limited reach of the Californian government by attempting to restrict commerce to the coast and not in “the interior with Indians.”²²⁰ The governor wanted commerce to happen in the towns because the government could more easily track it there, and make sure that traders were not selling illegally obtained horses or livestock. The government had little to no hope of enforcing its regulations against this contraband trade in the interior valley where the Natives

²¹⁸ Phillips, *Indians and Intruders*, 158.

²¹⁹ Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History: The Case of Mexican California, 1821-1846,” 6 contains a reproduction of this map.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 89.

reigned supreme. Figueroa wanted “monthly expeditions into the interior” partially supplied by private citizens, to try and stop this illegal commerce, but his efforts were not successful.²²¹

This geography influenced historical events during and after 1836, to which this discussion now turns. In 1836 the northern Californios, or *norteños*, ousted the sitting governor and military chief, Governor Nicolás Gutierrez, who had assumed command from the previous governor, Mariano Chico, earlier that same year. Because California was little more than cartographic territory, the Mexican state was unable to deliver overwhelming violence and crush the rebellion.

“Alta California remained a remote and economically marginal region of Mexico, a status largely unchanged since the first Spanish settlement in California in 1769.”²²²

Because they were physically remote, economically marginal, chafing under centralism, and unprotected by the central government, the Californios challenged Mexican sovereignty by declaring independence on November 7, 1836.²²³ The man who replaced Governor Gutierrez was Juan Alvarado, who was officially named governor of California in December, 1836.²²⁴ The California rebels’ motivations were similar to those in Texas because the Californios wanted benefits to balance the costs of being part of the Mexican state. The Californios were generally happy to participate in a federalist governmental structure where they had large degrees of

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History: The Case of Mexican California, 1821-1846,” 342.

²²³ Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History: The Case of Mexican California, 1821-1846,” 10 provides an overview of the twelve attempts made by Californios to overthrow their governors between 1821 and 1845. On page 11, he asserts that doing so without violence was a “local custom” going on to say later in the paper, on pages 14 and 15, that it appears the Californios were more concerned with fighting raiding Natives rather than themselves.

²²⁴ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*, 255-257; Bancroft, *The History of California, Vol III*, 459-460 also recounts the military confrontation as bloodless with Gutierrez surrendering before blood could be shed.

autonomy, but resented when the central government, or its appointees, robbed them of their autonomy.²²⁵ Bancroft summarizes the situation of the Californios by saying:

“for some twenty-five years, since the *memoria* ships ceased to come, there had been a feeling that California was neglected and wronged by the home government. The Mexican republic after the success of the revolution did nothing to remove that feeling. The people...waited in vain for the benefits to be gained from republicanism.”²²⁶

Since Mexico’s independence, “the Mexican government had mostly ignored California, and in turn, California ignored Mexico,” it was natural that the Californios wanted to formally govern themselves in a federalist government.²²⁷ The central government did not have legitimacy in the eyes of the Californios.

Bancroft goes on to summarize additional arguments for the Californios’ feelings of neglect or resentment towards the Mexican government: Mexico sent convicts to California, few promotions in the government went to Californios, and commercial policies were not designed for Californians. On top of this, individual prejudices favored rebellions,²²⁸ demonstrating the lack of persuasive power that the state had among its citizens in California. General neglect and poor policies made California a portion of Mexican territory that felt the central government had little or no legitimacy. This is why Juan Alvarado was able to challenge the Mexican sovereignty and rise to the governorship.

Alvarado’s quest for the governorship was not uncontested and he was challenged by southern Californios. These residents of the state were known as *sureños*. The *sureños* were

²²⁵ Salomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California*, 26-38.

²²⁶ Bancroft, *The History of California*, 449.

²²⁷ Bancroft, *The History of California*, 450. The quotation comes from Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 347-48.

²²⁸ Bancroft, *The History of California*, 450.

more loyal to the central government.²²⁹ It could also be said that the *sureños* acted because they were just suspicious of what the *norteños* were planning on doing with their newfound power, rather than loyal to the central government.²³⁰ The Mexican government could not afford to send a punitive military expedition against Alvarado owing to the tumultuous situation in Texas, and therefore sent a man by the name of Andres Castillero to negotiate with Alvarado. Alvarado was convinced that the Constitution of 1836, and centralism more broadly, would not harm California, and so he lay down his arms in June, 1837.²³¹ Alvarado was allowed to stay in power so long as he was not in open revolt and pledged loyalty to the Constitution of 1836.²³² So, California, even under the auspices of centralism, had all the autonomy it wanted, and could now “resist the oppressions of the rulers sent from Mexico” and govern itself.²³³

The California rebellion thus stopped short of independence, but won a large degree of autonomy because “Mexico’s ability to enforce its rule was limited at best.”²³⁴ At one point, a Mexican governor of California even told the central government that he, the governor, “had no authority in the territory because Mexico ‘had neither ships nor soldiers’ there.”²³⁵ The central government did not have the military power to enforce its sovereignty. Between the years of 1836 and 1841, there was very little official presence of the Mexican central government in

²²⁹ Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 344 asserts that the southerners were more loyal to the central government because they were *closer* to the central government. This position is bolstered by Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History,” 21-22 who also argues that the north was more prone to secessionist tendencies. These analyses conform to my theory of distance decay. Though it must be said that the *sureños* were not universally loyal to the central government, as they staged a rebellion to oust Governor Micheltoarena in 1845 to install the last Mexican governor, Pio Pico. This rebellion is mentioned on page 10 of Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History.”

²³⁰ Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History,” 21-22; Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 351-52.

²³¹ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 258-59.

²³² Bancroft, *The History of California*, 526.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 470.

²³⁴ Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 351-52.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

California, with at least one author claiming there were no federal Mexican troops in California during this time period, and that “the Mexican state had become essentially non-existent.”²³⁶

Because it was recognized by both the central government and the Californios that Mexico’s sovereignty was all but nonexistent, the central government reduced the burdens of membership in the Mexican state as much as possible to prevent an independence movement, like the one in Texas, from arising. Because Mexico did not have sovereignty here, California was cartographic territory for the Mexican state. Mexico ruled it, but only on the map, and only as long as no one violently challenged it for control of this territory. California did not follow Texas down the path to complete independence because of the concessions granted to it by the central government, because of greater cultural similarity with the Mexican core, and because outside cultural and political influences were not as strong as they were in Texas. But California was a de-facto state, independent from Mexico in all but name.²³⁷ California controlled its own territory and was not controlled by Mexico.

Even the Californios could not deliver pain to all parts of the territory they claimed to rule, and raids from external native tribes, motivated by the desire for horses, increased in intensity in the 1830s.²³⁸ The strategy of the Indians was to raid Californio *ranchos*, retreat into the San Joaquin Valley or “interior,” and there either eat, use, or sell their stolen prizes.²³⁹ The

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 360.

²³⁷ Bakke et. al, “Convincing State-Builders? Disaggregating Internal Legitimacy in Abkhazia,” 591.

²³⁸ Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History,” 20 mentions that there were at least three of these “expeditions” to try and punish the raiding Indians in 1839 by residents of San Jose. He says that the local “inhabitants” were the one who fielded these expeditions, which implies that these were mostly composed of everyday citizens, and not federal military personal; Broadbent, “Conflict at Monterey: Indian Horse Raiding, 1820-1850,” 91; Phillips, *Indians and Intruders in Central California, 1769-1849*, 158.

²³⁹ Phillips, *Indians and Intruders in Central California, 1769-1849*, 92 discusses the Indians stealing Californian livestock because they wanted to trade with the New Mexicans, who were coming over from Santa Fe.

government, even under home rule after Alvarado rose to power, was poorly funded and unable to protect its citizens and their livestock from Native raids, creating discontented *californios* that also called into question the government's sovereignty.²⁴⁰

The next change of the guard in the governor's house occurred when Governor Alvarado, ironically, wrote to Santa Anna in 1841 requesting the aid of the central government. Of course, this request illustrates that the governors of California wanted the central government's help when it was convenient, but otherwise wanted to be left alone. Santa Anna responded by sending 300 troops under General Manuel Micheltorena, who became governor of California upon his arrival in 1842.²⁴¹ Micheltorena was able to survive as governor until 1845, at which time the Californios showed their grievances against him by ousting him from power and installing a *sureño* as governor, Pio Pico. This change of the guard was also casualty free.²⁴² Pico was faced with both internal divisions between the north and south as well as the growing problem of American immigration and an impoverished state treasury.²⁴³

Though Pico was a man of California, he was unable, much like Alvarado, to unite the Californios into a cohesive group. American interests, that had to this point been lacking, began to surge in strength and to pry California further from the hold of the Mexican state. American interests led to the Bear Flag revolt in June of 1845, and the United States eventually conquering California as part of the Mexican American War. Though, it must be said that the United States

²⁴⁰ Phillips, *Indians and Intruders*, 162-165.

²⁴¹ Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 376.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 383.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 389; Gonzalez, "War and the Making of History," 22; Bancroft, *History of California*, 378 also notes that "the receipts at the custom-house were far from sufficient to meet the expenditures of the civil and military budgets" in 1834.

initially only conquered the *Mexican* portions of California, and “the interior” had yet to be conquered.²⁴⁴

So, California remained a nominal part of Mexico until it was taken from Mexico by the United States. The circumstances of that military campaign will be discussed in a later chapter, however, it should be explained why California did not end up like Texas, a free and independent state. Ultimately, the argument in Richards’ *Texas Moment* stands up to scrutiny. California was too far away from Mexico City for the Mexican government to violently enforce its sovereignty; California was a cartographic territory of the Mexican state. This was the result of the distance decay of power. So, whenever California did question the central government’s sovereignty, the central government, recognizing it had limited ability to deliver pain to California,²⁴⁵ and no backstop should the Californios pursue independence, persuaded the Californios compliance by granting them autonomy.²⁴⁶

The Mexican government also likely felt that a strategy of devolution was safe in California because there were relatively fewer foreigners to dilute its loyal Mexican population. Although Alvarado had declared California a “Free and Sovereign state,” he was later *convinced* that this measure was not necessary.²⁴⁷ So, the fact that the expansionist United States was further from California likely made Mexico less anxious about losing this portion of its territory to its northern neighbor. And where Texas was joined to the United States by the natural

²⁴⁴ Phillips, *Indians and Intruders*, 165.

²⁴⁵ Presley, “Santa Anna in Texas: A Mexican Viewpoint,” 491 argues that the Mexican army was significantly decayed and filled with raw recruits at the beginning of the Texas campaign. While the soldiers would have gained experience fighting against the Texas rebels, it is a difficult argument to make to say that the army was in better shape after being defeated by the Texans than it was before the Texas Revolution.

²⁴⁶ Richards, *The Texas Moment*, 350-351.

²⁴⁷ Bancroft, *History of California*, 464.

highways of the Gulf and Red River, California appeared to be secure behind the wastes of the mountain west and the very long voyage around Cape Horn.

Thus, the events in the frontier province of California proceeded differently than in Texas because their geographic situations were different. They were both frontier provinces that lay at a great distance from the Mexican capital and core, and thus beyond the control of the central government. But in the 1830s California, unlike Texas, also lay at a great distance from the United States, as measured in both miles and cost. Thus, the Mexican government felt safe in conciliating the California rebels while it felt obliged to demonstrate its sovereignty over the rebels in Texas. So, while the distance decay of power was greater in California than it was in Texas, the *challenge to power* was (or was at least was perceived to be), more urgent and dangerous in Texas. The Mexican government perceived that its *honor* was on the line in Texas in a way that it was not in California, and this perception—very likely a misperception—was its fatal undoing.

New Mexico 1837-1846, Historical Weight and Legitimacy

New Mexico is another case that may seem to disconfirm the distance decay theory. On the surface, according to the theory of distance decay, New Mexico, whose capital lay at a greater distance from Mexico City than San Antonio, should have gained its independence like Texas did. But New Mexico's inclusion in maps of the Mexican state up to 1846 hid the reality that New Mexico was, like California, effectively beyond the reach of the central government. It was in Mexico's cartographic territory. Consequently, this case of New Mexico simply adds nuance to the distance decay theory that would otherwise seem to have failed. Though the Mexican state could not deliver violence to New Mexico to prove its sovereignty, it retained the

territory through conditioned compliance from loyal members of the state delivering violence on behalf of the central government.

Individuals within and outside the state apparatus play an important role in the projection of state power into regions distant from the capital. New Mexico's Governor, Manuel Armijo, is one example of an important individual upholding the states' authority in a far-flung land. In the absence of the central government's ability to deliver pain to distant New Mexico, Armijo was a key repeater of the state's power, personally broadcasting the persuasive power needed to keep the isolated territory of New Mexico within Mexico's cartographic territory.

New Mexico's isolation is evident in its virtual independence from the central government. Historian Daniel Tyler says that by 1843 Governor Armijo "could not depend on the national government for any financial, logistic, or military support."²⁴⁸ Indeed, the New Mexican governor's only source of funds came from the Santa Fe Trail's import duties.²⁴⁹ His army consisted of unpaid, under-equipped, but patriotic locals.²⁵⁰ It was these local patriotic feelings, however minimal, that kept New Mexico part of the Mexican state by inspiring actions that sustained rather than subverted the central government.

New Mexico's revolution in 1837 was not a carbon copy of either that in Texas or California. Unlike California, New Mexico was relatively stable between 1821 and 1846. New

²⁴⁸ Tyler, "Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest: The View from New Mexico," 336.

²⁴⁹ Tyler, "Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest: The View from New Mexico," 327-328. Tyler discusses the importance of the Santa Fe Trail to the New Mexican treasury. Dudlo, "Martial Borderland: the Armed Incorporation of New Mexico, 1598-1912," 79. Tyler notes the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail was in 1821 when Anglo caravans began to arrive in Santa Fe. Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846," 144-148. Minge further illustrates the importance of the Santa Fe Trail to the treasury, noting that Armijo himself at one point led troops to defend caravans coming into New Mexico along the trail, and says that these caravans brought in some 19,454 pesos to the New Mexican Treasury in August of 1843.

²⁵⁰ Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846," 122 and 127

Mexico did not see a total of twelve rebellions against the government and was stable enough to successfully defend itself from an invasion from Texas in 1841.²⁵¹ Similar to California, even though New Mexico was in the “peculiar position” of being “surrounded entirely by wild Indians” and in the midst of “extreme poverty,”²⁵² its rebellion did not result in independence.

New Mexico, like California, did not secede when it challenged Mexican sovereignty in 1837. The central government was saved from this embarrassment by loyal citizens in the southern part of the territory who mounted a counter-revolution that stymied the rebellion. The central government had very little to do with suppressing the rebellion, but it greatly benefited from the fact that there were loyal citizens in this part of the northern frontier who acted on behalf of the central government, even in the absence of the central government’s ability to coerce their actions. Similar to California, as well, the initial rebellion had more to do with resisting the centralization of the Mexican state and deposing corrupt government officials, than with an outright bid for independence.²⁵³

New Mexico’s revolt in 1837 was primarily staged by the lower class Mexicans, as opposed to the elites who were ringleaders in both Texas and California.²⁵⁴ These poor citizens wanted more autonomy at the village level and were generally resentful of the current civil and military governor, Colonel Albina Perez, who they viewed as a corrupt, illegitimate

²⁵¹ Minge, “Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846,” 106. On page 107, Minge goes on to talk about how extra money was promised to New Mexico by the Central Government because of their defense of their territory, however, those funds did not regularly appear to New Mexico. New Mexico, along with California, and the Yucatan, were however, exempt from paying forced loans to help Mexico meet its debt obligations to the United States in 1843.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁵³ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 265.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

representative of the central government, or an outsider.²⁵⁵ When faced with the rebellion, Perez responded violently, and having recently disbanded the regular presidio troops because of funding issues, he raised a volunteer force to crush the rebels.²⁵⁶ His force was defeated by the rebels from the Rio Arriba, the region upriver from Santa Fe, and Perez's head ended up removed from his shoulders (figure III-3).²⁵⁷ The rebels installed a man named Jose Angel Gonzales as the governor.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 262.

²⁵⁷ Lecompte, "Manuel Armijo and the Americans," 53.

²⁵⁸ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 262-3.

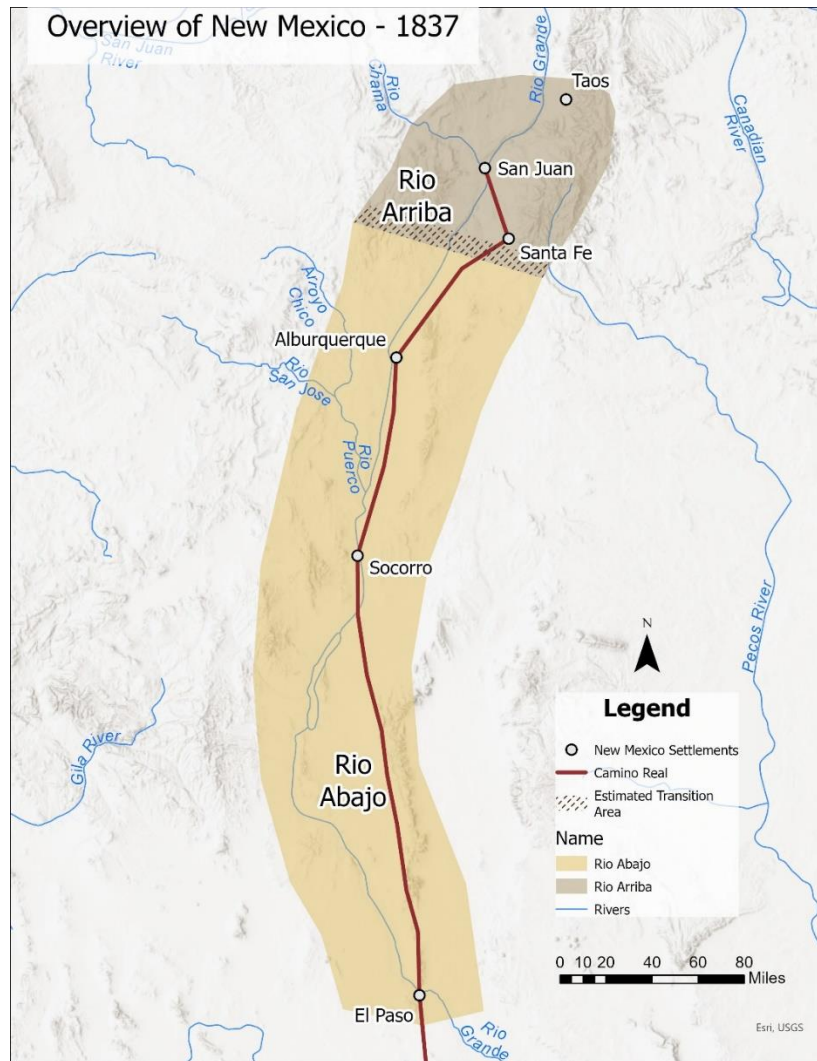


Figure III-3. Overview of New Mexico Circa 1837

This map provides an overview of New Mexico in 1837. The key features to note are the upper and lower river regions. The upper region was the site of the rebellion in 1837, and military reinforcements were led into that region from the southern, or lower, region. The settlements were largely confined to areas close to the Rio Grande Valley.

The rebels' success was short-lived, however, as a previous governor of New Mexico, Manuel Armijo, led forces from the Rio Abajo, down river from Santa Fe, against the northern rebels.²⁵⁹ The southerners counter-rebelled because they generally supported the constitution of 1836, feared what the northerners would do with the political reins of New Mexico, and were

²⁵⁹ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 263.

fearful that anarchy might break out in the province if it were led by an “Indian governor.”²⁶⁰ This group of loyal southerners were able to deliver violence that subdued all of the rebellious factions by 1838.²⁶¹ The central government was largely absent from the conflict, but did, importantly, supply some troops to help Armijo deliver violence to the rebels.²⁶² These troops were able to defeat the rebels north of Santa Fe and stop the violent challenge to the state’s sovereignty.

But the primary element of the central government’s power that prevented New Mexico’s rebellion from succeeding came from its persuasive power. Power that was broadcast through loyal southerners who marshalled resources of coercive power to defeat the rebellious northerners. The southerners, led by Armijo and supported by federal troops from Chihuahua, believed in the constitution of 1836 and were loyal to the central government even though it was virtually absent from their territory. Had the southerners chosen to rebel at this moment as well, it is unlikely the central government could have stopped New Mexico from separating from the country.

The failure of New Mexico’s revolt does not invalidate the theory of distance decay, state failure, and frontier revolt. There are three key reasons that it simply adds nuance to my argument. First, in New Mexico there were loyal individuals acting as relay stations for the state’s power in a place where the central government had little, if any, legitimacy. The state was legitimate enough in the eyes of key individuals that those individuals acted on the state’s behalf

²⁶⁰ Dudlo, “Martial borderland,” 88 and Lecompte, “Manue Armijo and the Americans,” 53.

²⁶¹ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 263-265. The mountains north of Santa Fe hid some rebels until the winter of 1838.

²⁶² Dudlo, “Martial borderland,” 88. According to Dudlo, the central government provided some troops to aid in putting down the rebellion. These troops arrived late and came from El Paso, the closest portion of the Mexican domain.

to keep New Mexico from seceding. Second, the central government was absent from New Mexico in all but name by the 1840s. This is an example of distance decay. Third, recognizing its lack of legitimacy, the Mexican central government pursued policies that made them less of a burden to the New Mexicans and kept the New Mexicans from outright pursuing secession against them.

Governor Manuel Armijo is no small part of why New Mexico stayed under Mexico's control. Even though independence was not necessarily a goal of the rebellion in 1837, political or social reform likely was, as the rebels were poor citizens from the bottom rung of New Mexico's social and economic hierarchy. Scholars observing the issue have called this rebellion class-based.²⁶³ Regardless of the rebels' intentions, the rebellion was a challenge to the central government's sovereignty that required the government to answer it by delivering violence. Among the rebellious northerners, the state had no legitimacy, and so its sovereignty was challenged. The challenge to power had to be settled on the battlefield. The government's sovereignty was tenuously proven by Armijo on the battlefield with the aid of some federal troops. Consequently, Armijo, "in gratitude and relief," was made the civil and military head of New Mexico for his actions against the rebellious group of overtaxed poor citizens.²⁶⁴ The governorship perhaps was a reward for loyalty, or a bribe to purchase future compliance with the central government's edicts.

²⁶³ Reno, "Rebellion in New Mexico – 1837," 206, 207, 210. Page 207 says that the response from Armijo, under the pronunciamiento at Tome expressed the belief that the rebellion by the poor people of the north "threatened to destroy peace and prosperity and to bring about disorder and anarchy." Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 261 for the argument that this was a class-based rebellion. Dudlo, "Martial borderland," 88 also notes that the rebellion was class-based.

²⁶⁴ Lecompte, "Manuel Armijo and the Americans," 53.

Governor Armijo provided the steady hand that the central government needed to prevent New Mexico from becoming another Texas. As illustrated by the Rebellion in 1837, there was enough resentment against government officials who were perceived as aloof or ignorant of local issues, to resort to arms. The northerners were, in part, rebelling against the imposition of new taxes by the outsider Governor Perez.²⁶⁵ Armijo, on the other hand, understood that the New Mexicans had been left out on their own by the central government since 1833 and his local knowledge helped him to govern the territory successfully. He did things like try to raise revenue to compensate private citizens for taking up arms against the Native raids, either through creating new revenue sources or by pestering the central government.²⁶⁶ “Money and defense were New Mexico’s most immediate” needs, and had been since its establishment; so Armijo made a series of land grants to wealthy foreigners who oftentimes promised financial support for the administration of New Mexico in exchange for the land.²⁶⁷ One such example was the “Sutton Grant” that was granted “in reward for considerable sums of money advanced to the local government.”²⁶⁸ He even personally paid local soldiers in the late 1830s because their paychecks were so irregular.²⁶⁹

So, policy moves like these, from a man who was perceived as a local, who was liked well enough by his people, and who acted as a patriot, helped keep New Mexico formally within the sphere of the Mexican state. Armijo helped give the Mexican state legitimacy in New

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Lecompte, “Manuel Armijo and the Americans,” 53; Tyler, “Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest: The View from New Mexico,” 335 to 336. Tyler asserts that New Mexico was responsible for financing its own affairs since 1833.

²⁶⁷ Tyler, “Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest,” 336. On page 335 of this text, Tyler asserts that New Mexico had been responsible for financing its own department since 1833.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 337.

²⁶⁹ Lecompte, “Manuel Armijo and the Americans,” 54.

Mexico, even though, functionally, New Mexico had been on its own since 1833. Despite lacking a “well-fed army,” Armijo was able to use other forms of power to help keep New Mexican citizens happy enough to prevent their challenging of the government’s sovereignty through armed rebellion again. His actions legitimized the central government in a way that enabled him to act as a repeater for the state’s economic and cultural forms of power. He helped to pay and persuade New Mexican citizens to remain part of the larger Mexican state.

While Armijo repeated the central government’s cultural and economic forms of power, distance decay largely ensured the Mexican central government’s absence from the territory of New Mexico by the 1840s. “As a result of turmoil in Mexico, the remote New Mexican Frontier had during the time since Mexican Independence generally looked after its own affairs.”²⁷⁰ New Mexicans had grown used to this reality and, as seen in their reaction to Governor Perez in 1837, they did not take well to extractive outsiders being appointed to govern them. This unwillingness to be subordinate to a perceived outsider likely derived from the fact that New Mexicans were responsible for their own defense against attacks from Native tribes, like the Apache and the Utes, who surrounded them and threatened them with invasion.²⁷¹

The central government was “unable to bolster” the “depleted” New Mexican treasury that relied almost exclusively on commerce from the Santa Fe Trail to stay afloat.²⁷² So when the central government exerted its authority through an outsider, and tried to collect illegitimate

²⁷⁰ Reno, “Rebellion in New Mexico,” 198.

²⁷¹ Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 107 notes that the Frontier departments were responsible for their own defense as of a decree made by the central government in 1836, from that point on they received little help from the central government, all military supplies and personnel were to be sourced locally; Tyler, “Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest,” 338.

²⁷² Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 121. Reséndez, “National Identity on a Shifting Border: Texas and New Mexico in the Age of Transition, 1821-1848,” 678 discusses the value of the Santa Fe trail being roughly a half million dollars in 1843.

taxes, the northerners instigated a rebellion.²⁷³ The benefits to being part of the Mexican state were few for New Mexicans; promised financial help from the central government was rarely received, and it was even more rarely promised.²⁷⁴ Overall, “routine government decrees and orders pertinent to more civilized centers in Mexico were regularly received but loosely applied in New Mexico.”²⁷⁵ The central government was largely absent. The central government assessed that New Mexico was too far away and offered too little in the way of revenue to be worth protecting using federal funds, so New Mexico was left to its own devices.

The last way in which New Mexico was able to nominally stay a part of the loose Mexican republic was because of policy actions taken at the center. As just outlined, the Mexican government formally left New Mexico to their own devices by doing things like delegating the responsibility of funding defense to the New Mexican government. This is a known policy action and is effectively devolution, or empowering lower levels of government within a governmental system. The central government recognized that it could not effectively help New Mexico, so it delegated two major responsibilities to them, collecting taxes and providing for their defense. In the case of the second responsibility, the Mexican government decided that it was too expensive to provide for the defense of its frontier provinces, and it chose not to provide this most basic government service to them.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Dudlo, “Martial Borderland,” 85-86.

²⁷⁴ Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 107.

²⁷⁵ Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 102.

²⁷⁶ Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 120 for officially giving the frontier departments charge of their own defense. 122 says that the “national treasury also lacked sufficient funds” to help New Mexico fund itself. Dudlo, “Martial Borderland,” 80-81 outlines the overall state and location of the military and says that over the first quarter century of independence “the military budget exceeded government revenues two out of every three years,” quoting Lieuwen, “Curbing Militarism.”

In denying the New Mexican government defense, the Mexican central government essentially ceded their right to tax their citizens on the frontier, likely having learned from their loss of Texas. Santa Anna, at least in the Texas context, recognized that a “system of direct taxation...might also serve as a pretext for uprisings and popular protests.”²⁷⁷ And, largely, he was right because citizens who do not receive the basic public good of government defense of their person and property are unlikely to view the government as legitimate, and are likely to negatively respond to increased burdens placed on them by that government. This rebellious tendency was seen in the 1837 rebellion, and this fundamental truth of government was likely why the Mexican government tried to avoid taxing New Mexico as much as possible. Historian Alan Minge offers us two examples of the Mexican government actively avoiding exacting taxes on New Mexico.

The first of these was a decree published in 1838 that exempted New Mexico for paying federal taxes for a period of seven years. So, New Mexico was supposed to be exempt from taxation up until the year 1845. This exemption was given in light of the fact that New Mexico had to defend itself from the predations of the Indians, and was an effort by the central government to lessen the cost of living on the frontier. The second example given by Minge occurred when the United States called in its Mexican debt in 1843. The central government forced the church and every state except California, Yucatan, and New Mexico to raise funds to pay back the money Mexico owed to its northern neighbors. Though the official reasoning, in New Mexico’s case, was that the tax exemption would help the state’s financial situation, given that each of the exempted states would, at one point or another, rebel against the central

²⁷⁷ Castañeda, “The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution,” 9.

government, and the exempted states were the furthest away from the Mexico's center of power, this action also illustrates the understanding of government officials that they *should* try and reduce the costs of living at the frontier, lest extracting resources result in a rebellion.²⁷⁸

The central government seemed to have decided that because it could not perform the primary function of a state, which is to defend its territory, and the persons and property of its citizens, it should not exact taxes. However, because New Mexico was so poorly defended, the Mexican state was unable to defend its national border when the United States seriously challenged its sovereignty there. New Mexico formally left the Mexican state in 1845 after a bloodless conquest by the American Army serving under command of General George Kearny.

“In the early 1820's, New Mexico was patriotic, optimistic toward its future as part of the new Mexican Republic...By the 1840s, Armijo's department was obviously suffering deleterious effects from twenty years of unmitigated Indian hostility, financial and military neglect by the central government, and the threat of invasion from *norteamericanos*, Texans, and Indians.”²⁷⁹

Armijo, who successfully defended the New Mexico against both Indian and Texan invasion, ultimately succumbed to the invasion of the Americans. He was patriotic enough to assemble a *volunteer* defense force in Apache Canyon on the 14th of August, 1846, to try and defend his territory from the oncoming Americans. However, likely recognizing the futility of his cause, Armijo ordered his troops to go home in an effort to save their lives. So, the Americans walked into undefended Santa Fe, “conquering” New Mexico without firing a shot or shedding a drop of blood.²⁸⁰ To the New Mexicans, as written by a New Mexican official in a

²⁷⁸ Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 105-107.

²⁷⁹ Tyler, “Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest,” 338.

²⁸⁰ Lecompte, “Manuel Armijo and the Americans,” 60.

letter to General Kearny on August 19, 1846, “the power of the Mexican Republic” was “dead.”²⁸¹

What started out with hopeful optimism in 1821 had been crushed by the realities of living in an isolated, hard to reach, mountainous area that was judged too expensive to defend.²⁸² The central government chose to leave New Mexico to its own devices in an effort to save its territorial integrity, but that decision, while it may have been necessary to immediately preserve the integrity of the state, ultimately cost the Mexican state that same integrity. Though Armijo helped the central government deliver violence to put down a rebellion in 1837, his patriotism was not strong enough to stand against the ability of the US military to deliver violence to New Mexico in 1846.

Sonora 1837-1845, A Case in the Domain

Sonora is within the present-day boundaries of Mexico and this section explains how Sonora stayed under Mexico’s control. In the cases of New Mexico and California, there were loyal individuals and internal political conflicts that kept these states part of Mexico until the United States wrested them away. In Sonora, the ultimate end to the rebellion in 1837 was brought about by the central government delivering just enough violence to stem the tides of conflict.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Minge, “Frontier Problems,” 334.

²⁸² Tyler, “Anglo-American Penetration of the Southwest,” 338.

²⁸³ Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 163-164; Voss, *On the Periphery of Nineteenth-century Mexico: Sonora and Sinaloa, 1810-1877*, 104. Voss in particular notes that Urrea left the state after finally obeying orders from the General, Francisco Duque, who had been sent by the central government to try and get Sonora to fall in line. Stevens mentions a “great military effort” being required by the central government to restore some semblance of order in the state.

The Mexican state of Sonora, is located in the Northwestern portion of the country. Its present-day northern border coincides with the international border between the United States and Mexico. The state has not always been its own entity, previously being part of the *Provincias Internas* under Spain. It was also one half of a single state, Occidente, from the time of Mexican Independence until 1831.²⁸⁴ Like the other states and territories in this chapter, Sonora rebelled against the central government during the 1830s and 1840s. Sonora, however, was close enough to the Mexican capital, and not directly on the American road to California, and so remained a part of Mexico, even in the face of US expansion.

Like its northern neighbor, California, Sonora was isolated from the central authorities in Mexico City, both during the colonial and post-independence periods. There were two major roads that connected the “populous central regions” with the western interior plateau (figure III-4). The western interior plateau road ran north to south and wound its way into the capital.²⁸⁵ The second artery went through Guadalajara, around the southern tip of the Western Sierra Madre, and then north along the coast of the Gulf of California.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier: A History of Sonora, 1821-1846,” ii-iii; Voss, *On the Periphery*, 60.

²⁸⁵ This “interior plateau road” is essentially the central branch of Mexico’s main track into the north. This branch connects Santa Fe with Mexico City.

²⁸⁶ Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 2.

States.”²⁸⁷ Moving east from the Gulf of California, one first encounters the coastal zone, followed by the Western Sierra Madre, and then the desert “Bolson” landscape.²⁸⁸

There are also numerous rivers in the area that allow for irrigation agriculture in the river valleys. The rivers Altar, Magdalena, San Miguel, Sonora, Oposura, and Bavispe supported major wheat producing areas and came to be known as the “breadbasket” of northwestern Mexico.²⁸⁹ In Sonora, there was also one major port, Guaymas, that was disadvantaged to Mazatlán because it lies well within the Gulf of California, making traveling northward to California inefficient. Mazatlán was easier to access because it did not require ships to sail up into the Gulf and then backtrack out of it before heading to their final destinations.²⁹⁰

Like Texas, California and New Mexico, Sonora was isolated and generally neglected by the central government, which was largely “ignorant” of issues there.²⁹¹ Mexico allowed Sonora to fall into disrepair by failing to stave off the ravages of the Apache Indians in the 1830s. A peace with the Apache that was funded by the payments of the Spanish crown was not funded by the newly independent and impecunious Mexican government.²⁹²

The policy that had kept the Apache at peace was similar to the one pursued by the Spanish when they advanced into the Chichimec frontier. That policy was dually underwritten by

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸⁹ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 40.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁹¹ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 48.

²⁹² Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 121-23. Voss talks about the successful presidial and governmental reforms instituted by the Spanish crown through Jose de Galvez that resulted in peace with the Apache. The peace and stability were brought about by providing rations to the Apache in exchange for the Apache settling down. LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios from Spanish to Mexican Control, 1790-1835,” 64-65 also talks about successful offensive campaigns that had been successful for the Spanish and Mexican presidios during this time period. These offensive campaigns had to be abandoned in the late 1820s, however, due to a lack of money within Sonora’s treasury.

the sharpness of the Spanish sword and the heft of the Spanish pocketbook. The Spanish were able to bribe the Apache into submission by giving rations to the Apache who agreed to settle and give up their semi-nomadic, raiding-based, lifestyle.²⁹³ These bribes were accompanied by Spanish soldiers in presidios that were meant to demonstrate the costs of taking the bribes and returning to raiding.²⁹⁴

The following quote from historian Stuart Voss' book on Sonora summarizes the Apache issue in Sonora well. Voss had just finished discussing the economic prosperity and urban growth experienced in Sonora in the 1820s. Voss argues that urban growth was allowed to happen *because* of good Spanish policy. To make that point he says,

“Royal administration, however, was now gone. Through indifference and ignorance, the new national government was unwilling to fulfill that crucial support role.”²⁹⁵

After independence, Mexico's central government stopped paying the bill for security in Sonora. Without funding, the presidios decayed and the Apache were not delivered, and hostilities resumed in the 1830s.²⁹⁶

The rebellion in 1837 was largely caused by government neglect, strife with the Apache caused by the discontinuation of the formerly successful policies, and the broader centralist/federalist divide was plaguing all of Mexico. The failing Mexican state could not afford to pay the Apache for their obedience, nor to punish Apache disobedience. So, the Apache

²⁹³ Stevens, “Mexico's Forgotten Frontier,” 121. Stevens assesses that this bribery policy was successful because the Apache were lazy, I disagree with that assessment. As raiding is indeed hard work, but most people would likely prefer to be given food rather than hunt for it. The Spanish themselves, certainly preferred having enslaved Indians or others to do their menial labor for them.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 48.

²⁹⁶ LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios,” 73 discusses the fact that the Sonorans did not continue giving the Apache rations; Stevens, “Mexico's Forgotten Frontier,” 123 talks about an Apache uprising in 1831.

frequently raided Sonora and Sonora remained an isolated, economically poorly developed, portion of the Mexican state.²⁹⁷

The Mexican state could not deliver violence to defeat the Apache because the presidios were weak and underfunded. The lack of funds for the presidios was driven by two key events. The first was Mexican independence, which stopped the Spanish crown from funding these troops.²⁹⁸ The second was the decision by the Mexican central government to make funding presidios a state expense, rather than a federal one.²⁹⁹ This official neglect continued a trend that had started in 1811 and resulted in “less and less frequent” payment of the troops.³⁰⁰

The increasingly infrequent payments resulted from the Sonoran government running a deficit. This deficit was caused by a shrinking tax base and increasing military expenses after Sonora was split from Sinaloa. The state’s income was largely dependent upon customs duties at its principal port of Guaymas.³⁰¹ The major point is that the Sonoran government did not have enough money to maintain the presidios, which led to very tangible declines in the state of the presidios in the 1820s, which allowed the Apache to resume their hostilities in the 1830s.

Those tangible declines were manifested in underfed, under clothed, and poorly equipped soldiers who were owed lots of back pay.³⁰² Additionally, “troop discipline had relaxed, the

²⁹⁷ Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 118 asserts that from the 1680s “for the next two centuries, with only an occasional respite, Apache hostility prevented Sonora from progressing beyond the status of a frontier.”

²⁹⁸ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 48.

²⁹⁹ LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios,” 53.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁰¹ LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios,” 55-57. The cost of the Sonoran presidios was a major reason why political leaders in Sinaloa wanted to split from Sonora, as the Sinaloans felt they were “no longer part of the frontier” and should not have to pay to finance Sonora’s defense which did not ostensibly benefit them. This source cites total military related expenditures at 220,000 pesos in 1835. These figures seem to be in like with Voss, *On the Periphery*, 54-55. Voss cites total state expenditures as being 158,813 pesos in 1825. Voss also mentions the deficit in these pages.

³⁰² Voss, *On the Periphery*, 49.

punctual payment of wages had been interrupted, and the shortage of minted coins had led to the use of *pagarés* and effects as substitutes.”³⁰³ These “effects” were supplies, and the *pagarés* were paper currency that was viewed as worthless by the soldiers and civilian Sonorans.³⁰⁴ Soldier morale was low.³⁰⁵

As a result of the onslaught from the Apache in the 1830s, the Sonoran government and its citizens did ask for more help from the federal government and the following quotes demonstrate the feeling of neglect the Sonoran government and citizens had. Around 1835,

“Sonora’s citizens believed that it was time for the federal government to assume responsibility for securing the state from hostile Indians. Unfortunately for Sonora, the disorganized and impoverished federal government was unable to provide that assistance and responsibility for defending the frontier would remain in the hands of the presidios for years to come.”³⁰⁶

And even before that, in 1833,

“the governor, noting on the one hand the increasing Apache horror and on the other the emptiness of the state treasury, could only issue a pitiful plea for donations from the people.”³⁰⁷

It was in this overall state of economic and military decay that General Urrea staged his federalist uprising in 1837 against the centralist governor, Manuel María Gándara.

Urrea of course viewed the government of his counterpart as illegitimate, and his stated causes for rebelling were the “repugnant laws” passed by the central government. These laws, in Urrea’s estimation, along with flaws in the constitution of 1824, led to “an inadequate army, no

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

³⁰⁴ LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios,” 58.

³⁰⁵ Morale was in such a bad state that there was a barracks revolt in 1833 because they thought their Commandant General was a very poor leader. LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios,” 64. LaValley discusses that rebellion in more detail.

³⁰⁶ LaValley, “Transition of the Sonoran Presidios,” 74.

³⁰⁷ Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 126.

wealth in the treasury, no credit, and high taxes.” Urrea believed, “in a word, no true nation existed and it was time for a remedy.”³⁰⁸ The state, in Urrea’s mind, had no powers of persuasion, payment, or to deliver pain in Sonora. So, the people, after not seeing any significant improvement under centralism, rallied behind Urrea in support of the “lesser of two evils,” federalism.³⁰⁹

To enforce his claim to power, General Urrea tried to conquer Sinaloa but was defeated by a Sonoran, General Mariano Paredes y Arrilaga, who rallied national troops to defeat Urrea. While Urrea was away trying to conquer Sinaloa, Gándara set up his own centralist government in Sonora and began the task of trying to stop Urrea’s rebellion.³¹⁰ Gándara increased his coercive power by coopting the local Yaquis, Mayos, Opatas, and Papagos to his banner and used them to tip the military balance in his favor. These recruits gave Gándara the numerical advantage on the battlefield that he needed to defeat Urrea’s federalist forces.³¹¹

The central government was largely absent from this conflict until 1838, when it ordered the Governor of Chihuahua, Simón Elías Gonzalez, to intervene on the side of the centralists. González had been neutral in the conflict prior to this point, and it was the French threat to Mexico’s sovereignty in the forthcoming Pastry War that would force him to side with the centralists.³¹² In September, the federalist strongholds of Alamos, Altar, and Hermosillo

³⁰⁸ Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 150-151.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

³¹¹ Voss, “On the Periphery,” 99-100.

³¹² Stevens, “Mexico’s Forgotten Frontier,” 157.

surrendered, and in December, the last federalist strongholds in the north were defeated personally by Gándara, temporarily ceasing hostilities.³¹³

Gándara retained control with the aid of the central government. But shifting tides in the Mexican capital caused the center to withdraw support from Gándara and open the second phase of these hostilities in 1842. Santa Anna regained control of the presidency in late 1841 and he appointed Urrea as the governor and commander general of Sonora in 1842, much to the chagrin of Gándara.³¹⁴ This decision illustrated the tenuous nature of legitimacy as well as the importance of personal politics in Mexico at the time, and it reignited hostilities into 1844.³¹⁵

The central government's call for amnesty on April 1, 1844 illustrates the "come and take it" principle. In an effort to assert itself, the central government sent Francisco Ponce de Leon to Sonora to put a stop to the conflict. "Upon arrival, he ordered a cessation of hostilities and the exile from the department of Urrea and the four Gándara brothers."³¹⁶ However, Ponce de Leon was unable to deliver violence to coerce obedience to his order and he "found himself in too weak a position to force the issue." The order was only obeyed after "another extreme military effort ordered by the center."³¹⁷

This effort led to Urrea temporarily vacating the seat of power, however he did not leave the state as ordered, attempted to regain the governorship from José María Gaxiola in June, 1844, and had to be again defeated by the newly installed commander general, General Francisco Duque. Duque and Gaxiola remained in power until they lost the support of the central

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

³¹⁴ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 101.

³¹⁵ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 162.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

³¹⁷ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 163-164. The quote from the previous sentence is located here as well.

government and Gándara rebelled again. After this change in power, turmoil seemed to have settled, but Sonora was in a poor condition as Gándara's government reinstated tenants of federalism.³¹⁸

Sonora was unable to separate from Mexico, or to obtain de facto autonomy, because the capital could deliver enough violence to keep loyalists in power. The violence was not overwhelming, since the Mexican state was unable to control the Apache; but it was sufficient to keep Sonora in the Mexican domain. As one historian put it: "centrifugal forces certainly were at work, but the pull of gravity was too strong."³¹⁹ The pull of Mexico's center of gravity, Mexico City, kept Sonora a part of Mexico. This gravity was felt because Sonora was close enough to the center that even with its coastal territory lying on the far side of the Western Sierra Madre, the state remained a part of Mexico.

Equally important is the lack of internal strength in Sonora. As described, Sonora's treasury was depleted, the state was ravaged by the constant attacks by the Apache, and political turmoil prevented economic development of the state.³²⁰ The people of Sonora had largely had their lives ruined by the political turmoil and the depredations of the Apache³²¹ and did not have enough internal strength to mount a campaign for secession.

Furthermore, Sonora was not bordered by a rival power at this time. So, Sonora, much like California and New Mexico, was too far away from the United States' center of power. Sonora was sufficiently insulated from the United States' influence that it stayed a part of

³¹⁸ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 103-105.

³¹⁹ Stevens, "Mexico's Forgotten Frontier," 154.

³²⁰ Voss, *On the Periphery*, 105. Voss says that the citizens were essentially sick of the political debate, and the hardships, or "civil strife," fighting over which style of government they would use brought, because they saw that these struggles over institutions had not changed any of the "realities holding back sustained economic growth."

³²¹ *Ibid.*

Mexico, even if the power of the Mexican state was, absolutely speaking, quite weak. As we saw in chapter 2, the boundary between the Mexican domain and sphere ran through northern Sonora or just north of Sonora.

Given its internal weakness and the fact that no other power was close enough to exert its gravity over this territory, Sonora remained a Mexican state. Mexico had failed its Sonoran citizens, but perhaps its failure strengthened the hand of the central government because it left the Sonoran people too poor, too poorly armed, and too mired by internal political division, to mount a successful revolt against the central government. So, even though the Sonorans recognized that the central government was not fulfilling its primary duty to protect their persons and property, they remained part of the Mexican state due to their proximity to the Mexican core and the lack of any outside power in proximity to Sonora.

Republic of the Rio Grande 1838-1840, Dominating the Edge of the Domain

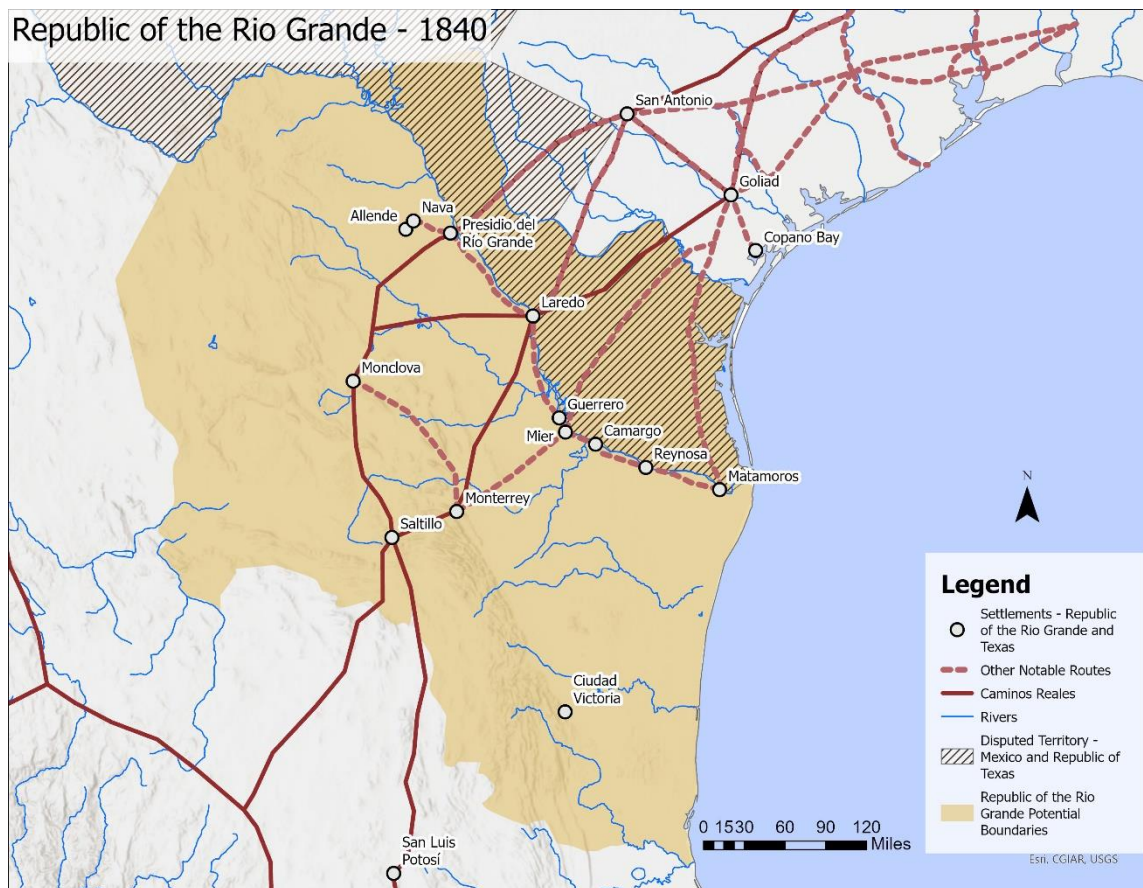


Figure III-5. Republic of the Rio Grande Circa 1840

This map gives an overview of the Republic of Rio Grande. Settlement sites were taken from Paul D. Lack's book, *Searching for the Republic of the Rio Grande*, especially for those along the Rio Grande itself. Key here is to note the disputed territory that make up the Nueces Strip and its lack of settlement.

The Republic of the Rio Grande was a short-lived attempt at secession that occurred between the years 1838 and 1840 on the Mexico/Texas frontier (figure III-5). The Republic nominally claimed the Mexican states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila, as well as the portion of Texas lying south and west of the Nueces River. The Nueces is the first major river north and east of the Rio Grande, and sovereignty in the territory between the two rivers was the

subject of debate between Mexico and Texas, as both claimed the “Trans Nueces” or “Nueces Strip.”³²²

This rebellion started when a man named Antonio Canales issued a *pronunciamento* in Guerrero, Tamaulipas on November 3, 1838, in favor of the federalist constitution of 1824.³²³ The separatist government did not officially start until January 7, 1840, when Canales and others drafted a constitution and elected officers. This effort to form a government came during a lull in combat operations, after the rebels suffered a sound defeat at the hands of Mexican General Arista outside of Monterrey late in 1839.³²⁴ This defeat foreshadowed the eventual reassertion of sovereignty by the Mexican state, however, the will of the rebels had not yet been sufficiently crushed so as to accept reintegration into the Mexican state.

Canales was formally put in charge of the rebel army, and the nascent Republic of the Rio Grande resolved to fight the central government until it had been overthrown. The Republic chose Laredo, Texas, as their capital.³²⁵ Their causes for rebellion were similar to those elsewhere in the frontier, in that they wanted “respect, protection, and security to persons and property,” all things the rebels felt the central government was not giving them.³²⁶ Native raids and banditry were major problems in the Nueces strip at this time, and neither the Mexican nor the Texan government could deliver violence to preserve peace in the region.³²⁷

³²² Vigness, “Relations of the Republic of Texas and the Republic of the Rio Grande,” 321. Texas officially remained neutral in the conflict concerning the Republic of the Rio Grande because they wanted recognition from Mexico of their independence.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 312.

³²⁴ Lack, *Searching for the Republic of the Rio Grande*, 87, 103.

³²⁵ Nance, *After San Jacinto: The Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1836-1841*, 252.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103, 190. Nance talks about Indian issues related to the Southwestern frontier of Texas or the North Eastern frontier of Mexico. On page 418, Nance mentions “lawless bands” who would steal property in Texas.

The rebel government, through Canales, opened negotiations with the Mexican General Arista, who was tasked with defeating their secessionist movement on the battlefield, and restoring some measure of order to the frontier. The aim of these negotiations was to try and end the war, however Arista believed Canales was negotiating in bad faith and did not pay the efforts much heed.³²⁸ The Rio Grande rebels hoped that formation of an independent government would inspire residents in Chihuahua and Durango to join the rebellion, but their western neighbors remained loyal to the central government, swayed by the persuasive power and “frantic appeals of Generals Arista and Reyes.”³²⁹

In March 1840, decisive military action was taken by Arista’s army in Morelos, alongside the Rio Grande. Canales was forced to surrender after some fierce fighting. Arista offered the rebel leader terms of surrender, but Canales rejected that offer and fled after his military forces were defeated. Amnesty was offered to the rebels at one point, demonstrating that “the policy of the Mexican government continued to be one of conciliation backed by a stern hand.” The “stern hand” was the 2,400 troops that Arista had positioned between the cities of Matamoros and Tampico.³³⁰

The failure of this secessionist movement just south of Texas confirms that the outer edge of the Mexican domain was in the vicinity of the Rio Grande. Texas had shown by its successful revolution that it was outside of the Mexican domain. Texas was in the sphere, where Mexican power was weak and mixed with the influence of outside sources like the United States. The Republic of the Rio Grande’s failure to create an independent state shows that “limit of control”

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 255-56.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³³⁰ Nance, *After San Jacinto*, 274-275.

of the Mexican state was somewhere around the Rio Grande River. Projecting power into the sparsely populated, desert-like Nueces Strip was difficult for the Mexican state. This line had historically been the northward limit of New Spain's area of control, as evidenced by Marquis de Rubí's line of presidios made in the 1760s.³³¹

The enduring significance of Rubí's line was demonstrated by the successful rebellion of the Republic of Texas and the failed rebellion of the Republic of the Rio Grande. This line marking the true limit of Mexican power had not moved since its demarcation in the 1760s. Texas, which had been outside of the line, was able to escape Mexico's rule, while the Republic of the Rio Grande could not. This fact illustrates the concept of distance decay. The Mexican Army was overextended in Texas because it was further from the Mexican core. It was operating within its effective range in the Republic of the Rio Grande. The Republic of the Rio Grande thus failed because it was within the domain where the Mexican state could deliver overwhelming violence.

In each of the cases outlined above, the Mexican state had little legitimacy among its citizens in these isolated and neglected territories. Failure to deliver violence for the purpose of protection was an oft-cited grievance against the central government, and this encouraged challenges to the state's sovereignty. In the sphere north of Rubí's presidio line, the Mexican state was unable to deliver overwhelming violence, so Texas won independence, and New Mexico and California won de facto autonomy. In the domain south of Rubí's presidio line, the Mexican state proved its sovereignty by delivering overwhelming violence and suppressing the

³³¹ Stevens, "Mexico's Forgotten Frontier," vi.

rebellions in the Republic of the Rio Grande and Sonora. A deeper investigation of the successful Texas challenge to sovereignty will be the subject of the next two chapters.

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CHAPTER IV

GEOGRAPHIC ORIGINS OF MEXICAN DISINTEGRATION

“The Chinese Administrators who were sent in to govern India stayed surprisingly free of corruption and they worked hard – but the fact is that no nation is governable except by overwhelming force or complete cooperation. And since there was no way conquering Chinese officials would get complete cooperation, and there was no hope of being able to pay for overwhelming force, the only question was when the resistance would become a problem.” – Orson Scott Card, *Shadow Puppets*, 303.

This quote from Orson Scott Card’s novel, *Shadow Puppets*, illustrates an important theme of this dissertation. People are not governable except by “overwhelming force or complete cooperation.” States typically seek to gain the cooperation of their subjects by engendering legitimacy in the minds of citizens or subjects in the territory they aim to govern. To engender legitimacy a state normally distributes public goods, the most basic of which is security of persons and property. In return for these goods, the population voluntarily obeys the commands of the state. However, a state may fail to provide public goods, and in such a case may be faced with legitimacy failure. When a state’s legitimacy fails, a growing number of its citizens or subjects will *not* voluntarily comply with the orders of the state, thus requiring the state to coerce obedience with the threat or application of overwhelming violence.

In Texas, the Hispano-Mexican state failed to engender legitimacy, and therefore failed to gain the voluntary cooperation of the Texians and Tejanos. Nor could either state project the overwhelming force that was necessary to prove their claim to sovereignty in spite of their legitimacy failures. Disobedience, resistance and rebellion thus became a problem in Texas. The problem asserted itself decisively in 1836, when the Texian rebels defeated Santa Anna’s army at San Jacinto and established the independent Republic of Texas. However, this catastrophic

failure of the Mexican state was rooted in much older patterns of human and physical geography.

In order to understand the Mexican state's failure in Texas, one must first understand why a state expands. A state expands in response to three basic stimuli: pressure, contact, and resource reward.³³² Spain's first northward salient of expansion in Mexico was a response to the stimulus of resource reward. Silver pulled the Spanish out of the Valley of Mexico into the *Gran Chichimeca*, and this salient, which Sauer called the "Trail of Silver," eventually extended north to Santa Fe.³³³ The other two northern salients, in California and Texas, resulted from geopolitical pressure. The Spanish colonial state attempted to expand into Texas in response to French pressure from Louisiana, while Russian pressure stimulated expansion into California. The resource stimulus was negligible for the Spanish east of the Rio Grande, which is why they surrendered the Louisiana territory without a fight.³³⁴

The Spanish state expanded east into Texas because of geopolitical pressure, while the French, British, and American states expanded westward because of resource reward. Animal pelts stimulated the French to expand along the Gulf and Red River. Land suited to cotton cultivation was the primary attraction for Americans.³³⁵

This chapter seeks to explain the stimuli that caused the growth and contraction of the Spanish state's salient in Texas. It begins by outlining Texas's physical geography and the

³³² D.W. Meinig used these terms in his lectures and the concepts they denote are essential to his books. Meinig was obviously inspired by the work of Carl Sauer, and more distantly by the work of Frederick Ratzel.

³³³ Sauer, "Personality of Mexico," 362

³³⁴ This selectivity in valuing resources illustrates a principle known to human-environment geographers, that the value of resources are constructed by human societies according to their internal cultural and technological systems. The Spanish did not value animal pelts the same way that they valued silver. So, the Spanish attached less value to the territories east of what would become Texas, primarily viewing them as a buffer for their silver mines. Huber, "Resource geography II: What makes resources political?" 1. Huber quotes another author saying, "natural resources are not naturally resources."

³³⁵ Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*, 9 and 13.

distribution of native populations within the state. This chapter then explains how the geopolitical pressure on Texas changed over time. French pressure challenged Spanish sovereignty and stimulated an expansion salient in the late 1600s. That pressure was removed when Spain acquired French Louisiana in 1762, and this allowed Spain to withdraw from east Texas. Spain again extended into east Texas when the United States acquired Louisiana, and external pressure resumed. Conflicts connected to Mexican independence and the incipient Texas rebellion in the sphere form the last sections of this chapter. The chapter closes by setting the stage for the successful challenge to power that would come to be known as the Texas Revolution.

Texas from 1600-1690, Absence of European Pressure

The native population of Texas was a very diverse mix of peoples. There were sedentary agricultural groups like the Caddo who lived in the pine woods of east Texas. The nomadic Apache and Comanche that dominated the Llano Estacado and the Edwards Plateau, and there were hunter-gathering tribes that lived in the coastal plains and along the post oak belt to the south and east of these two geologic features.

These native tribes were relatively well-connected with those around them, with evidence that some native groups had wide-ranging interactions that spanned from northeastern Mexico around the Rio Grande to the Caddo villages in east Texas.³³⁶ These interactions created patterns of movement that would eventually be followed by the colonizing Spanish when they extended their empire into Texas. Native trails ran from the northeast to the southwest on the coastal plain, passing through the bottleneck formed by the convex bulges of the Edwards Plateau and Gulf of

³³⁶ Foster, *Historic Native Peoples of Texas*, 73.

Mexico. The former was Apache and Comanche territory; the latter was impassible to the natives. The Camino Real (a set of roughly parallel roads) later followed this same line.³³⁷

Though there was a large amount of diversity among the native groups in Texas, for the purposes of this discussion as it relates to the expansion of the Spanish colonial state, there are three major divisions (figure IV-1). These divisions broadly conform to the major physical divisions of Texas. The Spanish colonial state was able to expand into only two of these regions, while it was largely kept out of the third.

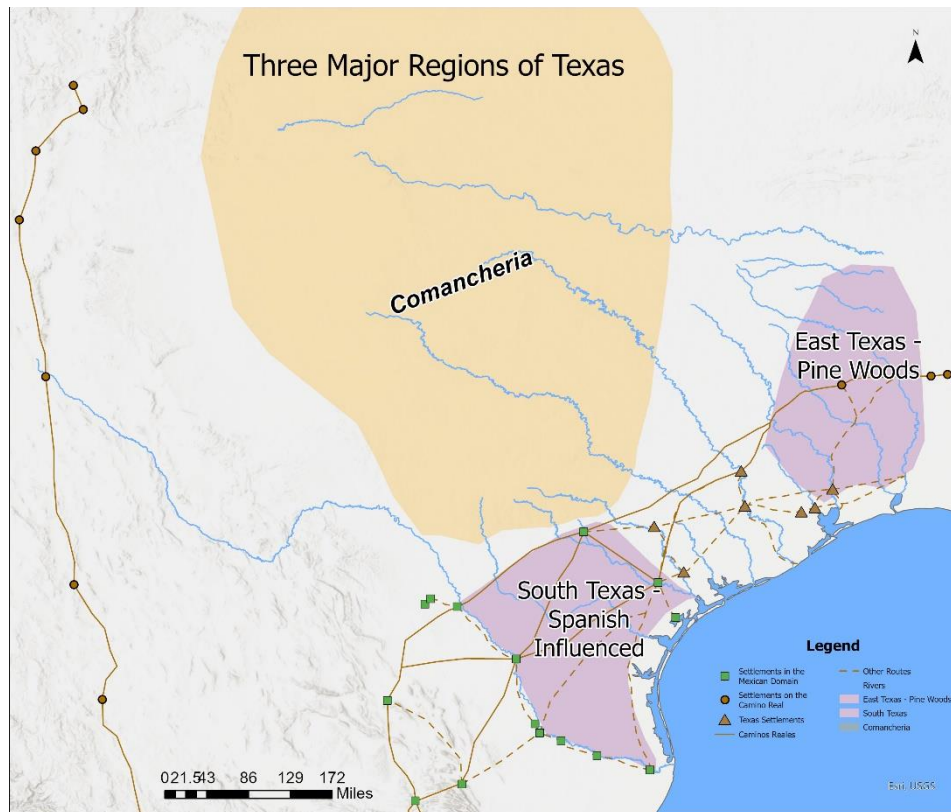


Figure IV-1. Three Major Regions of Texas

This map shows the “three major regions of Texas.” The Spanish and Mexican governments were strongest in the areas immediately surrounding “South Texas.” Their influence began to run out shortly east of San Antonio as the geography changes and one travels into the Post Oak Belt. Spanish and Mexican influence was all but absent from

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

the Pine Woods of east Texas. The Comanche stronghold, Comancheria, was located to the north, on the Edwards Plateau.

The first region is the semi-arid coastal plain. This is bounded on the south by the edge of the Spanish domain on the Rio Grande, on the southeast by the coastal marshes and prairies, and on the east by the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers.³³⁸ Its northern boundary is a line that begins roughly where the Pecos River meets the Rio Grande, follows Balcones Escarpment (the convex bulge of the Edwards Plateau) to the Colorado River near present-day Austin, and then runs northeast along the boundary between the Post Oak Belt and Blackland Prairie to the Trinity River east of Corsicana.³³⁹

The tribes in this region were much weaker than the plains Indians to the north and the woodland Indians to the east. This area's most formidable residents were likely the Karankawa who lived along the Texas coast, sustained by the resources of Matagorda, Copano, and Corpus Christi Bays.³⁴⁰ There were some agricultural tribes in the Rio Grande floodplains, but otherwise little if any farming west of the Trinity. The tribes of the Post Oak belt were little more than wandering bands.³⁴¹ The northern limit of these tribes was the southern limits of the Apache and other plains Indians. This ethnographic boundary coincided with the natural boundary between the Post Oak Belt and Blackland Prairie.

These weak tribes were preserved by the Post Oak Belt because the mounted plains

³³⁸ The Texas Almanac, "Texas Plant Life."

³³⁹ These boundaries are identified by Foster, *Historic Native Peoples of Texas*, based on the boundaries of his study areas of native populations in Texas. The study areas defined by Foster that fit into this area are found on pages 82, 106, 48, and 18.

³⁴⁰ Foster, *Historic Native Peoples of Texas*, 83.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19 and 48.

Indians lost much of their military advantage in the “timbers.”³⁴² Because of this natural haven, the tribes of the coastal plain were not destroyed by the Apache, who remained in the Hill Country northwest of San Antonio, or by Blackland Prairie tribes like the Waco and Tehuacana.³⁴³ The Camino Real later ran through the Post Oak Belt to skirt the territory of the stronger northern tribes.

The next step “up,” moving inland from the coastal plain, is marked by the Balcones Escarpment. This convex bulge is the eroded edge of the Edwards Plateau, or what is nowadays called the Hill Country. This was the eastern end of Apacheria, a broad belt of hostile territory that ran west into Arizona and Sonora. It was later the southern end of Comancheria, a belt that was also broad and hostile, but that ran north to the Red River and the high plains of the Llano Estacado.³⁴⁴ The importance of this area is that Spain did not and could not control it. When Spain attempted to establish a foothold on the Edwards Plateau, on the San Saba River, it was expelled. Spain was likewise expelled when it attempted to establish a foothold at the edge of the Blackland Prairie, on the San Xavier (today’s San Gabriel) River.

This impenetrable region formed a wedge that separated Spain’s New Mexico territory from its colonizing efforts in Texas. More importantly, this region provided a refuge from which marauding parties could descend on the feeble Spanish and Mexican settlements, demonstrating the impotence of those states and very seriously undermining their legitimacy.

The third great natural and ethnographic division was east Texas. This area was

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 49. Foster notes that the Apache started to move southeast of the Post Oak line by the 1700s after having stayed in the Hill Country for most of the period between 1500 and 1700.

³⁴⁴ Foster, *Historic Native Peoples of Texas*, 168.

distinguished by pine woods similar to those in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast Plain east of the Mississippi River. Its western border in Texas follows the line of the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers to near present-day Corsicana, and then runs north-northeast to Red River.³⁴⁵

Rainfall in east Texas was sufficed to permit native agriculture. Thus, Caddoan tribes like the Hasinai (or so-called “Texas”) Indians were settled in villages and organized into a defensive confederacy. This and the woodland setting allowed the Caddoan Indians of East Texas to almost entirely exclude the Apache and Comanche.³⁴⁶

Of all the native regions in Texas, East Texas was easiest to access from the east because it was penetrated on the east by the Red River. Thus, whatever power controlled the Mississippi River controlled the natural route to the Indian villages of east Texas. The long Spanish Road over the Coastal Plain from the Rio Grande was, by comparison, a study in the friction of distance.

The Spanish Road was rendered additionally difficult by the orthogonal direction of all the major rivers on the Coastal Plain. The rivers cut across this territory, flowing from headwaters in the higher, northwestern parts of the state towards the Gulf of Mexico and the lower, southeastern portions of the state. These rivers had a limited number of convenient crossings, as can be seen in the similarity in paths taken by early European explorers of Texas, some of whom were following native guides.³⁴⁷

The rivers east of the Caddo villages therefore facilitated movement by lowering the

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁴⁷ Foster, *Historic Native Peoples*, 108 notes this is especially true on the Rio Grande; Bridges and De Ville, “Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande,” 258. These authors cite first-hand traveler evidence of hard-bottomed river crossings between Natchitoches and the Rio Grande.

friction of distance. The rivers west of the Caddo villages had the opposite effect. From the Rio Grande to the Trinity they acted as obstacles that impeded movement and raised the friction of distance.

These great divisions are important to the story of the expansion and decline of the Spanish and Mexican states because they are the geographic foundation of the story of the Spanish and Mexican state failure in Texas. Neither state was able to conquer or control the great wedge of Apacheria and Comancheria, or to engender legitimacy in the frontier settlements that were subject to marauding raids from this vast refuge.

The Coastal Plains was closer to the Spanish domain, but it did not invite colonization or civilization. It was a semi-desert in the south and its wandering bands were too small and footloose to support robust missions. With the significant exception of the settlements at San Antonio and La Bahia, the Coastal Plain mainly served to lengthen the lonely road to the edge of the sphere.³⁴⁸

This gap was significant because it meant the east Texas Piney Woods were more readily connected with Louisiana than they were with the Spanish domain. Stephen F. Austin eventually settled his colony in that gap, and by doing so reinforced the economic, cultural and immigration links to the east. Because of shorter, more efficient connections to Louisiana and points east, it became ever more difficult for the Spanish and Mexican states to enforce sovereignty east of the Colorado River. The distance was great, the friction was high, the inconvenience of orthogonal rivers was now compounded by cultural “distance” and barriers.

The Piney Woods of east Texas offered an anchoring point because the Caddo tribes were

³⁴⁸ Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 18. Torget also notes this gap.

an organized, sedentary society in which the Spanish mission system might hope to enjoy some success. But the Spanish missions in East Texas never prospered because they were too far away from the domain, too highly affected by the distance decay principle, and too easily seduced by their French neighbors on the Red River.³⁴⁹

The First Stimulus of Pressure: Spanish Texas 1690 to 1713

The Spanish settlement pattern in Texas was determined by the complimentary aims of Christianizing the native population and keeping out the French. Spain ignored Texas until 1690 because it was remote from the Spanish center of power and it was not stimulated by pressure, contact, or any obvious promise of resource reward. However, this period of neglect ended when the French explorer René-Rebert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, descended the Mississippi from Canada, and later came ashore and camped on Matagorda Bay. With the vast Mississippi basin now claimed by France under the name of Louisiana, and with a French interloper squatting just outside the gates of New Spain, Spain was at last stimulated to expand into Texas.

The threat to Spain was real.

As historian Donald Chipman notes, La Salle saw geopolitical as well as economic value in the Louisiana territory because it provided a French foothold on the Gulf and interrupted Spanish territorial claims between Florida and present-day Tampico.³⁵⁰ La Salle exposed Spain's hold on Texas as a cartographic fiction by establishing a "colony" on Matagorda Bay in 1685.³⁵¹ Chipman said of La Salle entering the Gulf of Mexico, that he was in "a forbidden sea from

³⁴⁹ Smith, "A Native Response to the Transfer of Louisiana: The Red River Caddos and Spain, 1762-1803," 164.

³⁵⁰ Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, 72-73.

³⁵¹ La Salle intended to plant his colony at the mouth of the Mississippi, landed at Matagorda Bay by mistake, and attempted to move his misplaced colonists to the original location. Although the Matagorda site was more of a bivouac than a colony, the Spanish were right to perceive it as a harbinger of greater threats to come.

which all foreigners were excluded by royal Spanish decree.”³⁵² But instead of meeting a fierce fleet of Spanish ships determined to enforce this grandiose claim, La Salle snuck into Spanish waters unnoticed and landed on Spanish territory unmolested.

While initially unaware of La Salle’s advance into its territory, Spain did not react favorably when it learned of the explorer’s activities. Recognizing the threat that La Salle’s colony posed to Spanish sovereignty, the viceroy of New Spain quickly dispatched naval assets, later followed by overland expeditions, to quash this colonization attempt.³⁵³ La Salle’s “colony” had disappeared by the time a Spanish expedition located its remains in 1689. The “colony’s” disappearance is mostly owed to starvation, disease and Indian massacre rather than Spanish violence. A small French party escaped overland to Illinois, possibly following one line of the future *camino real*.

These early movements by the French and Spanish revealed the natural lines of access to Texas: west along the Gulf coast, north along the Gulf coast, overland from Mexico by way of Monterrey, and overland from the Mississippi Valley by way of the Red River.

The Texas coast is difficult to navigate, as is evident from the fact that La Salle lost both of his ships in Matagorda Bay.³⁵⁴ The greatest hazards are the bars that naturally form at the mouths of the rivers and bays, many of these bars lurking as little as four feet below the water’s surface. The natural lines of access by way of the Gulf were consequently largely neglected for more than one hundred years, until the early nineteenth century, when pirates, filibusters,

³⁵² Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 75.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁵⁴ Shuler, “The Influence of the Shoreline,” 24; Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 77, the vessel *Aimable* ran aground when entering Matagorda Bay, and *La Belle* was lost during a storm later.

revolutionaries, and at last American colonists, moved east from New Orleans to Galveston Island and the mouth of the Brazos.

In the seventeenth century access to Texas was primarily overland along lines that ran southwest to northeast across the coastal plain. La Salle attempted to escape to Illinois along one of these lines in 1687. He was murdered but members of his party brought news of the route back to France, and thirty years later a second Frenchman, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, followed the same general route southwest from Red River into Mexico. In 1689 the Spanish Governor Alonso De Leon followed roughly the same line northeast, from the Rio Grande to the villages of the Hasinai (“Texas”) Indians on the upper Neches.

La Salle’s intrusion stimulated Spanish efforts to secure the northeastern end of this overland route by establishing missions among the settled Caddoan Indians in east Texas.³⁵⁵ This began with Alonso de León in 1690 and Domingo Terán in 1691.³⁵⁶ Aside from the genuinely religious motivation of the Spanish fathers, the purpose of these missions was to *persuade* the Hasinai that they were indebted to the Spanish authorities in far-away Mexico City. But the distance from Mexico City to the Hasinai towns was too great for Spain to consistently supply a sufficient number of fathers and soldiers (bodyguards), so the state-building effect of Spain’s east Texas missions was much less than had been hoped.³⁵⁷

Louis Juchereau de St. Denis established a French trading post at Natchitoches, on the Red River, in 1713. The French government subsequently ordered him to open up an overland trade route (more precisely a smuggling route) from Natchitoches southwest to the Spanish

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

³⁵⁷ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 88.

domain beyond the Rio Grande. This action demonstrates Ratzel's theory that state expansion is often preceded by commercial agents.³⁵⁸ St. Denis followed these orders and crossed over the watershed between the Red and Sabine Rivers into the "forbidden land" (actually cartographic territory) of New Spain.³⁵⁹

Just like La Salle's entry into the Gulf of Mexico, St. Denis was met with silence instead of bayonets.³⁶⁰ St. Denis travelled southwest to San Juan Bautista (modern Guerrero), a Spanish settlement on the south bank of the Rio Grande, where he was arrested by Spanish authorities. The location of his arrest is significant because St. Denis penetrated five hundred miles beyond the cartographic boundary of New Spain before any Spanish official noticed or had the power to stop him.

Previous to the encroachments of La Salle and St. Denis, Spain was assumed that the Continental Buffer was sufficient to protect the Spanish silver mines. But after Spain caught St. Denis in their territory, serious doubt regarding the safety of the mines crept into Spanish policy. So, Spain moved to defend its border and began to organize a salient of expansion into Texas.

Responding to Pressure, Origins of Texas' Population Centers 1713-1763

Spain's efforts to colonize East Texas were almost exclusively a response to the stimulus of French pressure.³⁶¹ In addition to many ephemeral missions, Spain established three settlements along an expansion salient extending northeast from its domain boundary on the Rio

³⁵⁸ Ratzel, "The Territorial Growth of States," 354-358.

³⁵⁹ French Louisiana embraced the Mississippi drainage basin, so its boundaries were watersheds and not rivers. Spain actually placed its forward capital of Los Adaes a short distance east of the watershed, on a tributary of Red River, in 1729. In 1822 the Americans placed their frontier outpost of Fort Jessup directly on the watershed.

³⁶⁰ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 103-105.

³⁶¹ Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," 423; McCorkle Jr., "Los Adaes: Outpost of New Spain," 113-114.

Grande. The first of these three more permanent efforts at colonization was San Antonio, established in 1718 and the future hub of Spanish and Mexican activity in Texas. San Antonio was placed on the first reliable river north of the Rio Grande and shared with that river its name. The San Antonio River is reliable because it rises from springs in the Balcones escarpment, a short distance north of the town, but its location on the Balcones escarpment placed San Antonio dangerously close to the Edwards Plateau, Apacheria, and later Comancheria.³⁶² Spain tried to pacify the plateau and shield San Antonio with a mission and presidio at San Sabá, but Spain was incapable of subduing resolute adversaries at that distance.³⁶³

The second settlement, established by the Aguayo expedition in 1721, was located at a site not far from La Salle's doomed colony alongside Matagorda Bay. The Spanish called this settlement La Bahia, or the bay, for short. This settlement was first placed on the coast because it was thought it would help the Spanish check a second encroachment from the Gulf of Mexico and serve as a port from which to supply Spanish Texas.³⁶⁴ But there was no second encroachment and there were few if any seaborne supplies. Neglect of the coasting trade, hostile Karankawa Indians, and a less than desirable geographic situation, caused the Spanish to move La Bahia several times before settling on an inland site overlooking the San Antonio River, one hundred miles below San Antonio, in 1749.³⁶⁵

There were some Spanish ranches along the San Antonio River between San Antonio and La Bahia, and even an intermittent stockade on Cibola Creek (near present day Cestohowa), so

³⁶² The proximate threat were the Apache at this particular time. The Comanche slowly replaced them as they were pushed westward by the expanding United States. See source listed below.

³⁶³ Weddle, *The San Sabá Mission: Spanish Pivot in Texas*, 12-29 and 183.

³⁶⁴ Bridges and De Ville, "Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande," 253-54.

³⁶⁵ Jackson, *Imaginary Kingdom: Texas as Seen by the Rivera and Rubí Military Expeditions, 1727 and 1767*, 141.

this hundred-mile stretch of the San Antonio River valley should be conceived as the San Antonio River Enclave. The actual territory of Spanish Texas was very largely confined to this detached and tenuous fragment of the Spanish domain.

The third settlement, also established by the Aguayo expedition, was at Los Adaes on the border with French Louisiana in far east Texas. As stated earlier, Los Adeas was located near the watershed between the Sabine and Red Rivers and was what the geographer Vaughn Cornish calls a “forward capital.”³⁶⁶ When a state is primarily concerned with the administration of domestic affairs, the most convenient site for its capital is at a crossroads near the center of the state’s territory. When it is primarily concerned with administering foreign relations, as with a hostile, advancing or retreating neighbor, the most convenient site for its capital is at a “forward” position near the strategic frontier. The deep meaning of the location of Los Adaes, capital of Texas from 1729 to 1772, is that Texas had no domestic affairs to speak of, and that Spain’s primary purpose in Texas was to check encroachment by France.³⁶⁷

Los Adaes was not a population center. It was a remote, backwoods settlement that scraped by and was neglected by the imperial core in Mexico City. The small number of Spanish officers and soldiers stationed in Los Adaes traded illegally with the neighboring French, who had vastly superior connections to the Gulf by way of Red River.³⁶⁸ In 1723 a Frenchman in Natchitoches wrote that the Spanish had to trade with the French because they otherwise would

³⁶⁶ The concept of a “forward capital” was first applied to the northern frontier of New Spain in Spate, *Monopolists and Freebooters*, 297. The concept was first proposed in Cornish, *The Great Capitals*. It is developed in Spate, “Capital Cities,” 624.

³⁶⁷ There was a Spanish mission at Los Adaes from 1717 to 1719, and then a second mission and presidio after 1721. Los Adaes was capital of the state of Texas from 1729 to 1772.

³⁶⁸ Galán, *Los Adaes the First Capital of Spanish Texas*, 7.

have starved.³⁶⁹ In 1767 another Frenchman named Pierre Marie François de Pagés passed through Las Adaes on his way to Mexico. Here is Pagés' description of Spain's frontier capital.

“The settlement of Adaés consists of about forty miserable houses, constructed with stakes driven into the ground. It is situated on the declivity of a hill, the top of which, formed into a square, and inclosed with palisades, such as I saw at Natchitoches, served as a kind of fortress to the village. These forts or redoubts, in the language of the country are named presidio. The houses are scattered about the west side of the fort; and a little valley lying in the same quarter separates the village from a considerable eminence, on which stands a church and convent of Franciscans. A few straggling trees, and a heath overgrown with briars and thickets, and bounded everywhere by the woods, compose the cheerless prospect of the inhabitants.”³⁷⁰

Another important item to note is the distribution of Spanish military assets in Texas. The Spanish had approximately one hundred troops stationed at Los Adaes to enforce the border. But there were only eight troops, split evenly between two missions at present-day Nacogdoches and San Augustine, one hundred miles to the rear of Los Adaes.³⁷¹ The Spanish wanted to present a strong front to the French, but there were few reinforcements west of Los Adaes. Los Adaes was the tip of the Spanish spear defending East Texas, but the shaft of that spear was made from rotting wood.

The shaft of the spear ran southwest over the coastal plain through San Antonio to the distant settlements on the Rio Grande. As we have seen, the initial plan to supply Los Adaes

³⁶⁹ Bridges and DeVile, “Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande,” 256.

³⁷⁰ Pagés, *Travels*, 40-41.

³⁷¹ Hackett, “Aguayo Expedition.” Nacogdoches was not permanently settled until the 1770s, but there was a mission established in the area of the future town by Aguayo's expedition. See also Blake, “Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe de los Nacogdoches Mission,” entry on the Texas State Historical Association website and Bridges and De Ville, “Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande: Two Early Eighteenth-Century Accounts by the Sieur Derbanne,” 257.

through La Bahia failed.³⁷² By favoring the overland route, Spain artificially enhanced the isolation of Texas. Supplying Texas by way of the Gulf of Mexico and La Bahia would have reduced the friction of distance and strengthened Spanish control over Texas. Supplying Texas overland increased the friction of distance and raised the price of Spanish goods. Anticipating the hardships and dangers of the long road from Los Adaes to San Antonio and the Rio Grande,

Pagés wrote:

“The road from hence to Mexico [City], it is a journey of no less than five hundred and fifty leagues; and to the second Spanish settlement [on the Rio Grande] two hundred and fifty, by a way difficult to be found, and across rivers many of which are extremely dangerous in their passage. I was assured, that though at times a small party of two or three savages will undertake and accomplish this expedition, yet, with the incumbrance of baggage, it would be deemed highly imprudent to attempt it with fewer than ten or twelve persons in company.”³⁷³

The extraordinarily high cost of legal trade with Mexico encouraged illegal trade with French Louisiana. This smuggling was condoned and even supported by the Governors of Texas.³⁷⁴ The routine flouting of Spanish law made the tenuity of Spanish sovereignty evident to all.

Although not as remote and isolated as Los Adaes, the Spanish settlements around San Pedro Springs and the San Antonio River were detached from the main body of New Spain by the desolate interval of the Mustang Desert. As we have seen, these settlements at the head of the San Antonio River were part of a San Antonio River Enclave that stretched one hundred miles south to La Bahia. When he reached the Presidio San Antonio and adjacent “San Pedro villages,”

³⁷² Galán, *Los Adaes*, 59 notes the isolation and “miserable” conditions that the citizens at Los Adaes lived in, and on 65, reiterates the importance of trade with the French to the community there. It seems that Natchitoches was more important to maintaining Los Adaes than were any supplies from Mexico City.

³⁷³ Pagés, *Travels*, 45.

³⁷⁴ Gregory et. al, “Presidio Los Adaes: Spanish, French, and Caddoan Interaction on the Northern Frontier,” 68; Galán, *Los Adaes*, 58-59 for the presence of illegal trade as well as some limited legal trade in corn and beans. Page 11 outlines governor involvement in smuggling networks.

Pagés description makes clear he had entered an enclave. Describing the next leg of the journey to Mexico City Pagés wrote.

“But that vast country situated on this side of the San Pedro villages, and which stretches all the way to Rio Grande, is totally destitute of inhabitants. It is true, those regions are still frequented by savages; but they have no other object in view than to make war upon the Spaniards, to drive off their cattle, to hunt the buffalo, and to gather plaquemines [persimmons] and chestnuts, with which they retire to their villages in the north.”³⁷⁵

Although the Mustang Desert was Spanish territory on the maps, it was actually a *terra nullius*, which is to say a “debatable land” that anyone could enter at risk of his life. Pagés remarked on the change once he had crossed this debatable land and been ferried over the Rio Grande into the main body of the Spanish domain.

“From the Rio Grande, which we crossed in a ferry boat, the country becomes much more populous . . . The country in some places was well cultivated, and presented to the view of the traveler extensive fields of Indian corn . . .”³⁷⁶

Like the detached enclave of Spanish settlements around Santa Fe on the upper Rio Grande, the San Pedro villages around the Presidio San Antonio developed a unique Tejano identity and culture, along with corresponding sense of independence. Like the Spanish in Los Adaes, the Tejanos around the San Antonio River would frequently trade illegally with French Louisiana, driving cattle east to Natchitoches and New Orleans.³⁷⁷

Pressure Relieved: Evacuation from East Texas – 1763 to 1803

The stimulus of French pressure was removed from Spanish Texas by the Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762. Having just lost French Canada to Britain in the French and Indian War,

³⁷⁵ Pagés, *Travels*, 69.

³⁷⁶ Pagés, *Travels*, 115.

³⁷⁷ Poyo, “Community and Autonomy,” 11; Matovina, “Shifting Regional Identity: The Mexican Period, 1821-1836,” 8. The latter citation reflects the enduring nature of legal and illegal trade with Louisiana.

but not yet having signed the treaty ending the wider Seven Years War, the French King Louis XV ceded Louisiana to Spain to prevent it falling into the hands of Britain. This was also said to square Spain, which had fought with France, for its loss of Florida.³⁷⁸ One year later, in the Treaty of Paris, Britain agreed to divide French Louisiana with Spain along the Mississippi River.

The Treaty of Fontainebleau moved the international boundary two hundred miles east and gave Spain control of all the trade through New Orleans. This fundamentally altered the geopolitical context of Texas.³⁷⁹ Suddenly Spain did not have to worry about a hostile European power threatening Texas or the more valuable lands that lay behind it. Though Spain now shared a border with Great Britain, and the Ohio, Cumberland and Tennessee were now British rivers, there were yet no British settlements west of the Appalachians. Thus, the Treaty of Fontainebleau temporarily restored the old Continental Buffer.

The Spanish king, Carlos III, therefore ordered an inspection of the northern frontier of New Spain in an effort to run that colony more efficiently. As mentioned previously, this inspection by the Marqués de Rubí resulted in Spain drawing a presidio line across the North American continent at its narrowest point north of the silver mines (from the northwest corner of the Gulf of Mexico to the head of Baja California). Rubí's presidio line officially marked the northern limit of the Spanish domain in North America, omitting almost all of Texas. In the east, Rubí's presidio line ended at Presidio La Bahía, one hundred miles below San Antonio, and left

³⁷⁸ Lemmon, "The Archival Legacy of Spanish Louisiana's Colonial Records," 142-143.

³⁷⁹ The secret nature of this treaty is especially important to note here because Spain benefited from its terms by acquiring Louisiana. However, Spanish descendants in Mexico in 1836 would vehemently deny the veracity of the secretive treaty of Velasco in large part because it was "secret." Galán, *Los Adaes*, 192; Weber, "Conflicts and Accommodations: Hispanic and Anglo-American Borders in Historical Perspective, 1670-1853," 4.

San Antonio as an isolated outpost in a sea of hostile Indians.³⁸⁰

Speaking of the geographic changes that resulted from Rubi's inspection of the frontier, one author says, "Rubi's inspection resulted in an absolute abandonment of the East Texas region."³⁸¹ Although the change was delayed by ten years, Rubi's inspection led to abandonment of Los Adaes and removal of the Texas capital to San Antonio in 1772. This change conforms to Cornish's theory of capital location, since Texas was no longer required a forward capital on the border with New France. Located where the road from Mexico crossed the San Antonio River, the central artery of the San Antonio River Enclave, San Antonio was much better suited to administration of domestic affairs.³⁸²

Although the Treaty of Fontainebleau greatly enlarged the cartographic territory of New Spain by adding the western half of the Mississippi drainage basin, the removal of French pressure allowed Spain to withdraw to a more rational and restricted line of defense. As we have seen, the northern limit of the domain of New Spain was now clearly marked by Rubí's presidio line. In the new defensive system, the outpost of San Antonio was a forward capital placed opposite the new stimulus of pressure from Comancheria.³⁸³ In a letter written to the Commandant General of the *Provincias Internas* or frontier provinces, the Texas Governor Baron de Ripperda explained,

"This province at present recognizes no other enemies than the numerous and warlike Comanche nation . . . They live toward the north, inclining a little to the northwest, but rove from the upper part of New Mexico and some of them from even farther, to within a hundred odd leagues from here. These bands are seldom

³⁸⁰ Jackson and Foster, *Imaginary Kingdom: Texas as Seen by the Rivera and Rubí Military Expeditions, 1727 and 1767*, 209.

³⁸¹ Jackson and Foster, *Imaginary Kingdom*, 209.

³⁸² Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 225.

³⁸³ Jackson and Foster, *Imaginary Kingdom*, 210-214.

wanting in this neighborhood, being favored by the nearby range of hills [i.e. the Hill Country or Balcones Escarpment] in the same direction, and by the dense forests which on all sides surround this presidio.”

Ripperda was of course writing from San Antonio. In the same letter he mentions the stimulus of pressure from Apacheria, which stretched west from San Antonio and pressed against “the presidios of the line.”

“The Apaches . . . cause much damage, especially in the stock, and, as they live near to the presidios of the line, extract numerous rebranded horses which they steal; and although they always profess friendship, they come in ever increasing numbers, and, according to observation, mixed with those who openly molest the said line every day more insolently.”³⁸⁴

Rubí’s New Regulations for Presidios made clear that Spain had “spread itself too thin on the vast frontier.” Under Rubí’s New Regulations, “consolidation of the real frontier line, not preoccupation with an imaginary one, became the major concern.”³⁸⁵

One seeming exception to this consolidation was establishment of a new Spanish colony at Nacogdoches, in east Texas. The Nacogdoches colonists were a motley collection of Spaniards, Frenchmen, Indians, possibly Blacks, and an assortment of other mixed-race individuals. They were called the *Adaesans* because they had resided in or near Los Adaes, until they were forcibly removed to San Antonio under Rubí’s New Orders for Presidios. The *Adaesans* did not like their new home in San Antonio and immediately petitioned the government for permission to return to east Texas. After a year, permission was granted on the condition that the *Adaesans* settle at least “100 leagues” west of their old home at Los Adaes. This condition was to discourage the *Adaesans* from returning to their wonted trade of

³⁸⁴ Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, vol. 2, pp. 127-128.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 210

smugglers. Around 350 *Adaesans* settled at what they called Bucareli on the Trinity River from 1774; complaining that the site was unhealthy, they then moved eighty miles further east, to Nacogdoches in 1779.³⁸⁶

Spain's Nacogdoches colony was in fact the first in a series of what were mostly failed attempts to plant loyal settlers east of the San Antonio enclave. In 1805 the Texas Governor tried to plant a colony called San Telésforo where the Nacogdoches Road crossed the Brazos River, and another colony called Trinidad where that same road crossed the Trinity River. Colonists were enticed with an offer of free land and exemption from taxation, but very few responded to these incentives.³⁸⁷ The locations were remote from markets, unprotected against Indian attacks, and unappealing to almost every Spanish subject who was not an *Adaesans*. After Nacogdoches, there was no successful colony east of the San Antonio River Enclave until Steven F. Austin arrived with his 300 Americans forty years later.

Pressure Renewed: Spatial Patterns of Rebellion in the Texas Sphere – 1803 to 1827

Spain restored the Louisiana territory to France in 1801 and France sold that territory to the United States two years later. This removed the Continental Buffer and restored the northeastern boundary of New Spain to the watershed that divides the Red River drainage from the headwaters of the Sabine, Trinity, and Brazos Rivers.³⁸⁸ This natural boundary was adjusted by the Adams Onís Treaty of 1819, which moved the boundary from the watershed to midchannel in the Sabine and Red Rivers.

³⁸⁶ Bolton, "The Spanish Abandonment and Re-Occupation of East Texas, 1773-1779," 67-137. Galán, *Los Adaes*, 221-223.

³⁸⁷ Castaneda, *The End of the Spanish Regime, 1780-1810*, p. 309 ff.

³⁸⁸ See Wilkinson, *Map of North America*, 1804.

The pressure on this new boundary was far greater than it had been forty years earlier because the American empire was far more vigorous and belligerent than the empire of France. The core of the American empire was much closer, just under one thousand miles distant, and the friction over most of that distance was very low because rivers and the Gulf coast formed natural highways. The American empire was, moreover, ideologically hostile, being zealously republican and aggressively protestant. On top of this, the American empire had a large, growing, and unusually footloose population. One final factor adding to the great pressure the American empire could bring to bear on the boundary with New Spain was the spirit (*thumos*) of citizen soldiers, whether acting as filibusters, rebels, or soldiers in the regular army. The contrast between American and Spanish soldiers was remarked by the American Army officer Zebulon Pike when he was a captive in New Spain.

“For hospitality, generosity, docility, and sobriety, the people of New Spain exceed any nation perhaps on the globe: but in national energy, or patriotism, enterprise of character, and independence of soul, they are perhaps the most deficient.”³⁸⁹

The American empire that now loomed east of the Red River watershed was vigorous, belligerent, and growing stronger with each passing year. The Spanish empire that still lay west of that line was, in contrast, a decayed and failing state. The roots of this failure are complex but are neatly summarized in this line.

“In the course of the seventeenth century, the power of Spain began to wane not only in the domain of politics but in the realm of spirit.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁹ Pike, *Exploratory Travels Through the Western Territories of North America, 1805-1807*, 371.

³⁹⁰ LeCoq, *Understanding South America*, 64.

The decline of Spanish political power was the result of bad economic policies that combined extravagance and inefficiency. The decline of Spanish spiritual power is harder to explain, but for the purpose of this dissertation may be described as the hardening of enthusiasm into bigotry. In the sixteenth century Spain had been enthused by what Oswald Spengler called a destiny idea—by the conviction that Spain had a divine vocation to build a universal church and empire.³⁹¹ This is how the nineteenth-century American historian William Hickling Prescott described the intoxicating aplomb that accompanied this destiny idea

“The Spaniard was a knight-errant, in the literal sense, roving over seas on which no bark had ever ventured, among islands and continents where no civilized man had ever trodden, and which fancy peopled with all the marvels and dear enchantments of romance; courting danger in every form, combating everywhere, and everywhere victorious.”³⁹²

Although everywhere tainted by cruelty and cupidity, the empire of Spain had been for more than a century marked by tremendous courage, creativity, and expansive power; but by the time Spain entered Texas in 1689, its destiny idea and expansive power had both begun to fade. When the United States purchased Louisiana a little more than a century later, the Spanish Empire was tottering on the brink of catastrophic failure. Oswald Spengler describes the general process of state failure in Hegelian terms.

“A Culture is born in the moment when a great soul awakens . . . It dies when this soul has been actualized . . . Every Culture stands in a deeply-symbolical, almost in a mystical, relation to the Extended, the space, in which and through which it strives to actualize itself. The aim once attained . . . the Culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down . . . This—the inward and

³⁹¹ “In the Destiny-idea the soul reveals its world-longing, its desire to rise into the light, to accomplish and actualize its vocation.” Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, 118.

³⁹² Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella*, vol. 3, 490.

outward fulfillment, the finality, that awaits every living Culture—is the purport of all the historic ‘declines.’”³⁹³

Five years after the United States purchased Louisiana from Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Emperor invaded Spain, deposed its king, and placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. Although the Spanish king was restored in 1814, turmoil in the core of the Spanish empire permitted and inspired revolts throughout Spain’s American colonies. The final failure of Spanish power in New Spain began with the Hidalgo Revolt of 1810 and was effectively complete in 1821, when Augustin de Iturbide proclaimed the independence of the Mexican empire.

The Green Flag Rebellion

A revolt broke out in San Antonio one year after the Hidalgo Revolt. The Casas Revolt was suppressed, and its leader executed, but a rebel named José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara escaped through Natchitoches to Washington in the hope of obtaining aid from the United States. The United States Government refused direct aid but intimated that it would not stand in the way of Americans who wished to support the cause of Mexican independence. With this assurance Gutiérrez returned to New Orleans and fell in with William Shaler, a special agent of the U.S. Secretary of State charged with monitoring, if not fomenting, the troubles in New Spain. Under Shaler’s guidance Gutiérrez organized “The Republican Army of the North,” a band of about 130 filibusters and zealots under the command of Augustus W. Magee, erstwhile lieutenant in the American Army.

³⁹³ Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, 106.

The “Guíteérrez-Magee expedition” entered Spanish Texas from Natchitoches in August 1812, routed small Royalist garrisons at Nacogdoches and Trinidad de Salcido, and then, its ranks swelling with Tejano and Indian volunteers, captured both La Bahia and San Antonio by the spring of 1813. As the Republican Army of the North marched under a green flag, the “Guíteérrez-Magee expedition” was also called the Green Flag Rebellion.

In August 1813, the Republican Army of the North was slaughtered by a professional Spanish army at the Battle of Medina, twenty miles south of San Antonio. The Republican Army had marched out of the city on the Laredo Road in the hope of surprising the Royalists, who were moving north under the command of Joaquín de Arredondo, Commandant of the Eastern Internal Provinces. Arredondo later described the Battle of Medina as,

“the most complete and decisive victory over the base and perfidious rabble commanded by certain vile assassins ridiculously styled a general and commanders.”³⁹⁴

Though Arredondo’s language is contemptuous, he was not boasting, and he clearly conveys the important truth that, even in a failing state, a professional army almost always defeats a rag-tag rabble of adventurers, malcontents, and enthusiasts. This is especially true when the rag-tag rabble moves closer to the center of power.

Although the Spanish empire succeeded in suppressing the Green Flag Rebellion, and in driving the American filibusters back into Louisiana, the Magee-Gutierrez expedition exposed serious weaknesses in Spanish Texas. (1) A small band of irregulars had easily overrun the Spanish outposts at Nacogdoches and Trinidad. (2) Hundreds of disaffected Tejanos and Indians had joined the American filibusters on their march to San Antonio, so that the Republican Army

³⁹⁴ Hatcher, trans. “Joaquin de Arredondo’s Report of the Battle of the Medina,” 220.

reached the city five or six times larger than it had been when it entered Texas. (3) An outside army was required to enforce Spanish sovereignty in Texas, the local administration and military having collapsed, and in many cases having defected to the rebels. (4) Arredondo's extremely brutal reprisals against "the base and perfidious rabble" coerced obedience, but they alienated the hearts and minds of what he called the "wicked peasants" of Texas.³⁹⁵

James Long's Republic of Texas

In 1816 the American geographer William Darby published *A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana*, and in it claimed that French Louisiana had included Texas, and that Texas should therefore have been included in the Louisiana Purchase. Darby was at that time a planter in Natchez, Mississippi, and his *Geographical Description* rationalized the imperial ambitions of the Natchez grandees. Darby wrote,

"Upon rules of polity, the United States ought to enforce its title to Louisiana, in the most extensive scale upon which justice will sanction the claim. The province of Texas is now a wilderness, with but partial exceptions. In the first half of the current century, this region will be inhabited by either emigrants from the United States, or the Spanish colonies . . . With the Rio Grande del Norte, ought the southwestern emigration of the people of the United States, to find an eternal ne plus ultra."³⁹⁶

The imperial ambitions of the Natchez grandees were frustrated only three years later by the terms of the Adams-Onís Treaty, which set the Sabine and Red Rivers as the boundary between the United States and New Spain. In the hope of forcing a boundary adjustment, the Natchez grandees financed an invasion of Texas by Dr. James Long, another Natchez planter.

³⁹⁵ Hatcher, trans. "Joaquin de Arredondo's Report," 227.

³⁹⁶ Darby, *Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana*, appendix, xvii.

Like the Republican Army of the North, Long's "expedition" entered Texas from Natchitoches and advanced down the old Los Adaes Road to take possession of Nacogdoches.

On June 26, 1819, Long declared Texas an independent republic and himself President of its "Supreme Council" or running junta. Long justified these acts with a mix of republican bombast and tendentious historical geography.

"The citizens of Texas have long indulged the hope that, in the adjustment of the boundaries of the Spanish possessions and the territories of the United States, thy should be included in the limits of the latter . . . An expectation so flattering, prevented any effectual effort to throw off the yoke of Spanish authority, though it could not restrain some unavailing rebellions against an odious tyranny [i.e. the Green Flag Rebellion]. The recent treaty between Spain and the United States of America has dissipated an illusion too long fondly cherished, and has caused the citizens of Texas from the torpor into which a fancied security had lulled them."³⁹⁷

Texans were not yet "citizens" and very few living west of the Brazos River indulged the hope Texas might be annexed by the United States. But Long's design became apparent when the Supreme Council declared Galveston the port of entry to the Republic of Texas, and the privateer Jean Lafitte its governor.³⁹⁸ They were referring to Galveston Bay. Their settlement was on Point Bolivar, a site more easily defended against an attack from the west.

Galveston served Long's design in two ways. First, it served as a point with which to supply republican rebels fighting in New Spain. Galveston lay beyond the reach of Spanish power and yet outside of the control of the United States, and its position was ideal for transshipment of arms and ammunition to any point on the east coast of New Spain that was under rebel control. This is why the western tip of Galveston Island is named Point Bolivar for

³⁹⁷ "Declaration of Independence of Texas," *Niles' Weekly Register*, Sep. 11, 1819, 31.

³⁹⁸ "Republic of Texas," *Niles' Weekly Register*, Feb 5, 1820, 395-396.

the revolutionist Simon Bolivar in 1816.³⁹⁹ Second, Galveston served as a point through which American settlers in Long's nascent Republic of Texas could import and export if the United States chose to close the border. Galveston lay directly south of Nacogdoches and was the natural outlet of the Americans who had begun squatting in that vicinity. This is why Royalists occupied the mouth of the Trinity River in 1820, and why Mexico built fort Anahuac ten years later.⁴⁰⁰

Long attempted to secure the western perimeter the nascent Republic of Texas by fortifying the main river crossings. He sent his brother David with around twenty-five men to secure the La Bahia crossing on the Brazos, just west of today's Navasota. He sent smaller detachments to the San Antonio Crossing of the Navasota, at the northeast corner of today's Brazos County, and to the Falls of the Brazos near today's Marlin. The western perimeter of Long's Republic of Texas collapsed in October 1819, when these strongholds at the river crossings were overrun by much larger units of the regular Spanish Army.⁴⁰¹ Long fled to Galveston (Fort Bolivar). In 1821 he led a sortie that captured the presidio at La Bahia, but he was then captured and taken to Mexico City, where he died in a Mexican jail.

James Long failed to realize the vision of William Darby and the Natchez grandees. He did not move the southwest border of the United States to the Rio Grande. He lived to see the end of Spanish power, but the border still ran down the Sabine and Red Rivers when he died in that *Mexican* jail. But tragi-comic history of the "Long Expedition" did disclose three fateful

³⁹⁹ Wiggins, "Point Bolivar." As an additional note, Wiggins' article notes the origins of the name are somewhat uncertain.

⁴⁰⁰ *Arkansas Gazette* (July 14, 1821), 2.

⁴⁰¹ *Biographical Encyclopedia of Texas*, 289-291; Brown, *Annals of Travis County*, vol. 15, 143-146.

facts about the emerging geography of *Mexican* Texas. (1) East Texas would be settled by Americans. (2) Mexico would not be able to deliver overwhelming violence east of the Brazos River. (3) The vital links along the Texas coast would run east to New Orleans, and not south to Veracruz. James Long was simply a man ahead of his time.

Overwhelming Pressure: Texas Under Mexican Rule – 1821 to 1829

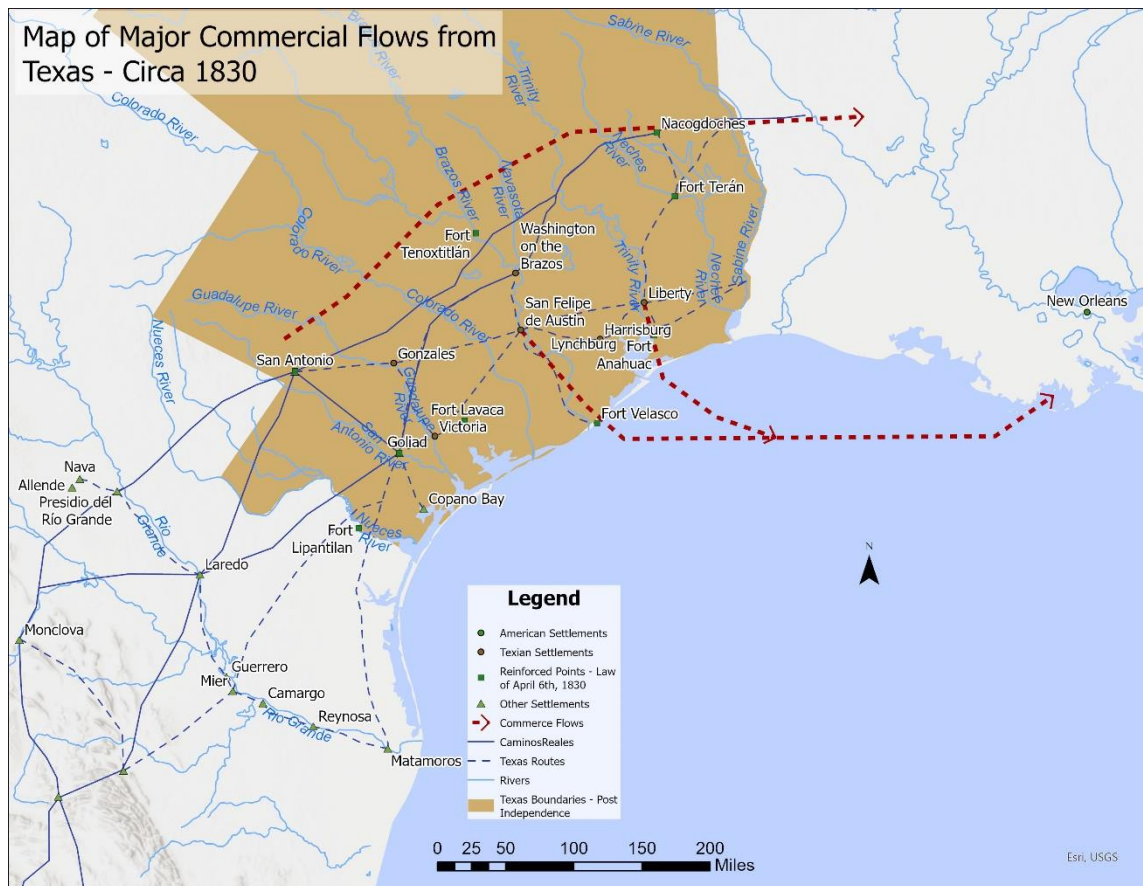


Figure IV-2. Map of Major Commercial Flows from Texas Circa 1830

This map is meant to depict the commercial connections back to the east that were spurring the growth of the American state westward, while simultaneously pulling Texas out of Mexico's sphere.

The newly independent Mexican state inherited the same geographic problem that the Spanish state had faced. The Mexican state had to defend its distant and desolate frontier from a hostile power, while overcoming the problems of distance decay, limited state resources, and the

need to extract revenue from trade. Trade regulations are particularly interesting because they flew in the face of the emerging trade patterns on the Gulf Coast between Texas and Louisiana (figure IV-2). When Spain and Mexico liberalized their trade policies to reduce smuggling and raise revenue, collecting taxes in remote ports was a new problem faced by the Mexican government.⁴⁰² To the end of increasing the state's presence in Texas, Mexico sent General Manuel de Mier y Terán on a fact finding mission into east Texas in 1828-1829. This was ten years after James Long had founded his short-lived Republic, and as Terán moved farther from the Mexican center of power on his journey from the Rio Grande to Nacogdoches, he observed the decaying power of the Mexican state.

“As one travels from Bejar to this town [Nacogdoches], Mexican influence diminishes, so much so that it becomes clear that in this town that influence is almost nonexistent.”⁴⁰³

What General Terán saw was evidence of Mexican state failure. Mexican cultural influence had all but disappeared long before he reached the international boundary. The Mexican State had little persuasive power over this disparate *Texian* population (remember *Texian* denotes American citizens of Mexico). Additionally, Terán observed few Mexican state officials and few citizens who were *culturally* Mexican.

Controlling east Texas was doubly difficult for the Mexican state for two major reasons. The first reason was that the Mexican state was greatly affected by the distance decay of power. To control east Texas the state had to overcome the friction of simple distance between the capital and the border, but the friction of simple distance was compounded by poor roads,

⁴⁰² The collection of taxes was something that Juan Almonte was concerned with when he traveled to Texas in 1834 and was a large part of Terán's recommendations for additional military troops in Texas, as seen in figure 1.

⁴⁰³ Manuel de Mier y Terán in *Texas by Terán*, 97.

inefficient administrators, and a population that was majority Anglo.⁴⁰⁴

The second reason the Mexican state had difficulty controlling Texas was its proximity to Louisiana. Northeastern Mexico was growing under the stimulus of contact, but northeastern Mexico was not growing as an extension of the Mexican domain. The economic, cultural, and kinship links of northeastern Mexico were thickening on the east, where they ran off into the United States, while they were thinning on the southwest, where they ran off into the Mexican domain. The historian Andrew Torget has shown that the road between San Antonio and Nacogdoches was lightly traveled, while the road between Nacogdoches and Natchitoches was heavily traveled.⁴⁰⁵ Much as the Santa Fe Trail connected New Mexico to the United States, the Camino Real, or the Old San Antonio Road, connected Mexican Texas to the United States.⁴⁰⁶

Texas overall, was sparsely populated.⁴⁰⁷ Geographer Peter Gerhard estimates the population of Texas in 1821 as 8,000.⁴⁰⁸ The historian Hubert Howe Bancroft estimated the population of Texas at that time to be nearer 3,500, excluding Indians.⁴⁰⁹ The governor of Texas, Antonio Martinez, writing about 1821, said there were only 2,516 Mexican nationals in Texas, almost all of them in the San Antonio River Enclave.⁴¹⁰ Nacogdoches, in 1821, was said to be an all but deserted town in the woods.⁴¹¹ Although Terán told us that there were Mexican nationals

⁴⁰⁴ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 97. Terán notes that there is little cultural Mexican influence in Nacogdoches. On page 98 he discusses the lack of “authorities and magistrates” in Nacogdoches to enforce Mexico’s laws.

⁴⁰⁵ Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*, 18.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Torget makes a similar point about commercial connections in the northern Mexican sphere all being back to the United States as opposed to the Mexican domain. Again, this spatial pattern was driven by those laid down by the Spanish, who viewed their sphere as a buffer and did not try and integrate it with their core and domain. The United States, on the other hand, was interested in expanding and consolidating these territories.

⁴⁰⁷ Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 8, 340-341.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁰⁹ Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas: 1531-1889 Vol II.*, 76

⁴¹⁰ McElhannon, “Imperial Mexico and Texas, 1821-1823,” 121.

⁴¹¹ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*, 4.

in Nacogdoches in 1828, they were overwhelmed by Anglos. The Mexican government had only a toehold in Texas, and the friction of distance made that toehold difficult to reach.⁴¹²

For example, Colonel Juan Almonte, recounts the trip from Saltillo to Monclova taking roughly three days, covering 57 leagues, or 171 miles.⁴¹³ That boils down to 57 miles a day, assuming an average of 10 hours of travel a day, they were traveling roughly 5.7 miles an hour. This number fits within the estimate provided by Shuler⁴¹⁴ of 4 to 6 miles per hour, and seems on the higher end of estimates, as an early expedition into Texas averaged only 18 miles a day.⁴¹⁵ Travel was not fast, and these estimates were for the fastest method of overland travel at the time, the horse. These estimates assume good roads, like those seen by Almonte during his travels.⁴¹⁶ The roads were not always good. So, travel was often much slower.

The isolation experienced by the residents of Texas at the frontier led to the development of the unique cultural identity of the Tejanos in the San Antonio River enclave, as these people understood that the central government, whether it was Spanish or Mexican, was not likely to help or defend them.⁴¹⁷ Remembering the brutal reprisals of Arredondo, these people also understood that the central government was likely to massacre them if they got seriously out of line. Summarizing condition of the Tejano at the time, Tijerina says,

“The Tejano experience made their full integration into the new Mexican nation a difficult proposition from the very outset. Texas’s frontier life and its border with the United States gave the region a special character that was not easily

⁴¹² Gerhard, *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, 24.

⁴¹³ Asbury and Almonte, “The Private Journal of Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, February 1—April 16th, 1836,” 12-13.

⁴¹⁴ Shuler, “The Influence of Shoreline,” 26.

⁴¹⁵ Carter, *Doomed Road of Empire*, 53.

⁴¹⁶ Almonte, *Almonte’s Texas*, 134. Almonte assesses the overall condition of the roads in Texas favorably, especially during the summer and fall. He notes their quality declines somewhat during the winter when the rain and mud are more plentiful.

⁴¹⁷ Poyo, “Community and Autonomy,” 3.

understood in the provinces to the south.”⁴¹⁸

It demanded great statecraft to administer this region of “special character.”

Indian affairs were another great difficulty of statecraft. The last Mexican Governor of Texas Antonio Martínez said that aggression by Native Americans had “almost destroyed this Province.”⁴¹⁹ Agriculture was not undertaken on a large scale because there was no internal market, no port, no protection against the Apache and Comanche, and because the roads to Monterrey and Santa Fe were “too long.”⁴²⁰ General Terán described the streets of San Antonio as unpaved and crooked.⁴²¹ Berlandier, a companion of Terán, remarked that the “Ciudad de Bexar resembles a large village more than the municipal seat of a department.”⁴²² The houses were mostly “huts” without amenities, though some were more sturdily constructed.⁴²³ The missions were also described as being in an advanced state of decay.⁴²⁴

The backwardness of San Antonio was largely attributable to its inability to defend itself from raids of Native Americans. Another Texas historian points out that the troops in the presidio were largely ineffective against the Native forces because they lacked “all resources.”⁴²⁵ Berlandier put the audaciousness of the Natives down to the “bad financial administration of

⁴¹⁸ Tijerina, “Under the Mexican Flag,” 36.

⁴¹⁹ McElhannon, “Imperial Mexico and Texas,” 121.

⁴²⁰ McElhannon, “Imperial Mexico and Texas,” 120; Sánchez and Castañeda, “A Trip to Texas in 1828,” 257.

⁴²¹ Sánchez and Castañeda, “A Trip to Texas,” 258; Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era*, 11 notes that streets in Spanish settled towns typically have straight streets, so the fact that San Antonio lacked these helps us see a written record in the landscape which indicates the Spanish influence was waning here, thus putting San Antonio on the edge of the Spanish, then Mexican, area of influence.

⁴²² Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 17. Quote appears in the Introduction written by Jack Jackson. Jackson is quoting Berlandier’s journal.

⁴²³ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 16. Quote appears in the Introduction written by Jack Jackson, Jackson is quoting Berlandier’s journal.

⁴²⁴ McElhannon, “Imperial Mexico and Texas,” 120. The report McElhannon cites was written by a Mexican official with the last name of Martínez who was inspecting Texas in 1821.

⁴²⁵ Sánchez and Castañeda, “A Trip to Texas,” 259.

Mexico,” as the troops lacked the horses and pay they needed to perform their jobs effectively.⁴²⁶ This description is corroborated by Governor Martinez’s earlier assessment that troops in Texas were generally “deprived of supplies, naked and starving,” and forced to procure supplies from the towns hosting them.⁴²⁷ Berlandier described the troops being sold supplies from corrupt government officials at huge markups. This corruption was possible, in part, because San Antonio was so distant from Mexico City.⁴²⁸ In short, Tejanos in the San Antonio River enclave were on their own when it came to defense. They could not expect the Mexican cavalry to charge across the Nueces strip and save them from the Native attacks.⁴²⁹

The second major reason there was a unique group of people in this part of Mexico is that the Tejanos in San Antonio had been cultivating trade relationships with people in Louisiana.⁴³⁰

One Mexican official says this about the Tejanos in San Antonio:

“Accustomed to the continued trade with the North Americans, they have adopted their customs and habits, and one may say truly that they are not Mexicans except by birth, for they even speak Spanish with a marked incorrectness.”⁴³¹

The Tejanos’ quirky Spanish dialect was a result of isolation and the distance that separated them from “normal” Spanish speakers in the center of Mexico. It was around 850 miles from San Antonio to Mexico City, and the journey was by way of bad roads. More Tejano trade went east to Louisiana because New Orleans was half the distance and the goods were both better and

⁴²⁶ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 16. Quote Appears in the Introduction written by Jack Jackson, Jackson is quoting Berlandier’s journal.

⁴²⁷ McElhannon, “Imperial Mexico and Texas,” 120

⁴²⁸ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 17. Quote Appears in the Introduction written by Jack Jackson, Jackson is quoting Berlandier’s journal.

⁴²⁹ Tijernia, “Under the Mexican Flag,” 36.

⁴³⁰ Tijernia, “Under the Mexican Flag,” 33 mentions the direct trade relationship overland with the United States; Poyo, “Community and Autonomy,” 11 talks about trade relationships between San Antonio and Louisiana developing as early as the 1770s.

⁴³¹ Tijerina, “Under the Mexican Flag,” 35.

cheaper.⁴³²

The Mexican state also faced a legitimacy crisis because it was unable to control its border or regulate the tide of American immigration.⁴³³ Illegal immigration contributed to the lack of Mexican influence in east Texas and Nacogdoches, where it seemed that the ratio of foreigners to Mexican citizens was ten to one by 1828.⁴³⁴

In San Antonio there were corrupt government officials; in Nacogdoches there were hardly any government officials to be found. The legitimacy of the Mexican state was thus an open question in both places. The Mexican state did not have legitimacy in Texas because it was unable to persuade, pay, or deliver pain to engender legitimacy among its citizens.

Most Texians and many Tejanos barely recognized Mexican legitimacy, and so were willing to challenge Mexican sovereignty when Santa Anna tried to centralize the central government in 1835. Texians and Tejanos were content to look after themselves, even undertake their own defense against the Comanche, so long as they were left alone by the Mexican state. But Santa Anna's centralization of the government increased the burden of Mexican citizenship without any compensating benefits. This eventually precipitated a challenge to Mexican sovereignty. This challenge to Mexican sovereignty would test the power of the Mexican state, and the next chapter will show how Mexico failed that test.

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⁴³³ McElhannon, "Imperial Mexico and Texas," 122.

⁴³⁴ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 97.

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CHAPTER V

MEXICO'S DISINTEGRATION, THE MEXICAN STATE'S SOVEREIGNTY IS UNASSERTED

“But as Mexico...will never have the power to govern—at a distance of 1800 miles—a race of active and intrepid men, who are hostile to her laws, religion, and manners. It would seem, therefore, that Mexico in relation to the settlement of Texas, has made an irretrievable false step.” – George Willian Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States, From Washington on the Potomac, to the Frontier of Mexico* (1844).⁴³⁵

Mexico's Weak Instruments of Power: Failure to Persuade, Pay, and Deliver Pain in Texas

In the quotation above, Featherstonhaugh summarizes the perilous state of Mexican Texas in 1835. The Mexican state had settled within its borders a group of people who would not voluntarily comply with Mexican customs, and in some cases Mexican laws. These American immigrants had no ingrained habit of obeying the Mexican state, having been raised in another country and another culture. Without habituation to obedience, the state had little persuasive power to engender obedience in these immigrants. Add to this the lack of funds in the Mexican treasury and Mexico was down two forms of power. So, given who Mexico was trying to govern and the lack of money at Mexico's disposal, Mexico would almost certainly, sooner or later, have to deliver violence to coerce obedience from the Texians, or American immigrants in Texas.

⁴³⁵ Omitted from this quote is text that clarifies Mexico's situation. The author is saying that Mexico, with its continuous revolutions at the center, was never going to be able to govern Texas. A stable Mexican state would have had a better chance at governing this remote province.

But citizens do not rebel without cause. Rebelling against a state can be a very costly endeavor, with the price often being one's life.⁴³⁶ Citizens are more likely to rebel in a state that performs poorly across all three measures of power: persuasion, payment, and delivery of pain. A state that cannot persuade its citizens to obey must pay for obedience or credibly threaten violence to those who disobey. When persuasion and payment fail, the state must answer the resulting challenge to its sovereignty with the *delivery* of violence.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that Mexico was failing to perform across all three major types of power in Texas. Chapter three demonstrated that Mexico was failing to perform well everywhere in its northern sphere. Texas receives closer attention in this chapter because it was the only rebellion that resulted in absolute loss of territory, thus making Mexico fit the definition of state failure used in this dissertation.

Mexico experienced a legitimacy failure in Texas. Mexico had to govern a culturally distant population, the Texians, that did not automatically or habitually obey Mexican edicts. Other than very inexpensive land, Mexico offered few benefits to pay the Texians for obedience. Mexico was also unable to deliver violence to protect the persons and property of the Texians from the serious threat of marauding Indians. This threefold lack of legitimacy meant that most Texians felt little loyalty to Mexico and little inclination to obey Mexican rules.

Because Mexico did not engender voluntary obedience, it had to coerce obedience at the point of a sword. But efforts to raise taxes and bolster the military presence in Texas only served to incite additional feelings of hostility among Texians and Tejanos. These hostile feelings

⁴³⁶ "Who draws his sword against his prince must throw away the scabbard," Ray, *A Collection of English Proverbs*, 21. This quote means that rebelling against the state often costs someone their life because the state, needing to maintain its sovereignty, must kill the rebel to snuff out the threat to its sovereignty.

eventually boiled over into open conflict, and Mexico's sovereignty was openly challenged by Texian and Tejano rebels. Because Mexico failed to successfully respond to this challenge, Texas gained its independence and Mexico was forced to surrender its claim to sovereignty over Texas.

The rebellion in Texas fits the geographic model proposed by this dissertation because it happened in a remote part of the sphere, the zone where citizens are most likely to view a state's edicts as illegitimate. The distance decay of the Mexican state is apparent both after the geographic interpretations of the state's advances and retreats in Texas from the last chapter, and from Mexico's inability to deliver pain, first to the Indians and then to the rebels.

This chapter explains the successful rebellion in Texas, beginning with the state's lack of legitimacy owing to the state's failure in the three forms of power. The lack of persuasion was evident in the Texian's lack of loyalty to the Mexican state. The state had a paucity of resources with which to reward obedient citizens. This lack of resources also contributed to a weak military, which was further crippled by poor leadership and the distance decay of hard power. The result was that Mexico could not deliver pain to its disobedient citizens in Texas.

Legitimacy Failure in Texas

Legitimacy failure was a precondition of the rebellion in Texas. A state enjoys legitimacy when an overwhelming majority of citizens are convinced that it has the right to rule, and that they have a duty to obey. A state suffers legitimacy failure when it loses this internal legitimacy and no longer commands habitual, compensated, or even coerced obedience. When disobedience rises to the level of open rebellion, a state must either enforce its sovereignty with overwhelming violence or surrender its sovereignty and recognize the rebels' independence. Mexico suffered an

accelerating legitimacy failure from its inception in 1821. When open rebellion broke out with the Battle of Gonzales in 1835, Mexico failed to enforce its sovereignty with overwhelming violence and was therefore obliged to surrender its sovereignty and recognize the independence of Texas.

Failing to Persuade, the Missing “Mystic Chords of Memory”

Abraham Lincoln famously described one leg in the tripod of legitimacy as “the mystic chords of memory.” This was in his first inaugural address, in 1861, when the South was on the very brink of rebellion, and Lincoln hoped that reminding the South of these mystic chords would coax it back into the Union. This failed and overwhelming violence was necessary to drag the South back into the Union, but this does not mean that the mystic chords of memory are unreal or unimportant. Habit, long usage, and hereditary sentiment act as a glue that holds a state together. They are what most people mean when they speak of *patriotism*.

There were few great Mexican patriots in Mexican Texas. Many Tejanos were no doubt proud that Mexico had won its independence from Spain, but the Mexican Revolution had not created a strong *national feeling*. Indeed, the lack of national feeling is one reason it took Mexico eleven years to throw off the Spanish yoke. As an historian of Mexico put it,

“Why was so long a struggle necessary? It was due to the fact that there was no unity of blood and sentiment. There was no national feeling. It was a struggle of localities, with local leaders against a force that was unified and single.”⁴³⁷

When independence engendered a degree of national feeling and Mexican patriotism, this

⁴³⁷ Starr, *Mexico and the United States*, 163.

was very largely confined to the country's ruling elite and was therefore concentrated in the capital. Waddy Thompson was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Mexico in the early 1840s. In this memoir of those years Thompson said that Mexico had the makings of national feeling and mystic chords of memory, but that Mexican patriotism was as a metropolitan sentiment.

“The better classes of Mexicans are generally intelligent, and I think as patriotic as the people of most other countries. Their revolutionary history abounds with characters and incidents of disinterestedness and virtue altogether romantic. They possess many of the elements of a great people . . . But it must be confessed that the mass of the population are very much unenlightened.”⁴³⁸

Very few Tejanos were of the better classes of Mexicans, so we may suppose their patriotic feelings were not strong. Robert William Hale Hardy was a British naval officer who spent four years in Mexico in the late 1820s and he was particularly disgusted by the lack of national feeling in Mexico, even among the better classes.

“The political morality of Turkey is infinitely superior to that of Mexico, where examples abound of bad faith, disregard of public good, and of every other such patriotic and virtuous principle . . . And, lastly, a system of brutal espionage, patronized by both parties, has demoralized the country . . . by destroying every species of individual confidence, and thus obliging every man to consider his parents, relations, friends, servants, and every person with whom he might be connected, or hold conversation, as being villains!”⁴³⁹

Even less strong were the patriotic feelings of the Americans emigrated into Texas and became nominal Mexican citizens after 1821. As Featherstonhaugh said in 1835, most American immigrants to Texas were “intrepid men, who are hostile to her laws, religion,

⁴³⁸ Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico*, 247.

⁴³⁹ Hardy, *Travels in the Interior of Mexico, in 1825, 1826, 1827 & 1828*, 528-529.

and manners.”⁴⁴⁰ This cultural distance was aggravated by the physical distance that separated the Americans from the Mexican domain, and even from the San Antonio River enclave. Whether they had entered Texas legally as colonists or illegally as squatters, most Americans had entered Mexican territory but had not in any deeper sense entered Mexico. As Santa Anna said of the difficulty of colonization efforts in Texas,

“...for after all foreigners, whatever be their nationality, more readily take on the customs and interests of the neighboring nation [the United States] than ours, especially when they find themselves such a long distance from the government of their new allegiance.”⁴⁴¹

Mexico’s problem was that there were not enough loyal Mexican citizens in Texas. The “mystic chords of memory” were very faint in the ears of Tejanos in the San Antonio River enclave. The Texians east of the Colorado River could not hear them at all. This was because the Texians were “essentially different through centuries of different political training.”⁴⁴² This is why the Texas Declaration of Independence reads similarly to the United States Declaration of Independence, with both documents declaring that the government’s legitimacy as derived from the consent of those it governs.⁴⁴³ Additionally, Texians were alienated from Mexico by language and religion. Most Texians were often protestants with deep prejudices against Mexico’s preferred Catholic religion.⁴⁴⁴ They felt little loyalty to a government with which they

⁴⁴⁰ Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States, From Washington on the Potomac, to the Frontier of Mexico*, 124.

⁴⁴¹ Santa Anna, “Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture,” 66.

⁴⁴² Howren, “Causes and Origins of the Decree of April 6, 1830,” 390.

⁴⁴³ The Texas Declaration can be found on the website of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

⁴⁴⁴ Benson, “Texas as Viewed from Mexico,” 223.

had rarely, if ever, interacted, and which was seated at a great distance in Mexico City.⁴⁴⁵ Couple these alien “habits of the heart”⁴⁴⁶ with the fact that Texas’ commercial connections were closer and more tightly woven with the United States than they were with Mexico, and it is clear why Mexico had little hope of voluntary compliance from *any* of their citizens in Texas.

Mexico recognized that they could not leave Texas wholly to its own devices and so passed a series of laws to try and prevent a large portion of their sphere from slipping away. The Laws of April 6, 1830, were “an attempt of Mexico to save Texas to the Mexican nation by strengthening the ties of that state with Mexico and severing those which bound it to the United States.”⁴⁴⁷ Mexico sent General Manuel De Mier y Terán to Texas to diagnose the problem there, and the Laws of April 6, 1830, were the solution. These Laws sought to deal with the alien American culture by providing incentives for Mexican families to settle in Texas, paying for their transportation and providing them with land.⁴⁴⁸ The government believed that a majority of the Texas population must be *culturally* Mexican, from the Mexican core or domain.⁴⁴⁹ Such people, it was thought, would be more loyal and law-abiding than the Texian colonists.⁴⁵⁰ Additionally, there was hope that the example of loyal citizens of Mexican origin would rub off

⁴⁴⁵ As an example of this, during the end of the Spanish state, some Tejanos joined Comanche raids against other Tejano settlements. Torget, *The Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*, 41.

⁴⁴⁶ The phrase “habits of the heart” is from Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 383.

⁴⁴⁷ Howren, “Causes and Origin of the Decree of April 6, 1830,” 421.

⁴⁴⁸ See Johnson, *A History of Texas*, 65-66 for the full text.

⁴⁴⁹ Colin Woodard’s, 2011 book *American Nations*, argues that geographic region of the “Deep South” discussed initially on pages 82-91, extends roughly to the Colorado River in Texas, illustrating the fact that US culture dominated the territory of East Texas in Mexico.

⁴⁵⁰ Loyalty to themselves was argued by Almonte in his 1834 Secret Report, and Loyalty to their previous country was argued by Santa Anna in his letter to the Mexican government after his loss at the Battle of San Jacinto. See Almonte, *Almonte’s Texas*, 224 for the former point and Castañeda, *The Mexican Side*, 66, for the latter. On the Texian’s contempt for Mexican law see Howren, “Causes and Origin of the Decree of April 6, 1830,” 381.

on the Texians.⁴⁵¹ Colonel Almonte advocated this point; he believed that the government's problem in Texas would be solved if more industrious Mexican citizens moved into Texas.⁴⁵²

Numerous Mexican officials who visited Texas saw the lack of Mexico's persuasive power because the population was majority American.⁴⁵³ Though immigrants were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Mexican Constitution upon entering the country, the oath was likely an expedient formality for many who took it.⁴⁵⁴ And cultural assimilation was working in the wrong direction. José Mariá Sánchez traveled with Terán to Texas in 1828 and remarked that many Tejanos were only "Mexicans by birth," as they had adopted all of the "customs and habits" of the Americans with whom they frequently interacted. Sánchez said they even spoke Spanish differently than Mexican citizens farther south. Santa Anna asserted that permanently staffing Texas with a robust military garrison would be necessary if Texas continued to be populated by foreigners who had more allegiance to their home countries than they did their adopted one.⁴⁵⁵ These foreigners, as Colonel Almonte later noted, only obeyed the government's laws if it was in their interest; inconvenient rules they simply ignored.⁴⁵⁶ Almonte believed Texian obedience would come only at the point of a sword.⁴⁵⁷

The "mystic chords of memory" were seldom heard north of the Rio Grande, and they were effectively inaudible east of the Brazos River. Without this music to move the hearts of

⁴⁵¹ Howren, "Causes and Origin of the Decree of April 6, 1830," 395.

⁴⁵² Almonte, *Almonte's Texas*, 225.

⁴⁵³ Sánchez, "A Trip to Texas in 1828," 260; Howren, "Causes and Origins of the Decree of April 6, 1830," 380.

⁴⁵⁴ Howren, "Causes and Origins of the Decree of April 6, 1830," 380.

⁴⁵⁵ Santa Anna, "Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture," 15, 66.

⁴⁵⁶ Rodriguez, "Children of the Great Mexican Family": Anglo-American Immigration to Texas and the Making of the American Empire, 1820-1861," 10. Rodriguez here argues that Anglo-Americans, Texians, were attracted to Mexico because they believed they would be able to live their lives free of government interference there. They grew angry at their government when that government-imposed burdens, like taxes, upon them.

⁴⁵⁷ Almonte, *Almonte's Texas*, 213.

Tejanos and Texians, the Mexican State had to rely on other sources of legitimacy.

Failing to Deliver Positive Pain, Failure to Protect

A state's delivery of pain to its territory not only demonstrates its sovereignty, but also engenders legitimacy by protecting the persons and property of citizens. By delivering pain to malefactors, a state wins gratitude and reminds its citizens of its punitive power. Mexico failed to protect its citizens in Texas and thereby lost rather than gained legitimacy.

Plains Indians had long ravaged the persons and property of Tejanos near the San Antonio River. In 1819 Juan Antonio Padilla reported that the Comanche spread "horror and devastation" as they "terrorized" the Tejanos.⁴⁵⁸ People were not safe in the town of San Antonio.⁴⁵⁹ Historian Andrew Torget describes "starvation" in San Antonio when Comanche raids prevented farming and incompetent, bedraggled troops lacked equipment to stop the attacks, even if they had the desire.⁴⁶⁰ Another historian, Brian DeLay, calls Comanche raids in 1814 and 1815, "punishing."⁴⁶¹ These descriptions are significant because they speak to the strength of pressure on the Tejanos.

The Texians were beset by hostile Native tribes from the moment of their arrival. The Karankawa, who lived in the coastal plains, attacked the Austin Colony. In 1822 a party of newly arrived immigrants lost all of their supplies and four people to a Karankawa attack. Informed of an earlier attack, the Mexican government sent fourteen troops to the mouth of the Colorado River, but these troops were soon withdrawn, leaving Stephen F. Austin's colony responsible for

⁴⁵⁸ Padilla in Hatcher, "Texas in 1820," 55.

⁴⁵⁹ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846*, 89 and 92, Weber specifically points out that Laredo lost an eighth of its population between 1831 and 1834. Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 37-42 outlines the atrocities the Comanche inflicted upon the Tejanos in west Texas.

⁴⁶⁰ Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 40.

⁴⁶¹ DeLay, "The Wider World of the Handsome Man: Southern Plains Indians Invade Mexico, 1830-1848," 92.

its own defense. Austin personally led a campaign against the worsening Karankawa threat after the withdrawal of the Mexican troops.⁴⁶² In his account of this response to the Karankawa depredations in 1824, John Henry Brown does not mention any action by the Mexican State.⁴⁶³

Texians were constantly harassed by various Native tribes under Mexican rule. The Austin Letters are replete with examples from small scale to large scale attacks, thievery, and murder by various Natives, named and unnamed. William Barton, in 1832, mentions in a letter to Austin that he had been robbed of property worth over six hundred dollars.⁴⁶⁴ The next year, a Texian by the name of Edward Jenkins was killed by Natives, thought to be Comanche, at Barton's farm.⁴⁶⁵ The camps of some Texians were plundered by raiding Natives⁴⁶⁶ and Austin himself describes the "sudden" attacks by several bands on a settlement near the Colorado River, before proceeding to Gonzales and stealing all of the horses from the latter place.⁴⁶⁷

John Henry Brown related how thirteen travelers on their way from Natchitoches to Mexico stopped at a man's house a few miles outside of Gonzales. The man warned the travelers of approaching Natives who were likely to be violent, but his warnings were ignored and the travelers were attacked by "a hundred mounted savages" shortly after he delivered his warning. The Natives did not suffer any casualties during the four-hour engagement, and decisively ended it by rushing the travelers who had all fired their smooth-bore weapons at the same time. The

⁴⁶² Ward, "The Lower Brazos Region of Texas," 155-157. This source lists the date as 1832, however, given the dates that surround it, it appears to be a typo. The date of 1822 is also given in Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*, 127.

⁴⁶³ Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*, 6-7.

⁴⁶⁴ Transcript of Letter from William Barton to Stephen F. Austin, August 14, 1832

⁴⁶⁵ "Wood's Prairie Raid." *Border Land: The Struggle for Texas, 1820-1879*. UTA Libraries.

⁴⁶⁶ "Camp of John Brown Plundered," University of Texas at Arlington, *Border Land: The Struggle for Texas, 1820-1879*.

⁴⁶⁷ Austin, *The Austin Papers*, vol II, 15-16. The quote is translated from Spanish.

travelers were subsequently scalped and the Natives “packed all their booty on the captured mules and moved off up the country.” Crucially, the response to this attack came, not from Mexican government officials enforcing order in their territory, but from Texians who took matters into their own hands. A “band of volunteers” followed the retreating Natives shortly after they completed their grisly deeds.⁴⁶⁸

Another illustrative incident occurred far beyond the reach of the Mexican state when a family of Texians had to defend their homestead in the middle of the night from a raid by eleven to fifteen Wichita. The family’s young son was tasked with shooting any raider he saw through a gap in the door. He claimed two lives defending his family this way. The family was well-beyond the help of like-minded settlers and surely expected no help from the Mexican government. This attack occurred near present-day Killeen on the skirts of Comancheria.⁴⁶⁹

The Texian colonists were on their own and had to provide for their own defense. Austin, as the head of his colony, engaged in treaty-making with local tribes. After a Tonkawa raid on a settlement in Austin’s colony in 1824, Austin negotiated a treaty that secured his colony from further Tonkawa raids. Notably, this agreement was not made by a Mexican Army officer or agent of the Mexican State, but Stephen F. Austin, a man who was effectively a real estate developer looking after the safety of his colonists. He also prudently pursued relations with more aggressive tribes like the Wichita. Unfortunately, Austin’s initial peaceful posture did not pay off, and a war started with the Wichita in 1825.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*, 16.

⁴⁶⁹ “Wichitas Raid Joseph Taylor Farm,” University of Texas at Arlington, *Border Land: The Struggle for Texas, 1820-1879* and Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas*, 298-302

⁴⁷⁰ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 129-132.

The Mexican government made one successful effort to deliver pain and chastise the raiding Waco tribe. A counter-raid of the Waco settlement was ordered by the military commandant of Texas, Colonel Anotnio Elosua, and commanded by Captain Nicasio Sánchez. Sánchez led a complement of 152 regular and militia soldiers into the heart of Waco country and killed eight of the Natives. The success of the campaign, however, was largely measured in the 195 horses the government recovered, as well as some weapons.⁴⁷¹

The Mexican state made some additional efforts to deliver violence to the Comanche, but despite some Comanche casualties, these efforts largely failed to provide long-term security for the citizens in Texas. A Comanche raid usually followed a raid by the Mexican army, and it was usually more effective. An 1834 raid stole every horse in Goliad.⁴⁷²

Official government violence was generally delivered by troops operating out of San Antonio, or in one instance Goliad. In the latter case, government troops operated with the assistance of civilians from DeLeon's colony, who had been pestering the government for help to stop raids by the Karankawa.⁴⁷³ However, official Mexican involvement in the action was minimal, and one author states the civilians "lacked military support" in their effort to stop the Karankawa raids.⁴⁷⁴

Stephen F. Austin provides some greater detail of the lived experiences of Texian settlers in the Mexican sphere of Texas:

"The emigrants to Texas, it is well known, have *never received* any succors from the government – *no garrisons were sent to protect them during their infancy*

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 141-42. Quote in this paragraph is on page 141.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 143-44.

⁴⁷³ Himmel, *Conquest of the Karankawas and Tonkawas*, 53; Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 145.

⁴⁷⁴ Himmel, *Conquest of the Karankawas*, 53.

*from the hostile Indians who then filled every part of the country. They have never cost the government one cent—all they have ever received was permission to settle in the country, and a title for the lands...that were then valueless to Mexico or to civilized man.*⁴⁷⁵

Though Austin surely has his biases, his point, written around 1833, is a valuable one.

The Mexican State did not protect its citizens from outside aggressors. There *were* Mexican troops in Texas, but their numbers and equipage were not sufficient to deal with the plains Indians. In 1834 the poor security situation led Almonte to conclude that the

“civil militias of the frontier are as good or better than the regulars. From their youth, those people are accustomed to fighting the Indians.”⁴⁷⁶

The civil militias *had to be good* at fighting the Indians because the Mexican army could not, or would not, aid in their defense. Mexico failed to protect the settlers. The Tejanos were also concerned with the lack of protection offered by the federal government, as outlined in the book *Comanche Empire*, whose author says

“They [the Tejano Oligarchs] were deeply incensed with the federal government’s failure to provide the funds and soldiers with which Texas could have protected itself against Indian raids”

The failure of the Mexican state to deliver pain and chastise the Indians contributed to a legitimacy crisis in Texas. The central state essentially devolved responsibility for Texas’ defense to Texas citizens, and this surely lowered any affection those citizens may have felt for their masters in the core.⁴⁷⁷ Tejanos and Texians were, however, willing to tolerate this neglect—

⁴⁷⁵ Stephen F. Austin, *The Austin Papers*, Vol II., pages 387-88. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷⁶ Almonte, *Almonte’s Texas*, 2003, 225.

⁴⁷⁷ Dimick, “Lords and Orders, Credible Rulers and State Failure,” 161; Brinkerhoff et al., “Distance, services, and citizens perceptions of the state in rural Africa,” 112-115.

so long as their masters in the core did not ask much of them.⁴⁷⁸

Failing to Pay, Mexico's Financial Inefficiency

The Mexican state suffered failures in its power to persuade and deliver positive pain on behalf of its citizens in Texas. Mexico also failed to purchase their loyalty by facilitating the prosperity of Texans. In the decades after its independence, Mexico was in a very poor financial condition. From 1829 to 1844 the treasury department saw forty different leaders and handled very little money.⁴⁷⁹ The Mexican government regularly ran a deficit and relied heavily on tariffs for revenue.⁴⁸⁰ The tariffs doubled or even tripled the price of foreign goods, fell most heavily on the poor, and diverted a great deal of revenue into the hands of smugglers and dealers in contraband goods.⁴⁸¹ Per capita national income declined after Mexican independence, and it continued to decline until the Porfiriato in the 1870s.⁴⁸² The total Mexican economy grew only slowly, partly owing to mismanagement and partly owing to poor transportation. Mexico's lack of navigable rivers ensured that goods were transported overland by costly mule trains.⁴⁸³

The great geographer Alexander von Humboldt explained the transportation system of New Spain in 1811.

⁴⁷⁸ Valerio- Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands*, 3.

⁴⁷⁹ Brack, *Mexico Views Manifest Destiny, 1821-1852*, 54.

⁴⁸⁰ Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*, 18; Deeds et al., *The Course of Mexican History*, 266 highlights the annual deficit from 1839 to 1846 as having been, on average, 12.7 million pesos. While this is outside of the immediate historical period under consideration, this remains to be a relevant fact because the financial situation in the 1830s was not much better. Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 67, also highlights the poor fiscal health of the Mexican state, noting the country was “mired deeply in debt that threatened to bankrupt the government...” Moreno-Brid and Ros, *Development and Growth in the Mexican Economy*, 30 also note that Mexico was highly reliant on international trade for its revenue.

⁴⁸¹ Wylie, *Mexico: Report on its Finances Under Spanish Government Since its Independence*, 5.

⁴⁸² Coatsworth, “Obstacles to Economic Growth in Nineteenth-Century Mexico,” 81.

⁴⁸³ Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*, 91; Meinig, *Continental America, 1800-1867*, 128 also notes this lack of inland navigable waterways and transportation occurring mostly on some form of animal.

“The roads of Mexico are either carried along the central table land itself, from Oaxaca to Santa Fe, or the lead from the table land towards the coasts. The former are for carrying on a communication between the towns on the ridge of mountains, in the coldest and most populous region of the kingdom; and the later are destined for foreign commerce . . . and the ports of Veracruz and Acapulco.⁴⁸⁴

Mexico’s economic development was retarded by a high friction of distance. Mexico is not landlocked, and being relatively long and narrow might seem ideally suited to a coasting trade; but as Humboldt notes, the population was concentrated on the plateau. A coasting trade was also discouraged under Spanish rule because Spain authorized only two ports for international trade, so that all other ports were small tributaries to Acapulco and Veracruz.

But, as I just said, the majority of Mexico’s population was located in the highlands on the plateau.⁴⁸⁵ The population was concentrated in the highlands to avoid the *vomito*, or diseases that afflicted inhabitants of the *tierra caliente*. Mexico’s economy was bound to remain fragmented, regionalized, and slow growing because its population was clustered inland, it lacked navigable rivers, and the friction of distance was high on its poor roads.⁴⁸⁶

Between 1825 and 1844, forty to eighty percent of Mexican government revenue was derived from import tariffs.⁴⁸⁷ Taxation by tariff appears to be cheaper than a sales tax because there are only a few authorized ports of entry and a great many authorized points of sale. In reality, taxation by tariff invites gross corruption.⁴⁸⁸ The higher the tariff the larger the bribes

⁴⁸⁴ Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, vol. 4, 1

⁴⁸⁵ Coatsworth, “Indispensable Railroads in a Backward Economy,” 947; Bowman, “The Frontier Region of Mexico, Notes to Accompany a Map of the Frontier,” 24.

⁴⁸⁶ Moreno-Brid and Ros, *Development and Growth*, 37.

⁴⁸⁷ Stevens, *Origins of Instability*, 19; Moreno-Brid and Ros, *Development and Growth*, 34 places the figure as averaging at 45% during the “early years of independence.”

⁴⁸⁸ Baur, “The Evolution of a Mexican Foreign Trade Policy, 1821-1828,” 234.

that will be offered to customs officers in the authorized ports of entry.⁴⁸⁹ The higher the tariff the larger the incentive to evade the tariff by smuggling.

Tariffs are theoretically easy to collect, but they are also easy to evade. They are especially easy to evade in a weak state like early Mexico, where corruption was rife, and the borders were extremely porous. It is estimated that two thirds of the imported goods sold in Mexico evaded the tariff by bribery or smuggling.⁴⁹⁰ This obviously trapped Mexico in a vicious cycle where the falling quantity of imports that actually paid the tariff demanded a compensatory increase in the tariff rate, and an increase in the tariff rate increased the incentive to bribe, smuggle, and evade the tariff.

Centeno argues that reliance on the tariff also prevented Mexico from reaping the state-building benefits of its numerous wars. He asserts that a state will be strengthened by war only if it extracts taxes from domestic economic activity.⁴⁹¹ But before it can extract domestic taxation for war, a “central state must have already developed” legitimacy “over its territory.”⁴⁹² Mexico was unable to tax its population and build its internal strength because it did not have enough legitimacy. Santa Anna underlined this point when he spoke of the government’s inability to finance the campaign to Texas, saying that:

“Who does not know the conditions of our public finances? Not only was it sad, but the only hope of obtaining money for the war was the very doubtful and

⁴⁸⁹ Stevens, *Origins of Instability*, 18.

⁴⁹⁰ Levin and Miller, “Why Great Powers Expand in Their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848,” 239.

⁴⁹¹ Centeno, “Blood and Debt,” 1567, on this page he states, “military conflict allows (and force) the state to depend less on the administratively simple, but inelastic, custom taxes and to rely on the more politically challenging, but potentially more lucrative, domestic sources of revenue.”

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 1569, where I insert “legitimacy,” Centeno originally has “sovereignty.” Either term suffices in this case, though the implications are different. I chose legitimacy because the Mexican state could not raise taxes because it was not viewed legitimately by its population in Texas.

dilatory system of direct taxation that might also serve as a pretext for uprisings and popular protests. It was not, therefore, proper to adopt it.”⁴⁹³

Mexico could not raise revenue through direct taxation without risking rebellion, so it could not pay its army to protect citizens and it could not nor pay for infrastructure that would help them prosper.⁴⁹⁴

When Mexico attempted to raise revenue with customs duties on imports to Texas, it sharply increased the cost of being a Mexican citizen without increasing the benefits. The state’s legitimacy further eroded. Mexico attempted to extract revenue from Texas with the Laws of April 6, 1830.

The Law of April 6th, 1830, Illegitimately Increasing the Costs of Mexican Citizenship

Mexico passed the Laws of April 6, 1830, to bind Texas more closely to the Mexican core. These laws closed the border to American immigrants, provided for collection of customs duties, and posted troops who did not protect citizens from hostile Native raids. Stephen F. Austin expressed the anger that some of the Texians felt in a letter he wrote to protest new laws.⁴⁹⁵ He complains the Mexican state lured American immigrants into Texas, only to “close the door and shut them out forever from their friends and relations.”⁴⁹⁶ The Texians “bitterly resented” the article of the laws that forbade additional immigrants from the United States

⁴⁹³ Santa Anna, “Manifiesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture,” 8-9. Dudley, *The Word and the Sword*, 8 says of taxes the “the level at which taxes may be set depends on the gains the individual derives from the community relative to his best alternative,” unfortunately for Mexico, there were few gains to be had for being a part of the state’s community.

⁴⁹⁴ Santa Anna, “Manifiesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture,” 8, talks about how the “administrative system” in Mexico had just changed, making this a critical time period for the state.

⁴⁹⁵ Austin, *The Austin Papers VII*, 388.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

settling in Texas.⁴⁹⁷

In addition to immigration restrictions, the Laws of April 6 also reinforced Texas militarily. Further eroding Mexican legitimacy, the new troops were not for protection of citizens, but were rather for law enforcement, suppression of smuggling, and collection of customs duties.⁴⁹⁸ The effort to suppress smuggling was a major part of Terán's "military measures" to bring Texas under Mexican control.⁴⁹⁹ These measures included building forts and posting garrisons in several strategic locations.⁵⁰⁰ One of these forts was named for General Terán and placed at the Neches River crossing of a trail called the Contraband Trace.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁷ Howren, "Causes and Origin of the Decree of April 6, 1830," 422; Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 5.

⁴⁹⁸ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 185.

⁴⁹⁹ Johnson, *A History of Texas*, 62.

⁵⁰⁰ Terán, *Texas by Terán*, 185; Jackson, "Fort Tenoxtitlan;" Weir, "Velasco, TX;" Johnson, *A History of Texas*, 62.

⁵⁰¹ Zuber, "Washington on the Brazos," 5.

military measures aimed to secure a cut of that wealth for the impecunious Mexican State.⁵⁰³

Terán proposed to redirect the trade of Copáno, Velasco, and Galveston south to Veracruz, Tampico, and Matamoros, and his proposal was codified in Articles 12 and 13 of the Laws of April 6. To discourage trade with New Orleans, foreign vessels were allowed to transport goods between Texas and other Mexican ports duty free. It appears that the tax break did little to increase the appeal of these inferior markets, since Almonte renewed the effort to redirect Texas trade routes in 1834.

The Laws of April 6, 1830, attempted to tie Texas to the Mexican core, but succeeded in further alienating the citizens of Texas. Suppression of smuggling raised consumer prices, while producer profits were reduced by the collection of duties and redirection of exports to inferior markets on the coast of Mexico. Thus, the Mexican State made itself onerous and obnoxious without providing any needed services, most notably the public good of security to its citizens.⁵⁰⁴

Many of these onerous and obnoxious measures were repealed after pushback from the Texians, who in the words of one historian “challenged the power and the will of Mexico and found it weak.”⁵⁰⁵ The same historian suggests that this successful challenge to Mexican power likely emboldened the Texians and made Mexican officials view the Texians as unruly and

⁵⁰³ Austin, *The Austin Papers*, Vol II, 1928, page 227, Austin says that the value of Texas “was unknown or greatly doubted” when he immigrated there in the winter of 1821-22. On page 387, he outlines the fact that Texas was weakening the Spanish government during the late 1700s, as it yielded “no revenue in return for the millions expended in its defence (sic.)” On page 388 he asserts that the Anglo colonists had made Texas valuable to the Mexican government, reiterating that it had previously been “valulless (sic.)”

⁵⁰⁴ This resentment bubbled up into armed conflict in the case of the Anahuac disturbances as well as the Battle of Nacogdoches. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 5-7 outlines the Anahuac disturbances resulting from the attempted collection of taxes by the central government. Parker, “Mirabeau B. Lamar’s Texas Journal,” 310-311. Parker’s footnotes on the context for the rebellion are the most helpful information on these pages. See also, Blount, “The Old Red House at Nacogdoches,” 590.

⁵⁰⁵ Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 5.

rebellious, thereby setting the two sides on a path towards armed confrontation.⁵⁰⁶

In his response to the Laws of April 6, Stephen F. Austin wrote, “moral obligation, and interests are the two great cords that bind communities, states and nations together.”⁵⁰⁷ We have seen the many reasons why the sense of moral obligation to Mexico was very weak in Texas. When the Mexican State attempted to tighten the cords that bound Texas to it with the Laws of April 6, Texians began to doubt that they were tied to the Mexican State by interests. They had not reached the point of open rebellion, but they were discontent and well aware that the Mexican State was weak.⁵⁰⁸

Failing to Deliver Pain, Failing to Secure Sovereignty, the Texas Rebellion

The Sphere Slipping Away, the Anahuac Disturbances and Battle of Nacogdoches

Two violent clashes were occasioned by the Laws of April 6, the Anahuac Disturbances and the Battle of Nacogdoches. Both events were triggered because the Mexican government was trying to extract wealth from Texians without providing anything in return.⁵⁰⁹ These two clashes were significant because they revealed the Mexican state’s inability to deliver pain east of the Colorado River.

The Anahuac disturbances occurred in 1832, two years after Colonel Juan Davis Bradburn, a Mexican officer, had taken command of a fort at the mouth of the Trinity River to enforce the Laws of April 6. Prior to the disturbances, Bradburn angered Texians by enforcing the collection of customs duties on goods coming south from east Texas. Not only did Bradburn

⁵⁰⁶ Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 8.

⁵⁰⁷ Austin, *Austin Papers Vol. II*, 389. The author substituted “ties,” for “cords.” Austin used the word cords.

⁵⁰⁸ Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 5, discusses that the Texians were airing their grievances within the state’s institutions.

⁵⁰⁹ Areas as far south as Laredo were subject to Indian Raids, as noted by Jose Maria Sánchez while traveling with General Terán. *Texas by Terán*, 250.

collect customs duties, he also collected them in an inconvenient way. Because Fort Velasco, at the mouth of the Brazos River, did not yet have a customs officer, every ship sailing from the Brazos River had to sail past Galveston Island, through Galveston Bay, and to the northeastern corner of Trinity Bay, to file the paperwork and pay the fees. This inconvenience and Bradburn's attempt to collect retroactive duties angered Texians. Some ships ignored Bradburn's rules; gunfire was exchanged at one point. The spark that set off the Anahuac disturbances occurred amidst these strained relations.

That spark was a dustup between William B. Travis, future hero of the Alamo, and Colonel Bradburn over slaves that had run away from a plantation in Louisiana. Bradburn took in runaway American slaves who sought asylum in Mexican Texas, and offered them protection from slave catchers working for their former masters. In this case, a slave catcher working for a Louisiana planter enlisted the help of Travis, Travis tried to trick Bradburn with false intelligence that a force had crossed the border from Louisiana to retake the slaves, and Bradburn, discovering the ruse, locked Travis and an associate in a brick kiln (the failing Mexican State did not have a secure jail).

About two hundred outraged Texians marched from the Brazos River to Turtle Bayou, a marshy area six miles north of Anahuac. The Mexican regulars clashed with the Texian militia on the eighth and ninth of June, 1832, and the Texians briefly captured Bradburn's cavalry. The militia avoided a decisive engagement, awaiting artillery that was on the way by sea from Brazoria. This artillery was intercepted by Mexican forces at Fort Velasco in another battle.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ Henson, *Juan Davis Bradburn: a reappraisal of the Mexican Commander of Anahuac*, 81. Henson says of the troops at Velasco that "since it lacked fort or cannon, few members of the Anglo community respected the authority

The delay gave Bradburn's superior, Col. Jose de las Piedras, time to arrive from Nacogdoches. Piedras yielded to the Texians' demands because he thought he was outnumbered. Bradburn was fired, Travis was released, the Mexican regulars mutinied against their officers, and the Fort Anahuac was abandoned.⁵¹¹ The Mexican State had been challenged and had failed.

The second confrontation occasioned by the Laws of April 6 was the Battle of Nacogdoches. This again involved Colonel Piedras, who had previously shown weakness in the Anahuac Disturbances. Fearing an uprising similar to that at Anahuac, Piedras ordered the Texians in Nacogdoches to give up their weapons. The Texians reply was effectively the same as their reply in Gonzales a few years later. "Come and take it!"

Rather than obeying, the Texians ordered Piedras to rescind his order and declare support for Santa Anna.⁵¹² Piedras refused and distributed his troops among three key buildings in Nacogdoches. The Texian force advanced on the town, and after a charge by Mexican cavalry drove off all but 100 of the Texians, house-to-house fighting ensued. Though progress was slow, the Texians encircled the town, forcing Piedras and his troops to flee Nacogdoches in the direction of San Antonio. The Texians pursued them. When they engaged the fleeing troops on the Angela River, the Mexican soldiers turned against Piedras and surrendered. The Nacogdoches garrison of 300 was taken prisoner, Piedras was taken to Stephen F. Austin, who sent him back to Mexico, and soldiers were marched out of Texian territory by James Bowie. Mexican casualties were ten times greater than Texian ones.

that the garrison was supposed to represent." The Texians, then, were unwilling to comply with state regulations unless it was at the point of a sword.

⁵¹¹ Previous three paragraphs are based on Henson, 1952, "Anahuac Disturbances," entry in the Texas State Historical Association's entry for the Anahuac Disturbances.

⁵¹² Santa Anna was a federalist at this time. He transitioned into a centralist in 1835.

The significance of the battle of Nacogdoches is that a rag tag rabble had defeated Mexican regulars in open battle and there was no reprisal. Mexico was never afterwards able to enforce its sovereignty east of the Colorado River. It could not persuade, it could not pay, and it could not deliver pain.⁵¹³ The Mexican State was *failing*.

Assessing a Failing State, Almonte's Map

When the Mexican military was cleared out of east Texas in 1832, the Mexican State had no “sensors” in place to surveil the territory. In 1834 it sent Juan N. Almonte into Texas to accomplish that task. Almonte started his travels, tellingly, by traveling to Texas via New Orleans. He traveled from the core of Mexico to New Orleans, and then went on foot to Nacogdoches.⁵¹⁴ His immediate assessment of Nacogdoches is even more damning than Terán’s talk of a virtually nonexistent Mexican influence in the town. Almonte says of Nacogdoches,

“the state of abandonment in which I found that town was truly appalling... There is not a single soldier there, and currently there do not exist in Béxar more than two presidial companies... These are the only troops to be found in all of Texas.”⁵¹⁵

These two companies were responsible for defending all of Texas, which Almonte estimated to be about 21,000 square leagues. Thus, the frontier had been “abandoned” and the Texians had been “unattended” since the battle of Nacogdoches.⁵¹⁶

Almonte goes on to say that it is “useless to think of ending abuses... without troops on the frontier.” He means that Mexican sovereignty was a fiction without enforcement. In fact, Almonte says that the government would “seem ridiculous” if it were to try and insist that the

⁵¹³ McDonald, “Nacogdoches, Battle of,” 1952.

⁵¹⁴ Almonte, *Almonte's Texas*, 208.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pages 212-13.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 210.

Texians obey its orders, since the Texians would say “come and take it” and the Mexican government would have no reply.⁵¹⁷ Many ethnic Mexicans in Nacogdoches wanted this military presence as well, as it would ensure that the Texians had “respect for the actions of the authorities.”⁵¹⁸ But, without a military presence, laws and customs duties would go unenforced and uncollected, and Texas would be at risk of separation from Mexico’s union.⁵¹⁹

In addition to advising renewal of an official presence in east Texas, Almonte advised the government to settle ethnic Mexicans among the Texians. The ethnic Americans were more willing to battle the Indians on their own, but Almonte thought there would be “no lack of Mexicans” who would be willing to settle in the frontier if the State would protect them⁵²⁰

With a remilitarization of east Texas, Almonte hoped to pacify the Texians and attract ethnic Mexicans. For this to succeed he proposed the establishment of a military headquarters in either San Antonio or Nacogdoches.⁵²¹ The states of Texas and Coahuila were combined in 1824, and the state capital and military headquarters was thereafter south of the Rio Grande in Matamoros, Monclova, or Saltillo. Almonte understood the utility of a “forward capital” and disutility of capital six hundred miles to the rear. At that great distance from his area of operations, State officers could not “accurately” understand what was going on and would take

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 134.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, page 134.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pages 213-214.

⁵²⁰ Almonte, *Almonte’s Texas*, page 225.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, page 218. Almonte argues that the military commander of Texas’ forces needs to be closer to where the problems are, so he advocates creating a commander of troops, who would report directly to the “supreme government” but “work in coordination with the Commandant General of the Eastern Interior States.” When Terán held this post, his headquarters was in Matamoros, according to the biographical entry on Terán on the Texas State Historical Association’s website, found [here](#).

“misguided measures” at the expense of “the nation.”⁵²² Almonte believed that a military commander or governor stationed in the middle of Texas, or at least in San Antonio on its western edge, would be able to more accurately understand and respond to events in east Texas, thereby benefiting “the nation.”

Almonte also understood that Texas had been artificially isolated by Spain’s poor commercial policies. Tejanos, and later Texians, had been forced into a contraband trade with Louisiana rather than with the interior of Mexico.⁵²³ Almonte further understood that this isolation was artificial and could be overcome with a coasting trade in the Gulf to reduce the friction of distance. To that end, he advised the government to continue the provision in the law of April 6, 1830, that allowed foreign vessels to ply a coastwise trade between Mexican ports.⁵²⁴ Almonte and many Mexicans understood that the Gulf was key to connecting Texas.

At one point in his report Almonte asks, “if, then, the condition of Texas is so prosperous what prevents Mexicans from enjoying its prosperity?” He answers this question by saying, “I have heard that one of the objections raised against the colonization of Texas by Mexicans is the distance that lies between Mexico and Texas.” Almonte’s solution to the friction of distance is simply this:

“those who reason thus, forget, undoubtedly, that in order to go to that territory, *it is not necessary to travel the entire distance by land*, for one may go from here to Veracruz in four days, and from there to Galveston or Brazoria in six or eight more... Texas can be made in twelve or fourteen days at the most.”⁵²⁵

⁵²² Almonte, *Almonte’s Texas*, 218.

⁵²³ Poyo, “Community and Autonomy,” 11; Matovina, “Shifting Regional Identity: The Mexican Period, 1821-1836,” 8. The latter citation reflects the enduring nature of legal and illegal trade with Louisiana; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 94 discusses how trade between northern Mexico and the Southern US increased.

⁵²⁴ Almonte, “Statistical Report on Texas,” 193.

⁵²⁵ Almonte, “Statistical Report on Texas,” 179. Emphasis added.

Almonte correctly diagnosed the geopolitical problems Mexico faced in Texas, and he proposed the correct remedies. The recalcitrant alien population of Texians would have to be pacified with a show of force, while being at the same time assimilated to Mexican culture by contact with ethnic Mexican settlers. A forward capital would have to be established in Texas. Isolation would have to overcome by developing the Gulf. But time had run out for the failing Mexican State and Almonte's recommendations came too late. It is in any case doubtful the Mexican State had the resources, unity, and general competence to implement them.

Inability to Deliver Pain, a Weak Mexican National Army

DePalo, a former U.S. Army Officer, provides an excellent account of the overall state of decay in the Mexican Army at the start of the Texas revolution. From its inception Mexico had struggled to meet the payroll of the army. During the short-lived reign of Agustín de Iturbide in the 1820s, the government was “inconsistent” in meeting “payroll obligations in a timely manner,” which “accelerated the desertion rate.”⁵²⁶ The military consumed about 85 percent of the national budget and the government was experiencing “diminished revenues.”⁵²⁷ By 1825 the lack of revenue and chaotic administration resulted in an authorized force of 62,552 soldiers (regular and reserve formations) to have only 32,161 soldiers in uniform.⁵²⁸ The decline continued, with the authorized strength of the Federal army reduced to 22,056 troops in 1833, but only 9,509 soldiers in uniform.⁵²⁹ The active militias could field only 5,209 of their 38,513 paper soldiers at this time.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 25.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

To make matters worse, the central government devolved some military authority to the state governments, which created militias of national-guard-like soldiers called *civicos*. Some state governors used this opportunity to amass large formations of troops, as was the case in Zacatecas who had roughly 17,000 troops in their state militia.⁵³¹ These state militias could challenge the central government for sovereignty, a situation that motivated Santa Anna to crush the militia in Zacatecas after the governor there refused to obey the central state's order to abolish its militia.

The manning situation did not improve between Santa Anna's defeat of the rebels at Zacatecas and the Texas rebellion. DePalo has an apt quote that summarizes the state of the army in 1836:

“Despite consuming a disproportionate share of federal revenues since independence, the permanent army had little to show for its extravagance. Units remained poorly trained, ill-equipped, and increasingly personalized. Absent a bond of national fealty, the army remained a collection of provincial constabularies more concerned with preserving regional autonomy than defending national interests.”⁵³²

So, when the time came to mobilize and defeat the rebels in Texas, the Mexican government was unable to send their sharpest knife into the sphere. Out of a total of 18,219 permanent federal troops who should have been available, the government was able to mobilize only 3,500 for the expedition to Texas.⁵³³ With militia units this force ended up totaling 6,000, but it was “poorly equipped, shoddily clothed, and undernourished, and exhibited a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the enterprise they were about to undertake.”⁵³⁴ An underwhelming force,

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

numbering 6,000, had to lumber to Texas to take on a fiercely determined, reasonably well-equipped, although somewhat undisciplined enemy, fighting on its own turf.⁵³⁵

Mexico was stabbing with a blunt knife.

Failure to Deliver Pain, Mexico Invades Texas

“These objections also were due to the fact that the government needed strong garrisons; its power had been created by bayonets and now had to be upheld by them.”

De la Peña, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, pages 8-9.

By the fall of 1835 the legitimacy of the Mexican state had failed in Texas. On October 2 Texians and Tejanos in Gonzales defied a government order to return a cannon with the now famous slogan, “come and take it.” Soon after, they laid siege to General Cos and his garrison at San Antonio, eventually forcing him to retire south of the Rio Grande. The Mexican state had been removed from all of Texas, and now had to deliver overwhelming violence to Texas or concede it was lost.

On top of the grave problems already described, a Mexican reconquest of Texas would have to overcome serious geographical obstacles. The natural defenses of the state were neatly described in a letter written in 1834, from Matagorda to the *National Banner* of Nashville, Tennessee. The writer, who signed his letter D, senses trouble in the offing and begins,

“We hear and feel the low rumbling of an earthquake. It may be stilled and cease for years to come, or it may burst forth from its pent cavern in wrath, fire, and destruction.”⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ Hardin, *The Alamo 1836*, 72 implies Houston’s troops were undisciplined because they greatly benefitted from the two weeks they spent at Groce’s ferry practicing in military drills.

⁵³⁶ D, *National Banner and Daily Advertiser* [Nashville, Tn.] (April 2, 1834), p. 3.

D was however confident that this earthquake could not destroy an independent Texas

“The strong natural defenses of the country consists in her rivers, which intersect at right angles the lines of march of any military force that could be brought against her. The banks of these rivers are defended . . . by dense and dark forests, filled with an undergrowth of vines and bushes. The largest of the rives, the Trinity, Brazos, Guadalupe and the Nueces, are fordable but at particular places, and then at low stages of water only.”

This is correct. The advance of an invading Mexican army would be channeled between the Gulf of Mexico and the high plateau of Comancheria, and this bottleneck would force it to cross a succession of increasingly large rivers, either on rafts or at predictable crossings well suited to ambush.

The Nueces Strip or Mustang Desert furnished another natural barrier orthogonal to the Mexican line of advance.

“Between the Nueces and Rio Grande is the Mustang desert—*Mustang* is the Mexican name for the wild horse. In this desert I have been obliged to dip the brackish water from a hole excavated in the ground . . . In crossing the desert, an army must march three days without water.”

After crossing the Mustang Desert, and before reaching the great rivers, a Mexican army would have to pass through the narrows where the convex lines of the coastline and Balcones Escarpment approach within one hundred miles of each other. Here the army’s left flank would be exposed to the Comanche and their right flank would be exposed to Texian guerillas operating out of the coastal marshes and lagoons.

“But suppose this desert crossed, and an army marching to the neighborhood of the [Austin] colony, their left flank would be liable to be harassed by the Comanche Indians . . . The right flank of such an army would be in no less danger than the other. There is a chain of [islands] extending along the coast . . . The sound behind these islands can be navigated at all times by small open boats with perfect safety. Against a fleet of such boats the Mexicans could offer no opposition, and the colonists could send a force in boats and place it upon the right flank or rear of the enemy at pleasure . . .”

If the Mexican army made it through this bottleneck and crossed the Colorado River, it would be menaced on every hand by woodlands in which the Texians could fight with great advantage.

The great Brazos and San Jacinto timbers would lay athwart their path, and the great Texas Timber Belt would hem them in on the north.

“The forces of Texas would consist of riflemen, and there are no better marksmen in the world. In making an attack they would choose the woodlands on the banks of streams. In such situations the best disciplined regulars cannot cope [with] riflemen—secure behind trees—with their enemies a fair mark.”

And if Mexico imagined that it could bypass these obstacles and invade east Texas directly from the Gulf.

“The colonists entertain no fear of an invasion by water, the whole naval force of Mexico consisting of but some half dozen vessels of perhaps a hundred tons burthen. Their large vessels are all rotten. They have not vessels enough in their whole mercantile service, to afford transport for an army. And were they to charter foreign vessels for this service, should the colonists capture any of them—no matter to what nation she might belong, the captain would find himself summarily pendent at the yardarm of his own ship—or making his last struggles in the deep.”

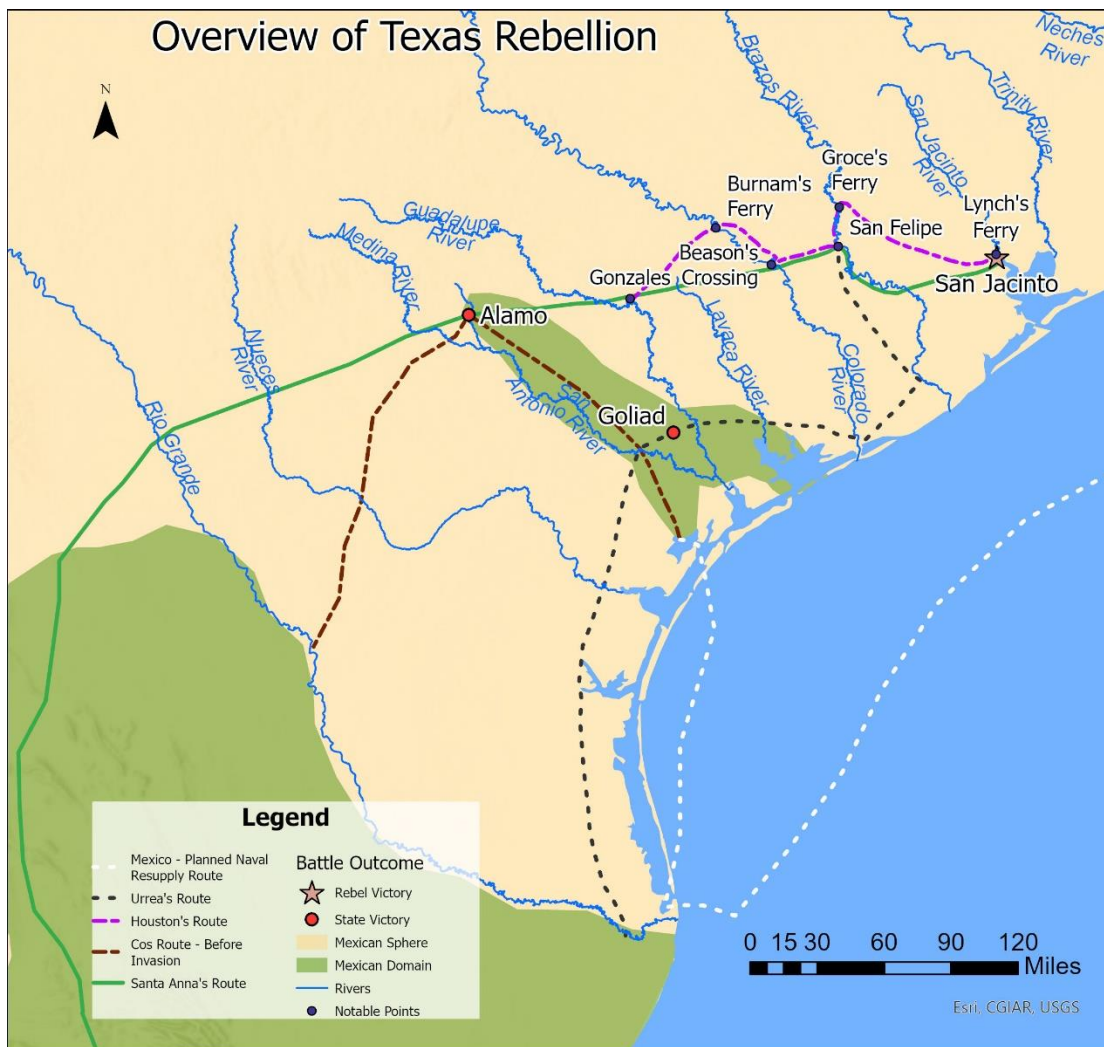


Figure V-2. Overview of the Texas Rebellion

This map shows that Mexico effectively applied military power in its Domain, but was unable to do so in the Sphere. Cos's route of travel began at the coast and ended along the Rio Grande, countering the movement of the rest of the Mexican Army, which was primarily west to east.

Mexico's attempted reconquest of Texas can be divided into two parts: the successful reconquest of the San Antonio River Enclave and the disastrous San Jacinto campaign in east Texas (figure V-2).⁵³⁷ The first part began with Santa Anna's army advancing from Saltillo to

⁵³⁷ Barker, "The San Jacinto Campaign." 237-345.

San Antonio over the “northern route.”⁵³⁸ This crossed the Mustang desert, suffered from a lack of “water and forage,” and imposed “severe hardship upon the army.”⁵³⁹ Santa Anna ignored the Gulf of Mexico and the potential of Matamoros as a source of supplies.⁵⁴⁰

“Unfortunately for the commander, the land, south of San Antonio at least, simply would not sustain a large body of men and animals, with the effect that the logistics of his campaign were poorly handled; and he found himself short of supplies...”⁵⁴¹

The march and supply lines across the Mustang Desert were “unnecessary,” and the hardships in this “inhospitable terrain,” contributing to a rash of desertions.⁵⁴² In addition to the unforgiving terrain, the Mexican Army was struck by a February blizzard that dropped 16 inches of snow.⁵⁴³ Santa Anna’s army lacked food and water, survived their lack of supplies by “pillaging” or receiving a “donation” from the people of Nuevo León or other Mexican citizens.⁵⁴⁴

Santa Anna’s strategy was to have two columns converge on San Antonio. The town itself was not strategically valuable, but Santa Anna believed that recovery of the last Mexican

⁵³⁸ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 53. The northern route was the route along the Camino Real which went from Saltillo through Guerrero and onward to San Antonio. General Filisola advised Santa Anna to take a more southerly route and focus on taking Goliad, ignoring San Antonio.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ Pohl and Hardin, “The Military History of the Texas Revolution: An Overview,” 278.

⁵⁴² DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 54. Santa Anna, “Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture,” 10-11, Santa Anna himself acknowledges the “high” cost of transportation between San Luis Potosi and Texas, and he was, in his own words, concerned about finding enough food for his troops.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ Presley, “Santa Anna’s Invasion of Texas: A Lesson in Command,” 244 says that “provisions often had to be produced under duress in towns and villages along the route, an act that produced outraged and resentful citizens.” DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 56 specifically uses the word “pillaging” to describe how the Mexican Army acquired supplies as it traveled north. Santa Anna, “Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture,” 11 said that the people “donated food supplies to the army,” at the “instigation of their worthy and patriotic governors.” This author is inclined to believe that these supplies were forcibly acquired and not donated in the altruistic sense of the word.

stronghold in Texas was critical to national pride.⁵⁴⁵ The old La Bahia presidio at Goliad was the real strategic key to Texas, because from this point an army could cut supplies from the coast to San Antonio, and advance east to Austin's colony on the lower Brazos, or northeast towards Nacogdoches.⁵⁴⁶ Santa Anna later defended his determination to capture San Antonio with the claim that it was the "door" to the Army's "future operations."⁵⁴⁷ But it was a blunder from the military point of view. He would have effectively controlled San Antonio from Goliad because he would have controlled its communication with the coast. But control of San Antonio did not entail effective control of Goliad, and San Antonio was not the ideal *point d'appu* for the final assault on the Texian strongholds in east Texas.⁵⁴⁸

In any case, Santa Anna succeeded in capturing both San Antonio and Goliad.⁵⁴⁹ These victories were significant for two reasons. First, they show that the Mexican State could deliver overwhelming violence across the Mustang Desert and into the San Antonio River Enclave, a detached particle, or incipient outlier, of the Mexican domain. The government could enforce its sovereignty here, even if many Tejanos did not accept its legitimacy.

The second reason these two victories are significant is that they demonstrate what can happen when the state *misdelivers* pain. Pain normally subdues a rebellion, but misdelivered pain fans the flames of rebellion with outrages and atrocities. Goliad was especially illustrative of

⁵⁴⁵ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 53.

⁵⁴⁶ Pohl and Hardin, "The Military History of the Texas Revolution: An Overview," 290-291.

⁵⁴⁷ Santa Anna, "Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture," 13.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26 Santa Anna notes the strategic importance of the Texas coast as an avenue of supply for the rebels, as well as an avenue of escape. The importance of the Coast is also corroborated by General Filisola, who was particularly interested in taking Goliad, see Filisola, "Representation to the Supreme Government," 197; DePalo, *Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 53; Pohl and Hardin, "The Military History of the Texas Revolution," 288; and Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 106.

⁵⁴⁹ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, 57. Santa Anna, "Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture," 25-26 also defends his decision to send Urrea along the coast to secure his freedom of movement and deny supplies for the Texans.

this, because General Urrea murdered James Fannin and his troops after they surrendered, following the battle of Coleto Creek; but the Mexican massacres at the Alamo and Goliad both became battle cries—true *slogans*—when the rebels rallied to crush the Mexican army at San Jacinto.

Santa Anna did not understand his enemy. He miscalculated when he thought that the rebels, especially the Texians, could be overawed into submission through a massive delivery of pain in the form of terror, brutality, and massacre. While this tactic had worked at Zacatecas, it backfired in Texas and inflamed the rebels.⁵⁵⁰ In Zacatecas, brutality *reinforced* the legitimacy of the Mexican State by proving its superiority to local renegades. In Texas, brutality *undermined* the legitimacy of the Mexican State because it proved the rebel's complaint that the Mexican State was *tyrannical*.

Despite his victories at the Alamo and Goliad, Santa Anna's army was in a precarious position. It was living off the land and reliant on long, vulnerable overland supply lines. Santa Anna did try to supply his army via the Gulf, but as the correspondent from Matagorda had predicted, the Texas Navy was able to foil this plan in the waters outside of Matamoros (see the white line in figure two for the proposed route of the supply mission).⁵⁵¹ The incident of the Brig Pocket, when the Texas Navy intercepted supplies bound for Santa Anna's army at Matamoros,

⁵⁵⁰ Winders, "This is a Cruel Truths, But I cannot Omit It," 431-32. Winders says that General Urrea expressed reluctance to carry out his orders to kill the rebel prisoners after the battle of Coleto Creek, understanding that doing so would be counterproductive to the mission of reincorporating Texas into the Mexican state.

⁵⁵¹ Jordan, *Lone Star Navy: Texas, the Fight for the Gulf of Mexico, and the Shaping of the American West*, 310. The Brig Pocket intercepted supplies eventually destined for the Mexican Army outside of Matamoros. General Filisola references this important supply shipment in Filisola, "Representation to the Supreme Government," 197.

illustrates the impossibility of using the Gulf to support the army when there was, effectively, no Mexican navy.⁵⁵²

Up to the conquest of the San Antonio River Enclave in early 1836, Santa Anna's forces were favored because of their massive numerical advantage. This numerical advantage carried the day at the Alamo, and the use of cavalry was a key component in Fannin's defeat at Coleto Creek, outside of Goliad. But the second stage of the reconquest of Texas—the San Jacinto Campaign—required Santa Anna to cross the Colorado River and enter the rebels' territory, where the supply lines were longer, the rivers were deeper, the woods were thicker, and the rebels were fighting for hearth and home with the war cry of Goliad and Alamo in their mouths.

Slipping up in the Sphere: The San Jacinto Campaign

“Although the long hike probably left scars on the Mexican Army, its problems changed considerably with the geographical change.”

Presley, “Santa Anna in Texas: A Mexican Viewpoint” (1959)⁵⁵³

Santa Anna said that his plan after the battle of the Alamo was to cut off the retreat of the Texans' rebel army. But as he pursued the fleeing army, the pain he was able to deliver decreased with every step he took further east. Compounding the simple distance decay of power were the “natural obstacles” his advancing army faced and he “had no means to overcome.”⁵⁵⁴ As the correspondent from Matagorda had foretold two years before, these natural obstacles were the orthogonal Colorado and Brazos Rivers, each running through a sheath of tangled timber, and the great Texas Timber Belt that hedged Santa Anna on the north. Mud was another obstacle for which Santa Anna's desert army was poorly prepared. There had been too little water in the

⁵⁵² Neu, “The case of the Brig Pocket,” 276-295.

⁵⁵³ Presley, “Santa Anna in Texas: A Mexican Viewpoint,” 505.

⁵⁵⁴ Santa Anna, “Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture,” 23.

Mustang Desert; on the coast of Texas, there was often too much. When the rivers flooded, the army did not have gear to cross them easily.⁵⁵⁵ None of these factors stopped Santa Anna's army, but each added its tax to the delivery cost of violence. The Mexican army grew weaker the farther it went east into this alien terrain.

There were no major battles fought between the Alamo and San Jacinto, since the Texas army was strategically retreating to weaken its pursuers. Sam Houston knew he was outnumbered and must therefore fight Santa Anna in the time and place most advantageous to himself. Drawing Santa Anna east fatigued the Mexican army, reduced its numerical advantage, and extended its supply lines. Drawing him towards the woods reduced Santa Anna's advantage of superior cavalry.⁵⁵⁶

Santa Anna pursued Houston's army to the vicinity of San Felipe on the lower Brazos River. But around the 12th of April, Santa Anna decided that Houston's army was no longer his primary objective, and that he would instead try and catch the retreating rebel government in Harrisburg, near present downtown Houston.⁵⁵⁷ He had just learned of the government's location and decided to quickly advance across the Houston Prairie with a force of approximately 950 men, and hopefully quash the rebellion by capturing its leaders.⁵⁵⁸ Houston had two weeks earlier marched upriver from San Felipe to Groce's plantation, where he drilled his troops for approximately two weeks.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁵ Presley, "Santa Anna in Texas: A Mexican Viewpoint," 511.

⁵⁵⁶ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army*, 59-60.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ Hardin, *The Alamo 1836: Santa Anna's Texas Campaign*, 72-73. DePalo, *The Mexican National Army*, 61.

⁵⁵⁹ DePalo, *The Mexican National Army*, 61 asserts that Santa Anna moved to cut off Houston's Troops. Hardin, *The Alamo 1836: Santa Anna's Texas Campaign*, 73 asserts that Santa Anna's objective was to cut off the retreating Texas government. This discrepancy should not worry us, however, because Santa Anna's intentions do not change

In Santa Anna's haste to catch the leaders of the rebel government, he overtaxed his men.⁵⁶⁰ His army had been on the march since it left Saltillo and Sam Houston's strategic retreat had worn them down. Santa Anna's dash across the Houston Prairie had been the last straw.

Santa Anna did not know that Houston's army had moved east from Groce's ferry, and he was surprised to find it positioned on the west bank of the San Jacinto River.⁵⁶¹ The two armies eyed one another without much significant action on April 20th, with Houston waiting until the following afternoon to attack.

Thankfully for the Texians, the Mexican Army did not post sentries on the afternoon of the 21st, so the Texians were able to sneak up on the sleeping Mexicans and attack before some of their enemies were awake.⁵⁶² Some critics condemn this surprise attack as a dirty trick, or as evidence that the Texians held the Mexicans in contempt, but these scolds have obviously never fought a war, and appear to forget that Texian troops were slaughtered at Goliad and the Alamo in cold blood.⁵⁶³ In any case, contempt for the enemy obviously went the other way, as evidenced by the napping Mexican soldiers.

Before we look at the Battle of San Jacinto in detail, it will be useful to step back and consider the San Jacinto campaign from the perspective of military science. The classic text of military science at that time was *On War*, published in 1832 by the widow of Carl von

the fact that he advanced from his main body with a smaller contingent of troops, which largely evened the numbers for the upcoming battle of San Jacinto. Additionally, I would come down on the side of Hardin, as he cites evidence that Houston could have fled north towards Nacogdoches and was not necessarily bound for Harrisburg.

⁵⁶⁰ Santa Anna, "Manifesto Relative to His Operation in the Texas Campaign and His Capture," 15. Santa Anna says that "brevity was the ruling principle" of his plan post-Alamo. He found himself harassed by guerrillas and split his force to try and deal with those soldiers. DePalo, *The Mexican National Army*, 59 also notes that the poor supply situation around San Antonio prompted Santa Anna to move on quickly after the battle of the Alamo.

⁵⁶¹ Hardin, *The Alamo 1836*, 66, 79.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 79-81.

⁵⁶³ Burrough et al., *Forget the Alamo*, 141-42.

Clausewitz. Clausewitz tells us that a strategic retreat tends to demoralize the retreating army, particularly when the retreat follows a major defeat. The pursuing army on the other hand “presses forward . . . with the overweening spirit which good fortune imparts,” even “with the confidence of a demi-god.” Morale in the Mexican and Texian armies clearly conformed to this pattern, with the Mexican army becoming overconfident to the point of recklessness, and the Texian army becoming demoralized to the brink of mutiny.⁵⁶⁴

At the material level, however, every step in a strategic retreat increases the relative strength of the *retreating army*; or as Clausewitz puts it: “every assailant in advancing diminishes his military strength by the advance.”⁵⁶⁵

Clausewitz gives three main reasons for the growing material advantage of a retreating army, all of which were in play in Houston’s strategic retreat to the San Jacinto River. The first reason is that the retreating army wastes the country through which it retreats, thus forcing the advancing army to devote an ever-increasing share of its men and material to foraging the wasted country and operating lengthening supply lines.

“The Army in retreat has the means of collecting provisions everywhere, and he marches towards them, whilst the pursuer must have everything brought after him . . . All that the country yields will be taken for the benefit of the retreating Army first, and will be mostly consumed.”⁵⁶⁶

The second reason is that the pursuing army is stretched thin and depleted by the detachment of units to occupy the territory it conquers, whereas the retreating army is concentrated and, “in the great majority of cases,” augmented by reinforcements, “either in the

⁵⁶⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, vol. 2, 325.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 326.

form of help from abroad or through persistent efforts at home.” The original Mexican army was in this way depleted by detachments to occupy San Antonio, Goliad, and Bastrop. Houston, meanwhile, may have entertained an unrealized hope of reinforcement by the American garrison at Fort Jessup, near Natchitoches, but was certainly reinforced by volunteers who flocked to his army as Santa Anna advanced into east Texas.⁵⁶⁷

Thirdly, Clausewitz explains that a strategic retreat draws the enemy into a position where a lost battle will be debacle because there is no refuge into which the defeated and disorganized army can safely retreat and recover. “What a difference,” Clausewitz writes, “between a battle lost close to the frontier of our country and one in the middle of the enemy’s country.”⁵⁶⁸ A battle lost deep within enemy territory is especially catastrophic when the defeated and disorganized army happens to be commanded by its country’s commander in chief.

The crushing Mexican victories at San Antonio and Goliad clearly filled Santa Anna with “the overweening spirit which good fortune imparts,” and this rose to “the confidence of a demi-god” when Houston’s army fell back from the Colorado River. But the material reality was that Santa Anna’s army was stretched and depleted when he reached the Brazos, and that it was further depleted when he made his impetuous dash to capture the rebel government at Harrisburg. By the time Santa Anna met Houston on the San Jacinto, his numerical advantage had shrunk from around 6:1 to 4:3. And this small numerical advantage was nullified by fatigue and over-confidence, so that the Battle of San Jacinto was lost. This lost battle was a debacle because it occurred so deep with enemy territory, and there was no way for the shattered army or

⁵⁶⁷ Barker, “The San Jacinto Campaign,” 249-251.

⁵⁶⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, vol. 2, 327.

its commander (who was also commander in chief of all Mexico), to retreat to a safe refuge and reorganize.

The Battle of San Jacinto was a debacle. Six hundred and thirty Mexicans were killed, whereas the Texian death toll was nine. That was slightly less than half of the Mexican army on the field that day. Disorganized by the debacle, and without the slightest hope of safe retreat, surviving Mexican soldiers and their commander were taken prisoner. As a prisoner of the Texian rebels, Santa Anna had no choice but to sign the Treaties of Velasco. By this instrument Santa Anna conceded that the reconquest of Texas had failed.

Santa Anna bears some of the blame for this state failure. He blundered when he focused on San Antonio, when he failed to use the Gulf for transport, when he massacred the Texians at the Alamo and Goliad, when he pursued Houston into east Texas, and when he camped his army in an open field within sight of his enemies. These were all pivotal points that helped the rebelling Texians. But Santa Anna's many blunders must be seen within the vastly larger historical geography of Hispano-Mexican state failure that this dissertation describes.

By the terms of the Public Treaty of Velasco, Santa Anna agreed to permanently end hostilities with Texas and order all Mexican forces to retreat south of the Rio Grande. His subordinates obeyed the order and withdrew south over what was now the effective, although still disputed, international boundary. General Filisola later said his retreat was largely because of the "inclemency of the season,"⁵⁶⁹ as his troops in Texas were surrounded by a "sea of mud."⁵⁷⁰ Some modern historians have joined Filisola in the pretense that Mexico was defeated

⁵⁶⁹ Filisola, "Representation to the Supreme Government," 181.

⁵⁷⁰ Hardin, *The Alamo 1836*, 84-85.

by Texas weather and not Texian arms.⁵⁷¹ But, once again, the truth is that Hispano-Mexican state failure was a vastly larger process of political collapse. It certainly was not entirely Santa Anna's fault, and it certainly was not entirely the fault of bad weather.

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⁵⁷¹ Dimmick, "Mexican Army in Texas: The Sea of Mud."

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CHAPTER VI

THE MADNESS OF A FAILING STATE AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

“Because political boundaries form the areal expression of the limits of jurisdiction and power of the system to which they belong, they are perhaps the most palpable political geographic phenomena.”

Minghi, “Boundary Studies in Political Geography” (1963)

In the spring of 1846, Mexico declared a defensive war against the United States because the United States had placed an army and fort on the debatable land of the Nueces Strip. Less than two years later, Mexico had lost more than half of its territory and suffered the humiliations of repeated military defeats and a foreign flag flying over its capital. By the terms of this dissertation, this catastrophe was one of the most spectacular examples of state failure in human history. This catastrophe was not a surprise, since the Mexico of 1846 was geographically untenable, but it repays close study as a lesson in some mechanisms of state failure.

Mexico’s Imaginary Boundary

The Mexican-American War was a war about a boundary. But, pace the quote above, the boundary at issue was not the true limit of power of the political systems it ostensibly separated. The problem that sparked the war was a mismatch between each state’s cartographic and actual territory. The Mexican state’s actual territory was far less than its cartographic territory, while the United States could easily project overwhelming violence beyond the Mexican boundary that was drawn on the maps.

The unreality of the northern boundary of Mexico was recognized by backwoodsmen and diplomats alike. In 1827 the British *chargé d’affaires* to Mexico called it an “imaginary boundary” and explained that it lay some distance north of the Mexican government’s actual sphere of influence.

“Some hundreds of squatters . . . have crossed the frontier with their families, and occupied lands within the Mexican territory; while others have obtained grants from the congress of Saltillo . . . By thus imprudently encouraging emigration upon too large a scale, the Mexican Government has retained but little authority over the new settlers . . . who, being separated only by an imaginary boundary line from their countrymen upon the opposite bank of the Sabina, naturally look to them for support in their difficulties, and not to a Government, the influence of which is hardly felt in such remote districts.”⁵⁷²

Nine years later, when the Texas Revolution was underway, American officials again called Mexico’s mapped frontier an “imaginary boundary.” Writing from Fort Jessup near Natchitoches, Major General Edmund P. Gaines told Secretary of War Lewis Cass,

“Should I find any disposition on the part of the Mexicans, or their red allies, to menace our frontier, I cannot but deem it to be my duty . . . to anticipate their lawless movement, by crossing our supposed or imaginary national boundary, and meeting the savage marauders wherever to be found in their approach towards our frontier.”⁵⁷³

Gaines did ask Cass to obtain President Jackson’s permission to treat the Mexican boundary as the imaginary cartographic fiction that it actually was, and in his answer, Cass told Gaines,

“It is not the wish of the President to take advantage of present circumstances, and thereby obtain possession of any portion of the Mexican territory . . . [but] you are authorized to take such position on either side of the imaginary boundary line, as may be best for your defensive operations.”⁵⁷⁴

The two men’s use of the phrase “imaginary boundary” makes clear that they both well understood that the actual limits of Mexican power lay some considerable distance south of the imaginary line registered in treaties and on maps.

The United States had long designed to adjust this imaginary boundary and annex the northern sphere of New Spain. In 1809 the American ambassador to France advised President

⁵⁷² Ward, *Mexico in 1827*, 586.

⁵⁷³ Mayo, *Political Sketches of Eight Years in Washington*, 144-146.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Jefferson that this could easily be done while Spain was preoccupied by Napoleon's invasion. Jefferson answered that the United States was in no hurry and would, rather than appear an aggressor, wait until circumstances allowed it to take the land under the pretext of national defense. Jefferson wrote,

“You have thought it advisable sooner to take possession of adjacent territories. But we know that they are ours the first moment that any war is forced upon us for other causes, that we are at hand to anticipate their possession, if attempted by any other power, and, in the meantime, we are lengthening the term of our prosperity, liberating our revenues, and increasing our power.”⁵⁷⁵

Sixteen years later, in 1825, Secretary of State Henry Clay wrote to Joel R. Poinsette, the American Ambassador to Mexico, instructing him to seek an adjustment of the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty line. He explained that the Sabine boundary was too close to “our great western mart” at New Orleans, and that moving the line to the Brazos, the Colorado, or the Rio Grande, would prevent “difficulties” that “may possibly hereafter arise between the two countries.” When Clay wrote of “difficulties,” he specifically meant the difficulties the United States would make for Mexico if its uncontrolled northern territory should become a lawless refuge of marauding Indians and runaway slaves. He also noted that this adjustment “would have the effect of placing the city of Mexico nearer the center of its territories,” and of making control of “the powerful warlike and turbulent Indian nation of the Comanches” the problem of the United States.⁵⁷⁶

Poinsette was unable to *persuade* the Mexicans that a boundary adjustment would be to their advantage, so, between 1829 and 1836, Poinsette's successor, Anthony Butler, attempted to adjust the boundary by *payment* to Mexico or bribes to Mexican officials. As John Quincy

⁵⁷⁵ Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 7, 261.

⁵⁷⁶ *American State Papers*, vol. 6, 578-581.

Adams later recorded in his diary, Butler's "double-dealing line of negotiation" aimed "to strip Mexico of Texas, Santa Fe, and California, and annex them all to the Union."⁵⁷⁷ Butler's "cheap and low plan of bribery" failed to purchase the northern sphere of Mexico, but it persuaded the United States government that the northern sphere could be purchased because the Mexican government was chronically in debt and short of cash.

"It was the beginning of the strange infatuation which the Government of the United States had, that through Santa Anna's greed and military necessities Mexican territory might be purchased, an infatuation which lasted well through the Mexican War."⁵⁷⁸

The United States government supposed that Mexico must sooner or later sell its northern sphere to settle its international debts and fund its government. Mexico was in the position of an impoverished spendthrift who owns a valuable automobile they are too poor to drive. It could not hold out forever, and Mexican California was particularly a prize worth having. Here is how the American Ambassador to Mexico described the situation in 1842.

"I believe that this government would cede to us Texas and the Californias, and I am thoroughly satisfied that this is all we shall ever get for the claims of our merchants in this country. As to Texas, I regard it as of but little value compared with California, the richest, the most beautiful, and the healthiest country in the world. Our Atlantic border secures us a commercial ascendancy there. With the acquisition of Upper California, we should have the same ascendancy on the Pacific. The Harbor of San Francisco is capacious enough to receive the navies of the world . . . I am profoundly satisfied that in its bearing upon all the interests of our country, the importance of the acquisition of California cannot be overestimated."⁵⁷⁹

Texas won its independence in 1836 and joined the Union in 1845. But its boundary with Mexico was disputed and the United States government was eager to settle the question with

⁵⁷⁷ Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 9, 358.

⁵⁷⁸ Reeves, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk*, 74-75.

⁵⁷⁹ Reeves, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk*, 100-101.

Mexico. The United States government hoped to do this with a great and final adjustment of the Mexican border, from the Gulf to the Pacific, with California ultimately on the American side of the border. It was to bring about this great and final adjustment that President James Polk sent John Slidell to Mexico with an offer of fifteen to thirty million dollars for its northern Sphere.

Polk did this with the encouragement of Santa Anna, then exiled in Havana but expecting to return to power soon. Santa Anna had suggested that Mexico would cede all of its territory above the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers for a pecuniary consideration of thirty million dollars, this sum being sufficient to pay Mexico's most pressing debts and keep its army in order.⁵⁸⁰ The Mexican government, then under General Paredes, was, as Polk put it, "dependent for its continuance in power upon the allegiance of the army under his command," and that army "being badly fed and clothed and without pay, might and probably would desert him, unless money could be obtained to supply their wants."⁵⁸¹

Polk's preference was for a new boundary running up the Rio Grande to El Paso, and then west to the Pacific along the 32nd parallel. If that were not possible, he would be content with Santa Anna's offer of all the country north of the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers.⁵⁸² This later boundary would have given the United States California and the habitable portion of New Mexico, while leaving Mexico with the wild and then worthless waste of Apacheria.

When war was declared against Mexico in 1846, James Buchanan, Polk's Secretary of State, proposed to inform the governments of Britain and France that "our object was not to dismember Mexico or make conquests," and that "in going to war we did not do so with a view

⁵⁸⁰ Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk* vol. 1, 224.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 307, 312.

to acquire California or New Mexico or any other portion of the Mexican territory.” Polk rejected the proposal, and in his diary wrote that the United States would most certainly dismember Mexico, but this would be a reparation and not a conquest.

“I told him that though we had not gone to war for conquest, yet it was clear that in making peace we would if practicable obtain California and such other portion of the Mexican territory as would be sufficient to indemnify our claimants on Mexico, and to defray the expenses of the war which that power by her long continued wrongs and injuries had forced us to wage.”⁵⁸³

Some Failures of Internal Sovereignty

The conduct and outcome of the Mexican American War demonstrated that Mexico continued to be a failing state in the 1840s. Throughout that decade Mexico lost control of actual territory to the aggressively expansive Apache, and then, in 1848, the United States erased the fiction of Mexico’s cartographic territory in its northern sphere. The Mexican State certainly delivered violence to Apacheria, but it was slowly losing ground in Chihuahua and Sonora. As the British adventurer George Frederick Augustus Ruxton wrote from Chihuahua in 1847

It is . . . infested with hostile Indians, who ravage the whole country, and prevent many of its most valuable mines from being worked. These Indians are the Apaches, who . . . roam over all parts of the state, committing devastations on the ranchos and haciendas, and depopulating the remote villages.⁵⁸⁴

John Russell Bartlett was part of the Commission that settled the international boundary after the Mexican-American War. He described the fate of the Mexican town of Fronteras, in northern Sonora, about fifty miles south of today’s international boundary.

“Fronteras was formerly a town of considerable importance. It was established about eighty years ago as a presidio, or garrison, and at one time contained two thousand inhabitants . . . Fronteras, like most of the military colonies, fell into

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁵⁸⁴ Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountain*, 145.

decay, chiefly from the neglect of the central government to properly provide for the soldiery, in consequence of which, the inhabitants were left without protection from the attacks of the savages. To such an extent did the place suffer from the incursions of the Apaches, who killed off the herdsmen, drove the cultivators from the fields, and took captive the women and children, that about three years ago it was entirely abandoned.”⁵⁸⁵

The United States’ invasion of Mexico did not cause the Mexican state to fail, but rather, demonstrated that the Mexican state was failing. The Mexican American War shifted the boundaries between the United States and Mexico to more accurately reflect the relative power of each state. The United States gained territory as the expanding continental power and Mexico lost territory as the failing one. While the United States’ annexation of Mexico’s northern sphere was not “foreordained,”⁵⁸⁶ it did result from the fact that the United States had power sufficient to command obedience in that territory and Mexico did not.

External Sovereignty and Overlapping Spheres as Precursors to Conflict

To this point, this dissertation has dealt with the concept of *internal sovereignty*, which is recognition of a state’s right to rule by the inhabitants of that state’s territory. The rebellions in Mexico’s northern sphere show that Mexico struggled to maintain internal sovereignty, and in the case of Texas lost it entirely. However, there is another kind of sovereignty, external sovereignty. External sovereignty exists when other states recognize a state’s right to rule.⁵⁸⁷

Geoffrey Goodwin aptly says of the distinction between the two terms:

⁵⁸⁵ Bartlett, John Russell *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua*, vol 1, pp. 264-266.

⁵⁸⁶ Meinig, *The Shaping of America, Continental America*, 128. Meinig notes that the idea of Manifest Destiny was gaining significant traction in the United States around this time. Manifest Destiny refers to the idea that the United States was on a divinely inspired mission to expand across the North American continent.

⁵⁸⁷ Goodwin, “The Erosion of External Sovereignty?” 61; Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, 1. Krasner calls this “recognition,” “international legal sovereignty.”

“Externally, sovereignty connotes equality of status *between* the states – the distinct and separate entities – which make up our international society. Internally, it connotes the exercise of supreme authority by those states within their individual territorial boundaries.”⁵⁸⁸

This idea is especially important in present-day international relations, because powerful states agree to stay out of the internal affairs of weak states, through recognizing the weak states’ sovereignty, even when the strong state has the power to intervene in those internal affairs. Some argue that external sovereignty is why weak, or failing, states continue to exist.⁵⁸⁹

Though, external sovereignty is *usually* granted from one state with internal sovereignty to another state with internal sovereignty, that is not always the case.⁵⁹⁰ Some states, like present-day Somalia, have external sovereignty but very limited internal sovereignty.⁵⁹¹ It can also be the case that a territory with internal sovereignty exists but does not have external sovereignty. Such territories are called de facto states and examples are South Abkhazia or Somaliland.⁵⁹² Indeed, Stephen Krasner rightly points out that international recognition involves “authority and legitimacy, but not control.”⁵⁹³ He means that the international community grants external sovereignty but does not by so doing guarantee internal sovereignty. Internal sovereignty can be patchy and so can external sovereignty. When Russia annexed Crimea in

⁵⁸⁸ Goodwin, “The Erosion of External Sovereignty?” 61. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁸⁹ Atzili, “When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict,” 139-173.

⁵⁹⁰ Eckes, “The Reflexive Relationship between Internal and External Sovereignty,” 18-19.

⁵⁹¹ Pegg and Kolsto, “Dynamics of internal legitimacy and (lack of) external legitimacy,” 198

⁵⁹² Bakke et al, “Convincing State Builders,” 591; Pegg and Kolsto, “Dynamics of internal legitimacy and (lack of) external legitimacy,” 198.

⁵⁹³ Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, 2.

2014, the international community did not recognize Russian sovereignty in Crimea, although most people in Crimea did.⁵⁹⁴

The United States granted Mexico external sovereignty over what had been New Spain when it recognized Mexican independence in 1822. Mexico did not enjoy internal sovereignty everywhere south of the boundary established by the 1819 Adams-Onís treaty, but so far as the American government was concerned, this was all Mexican territory. But external sovereignty is not a permanent gift and can be withdrawn for a variety of reasons. We just saw that Major General Edmund P. Gaines was permitted to ignore Mexican sovereignty in order to prevent cross-border raids into the United States. A powerful state may also withdraw external sovereignty from a portion of another state’s territory that it discovers a need to annex. This is usually done under the color of some pretext. This was noted in an 1846 speech on the Oregon question, delivered in the U. S. House of Representatives by the Whig congressman Joshua Fry Bell (figure VI-1).

“The history of the world . . . proves, that when a contiguous territory is *necessary* to the general, political, or commercial welfare of a particular people, and they *have the power* to take and keep it, its acquisition becomes a matter of ‘manifest destiny.’”⁵⁹⁵

Uneven External Sovereignty and the Three Forms of Power

External sovereignty is maintained with the three forms of power, but ultimately rests on a state’s ability to deliver pain, directly or by means of an ally, to any state that does not respect that sovereignty. Diplomatic treaties are excellent examples of “persuasive” agreements used to

⁵⁹⁴ Costelloe, “Treaty Succession in Annexed Territory,” 344.

⁵⁹⁵ Bell, *Speech of Mr. J. F. Bell, of Kentucky, on the Oregon Question*, 4.

secure or surrender external sovereignty.⁵⁹⁶ We just saw that the American Ambassador Joel R. Poinsette tried, without success, to persuade Mexico that it was in Mexico's interest to cede Texas to the United States. External sovereignty can also be secured or surrendered by direct payment. The United States, for example, purchased Louisiana from France in 1803, and the Gadsden territory in Southern Arizona from Mexico in 1853. As we just saw, it also attempted to purchase New Mexico and California. But physical force is the only sure guarantee of external sovereignty, since no outside state can withdraw its fear of pain.

Thus, through the greater part of human history, a failing state deficient in physical force was diminished by what the geographer Friedrich Ratzel called "encroachment and usurpation."⁵⁹⁷ The great empires in the past expanded and contracted according to their relative ability to conquer or repulse conquest. Territory could be *claimed* by anyone who could produce a map or treaty showing their ownership of the land; but territory was *held* by the power that could take or hold it with violence.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁶ Roshchin, "The Concept of Friendship: From Princes to States," 606.

⁵⁹⁷ Ratzel, "The Territorial Growth of States," 351.

⁵⁹⁸ Banton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900*, 1. Banton notes the difference between territorial claims made by European empires and the territory that they actually controlled.



Figure VI-1. Overlapping Spheres of the United States and Mexico

This map depicts how the westward expanding United States' sphere had begun to overlap with Mexico's northern sphere. The United States had acquired frontage on the Pacific Coast in June of 1846 when they signed the Treaty of Oregon with Great Britain. James K. Polk desired the port and harbor of San Francisco, providing the United States a beacon to advance towards. Mexico, on the other hand, had no unique need for San Francisco, possessing other ports along the Pacific, and could not deploy the resources to the north to defend its northern sphere.

The Western Border of Texas, Proximate Cause of the War

Mexico repudiated the Treaty of Velasco and refused to recognize Texas's independence.

It was too weak to attempt a second reconquest of Texas and so expressed its hostility with

revanchist rhetoric, incitement of the Indians, petty cross-border raids, vain and vindictive legislation, and refusal to settle the question of its boundary with the new republic.⁵⁹⁹

Between 1836 and 1848, Texas and Mexico were in fact divided by a desolate no-man's land between the Rio Grande and Nueces rivers. This was called the Mustang Desert, and later the Trans Nueces or Nueces Strip.⁶⁰⁰ Texas claimed the Nueces Strip and said the new international border was the Rio Grande.⁶⁰¹ Texas based this claim on the Treaty of Velasco and the fact that, following the debacle at San Jacinto, the Mexican army had retreated south of the Rio Grande. As an Arkansas politician explained in 1848, General Filisola recognized the Treaty of Velasco and the Rio Grande boundary when he marched the defeated Mexican army back to Mexico.

“Thus empowered he agreed to that treaty—solemnly ratified on the part of the government he represented, and was permitted to march the captive army into Mexican territory, by which was understood by both parties the territory west of the Rio Grande del Norte. The revolution was regarded as successful to this river, and therefore the Mexican army in hunting for Mexican territory, did not stop at the Nueces nor in the strip of desert country between this river and the Rio

⁵⁹⁹ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 17; Minge, “Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846,” 134. Minge notes that Mexico specifically mentioned Texas as being exempt from having to provide troops for a conscription ordered by the center in 1843; Bauer, “The United States Navy and Texas Independence: A Study in Jacksonian Integrity,” 47. Bauer discusses the Mexican decree which resulted in the “closure” of ports in Texas. The Mexican government was upset with the US government for escorting merchant vessels into Texas ports, however, the United States recognized that Mexican authority “in Texas was annulled” and that the closure of the ports was “obviously tantamount to a blockade by notification merely.” Meaning the Mexican government could not enforce its policy with force, therefore its policy effectively did not exist or apply to the United States; Vázquez, “The Texas Question in Mexican Politics, 1836-1845,” 317. Vázquez, in regards to the April 5th, 1837 abolition of slavery in Mexico, mentions that Texas slave owners would not be given compensation for their recently freed slaves because of the part they played in the conflict against the central government. This particular policy is interesting because it serves as a tacit recognition of Texas’ independence. Previously, the central government made exceptions for Texas slaveholders when it made policy on the issue of slavery, so, in a sense, the Mexican government’s wholehearted abolition of the institution gives the indication that they did not realistically expect to bring Texas back into the fold.

⁶⁰⁰ Meinig, *Imperial Texas*, 39.

⁶⁰¹ Marshall, “The Southwestern Boundary of Texas, 1821-1840,” 281.

Grande del Norte, nor did they regard themselves as on Mexican soil until they crossed to the west bank of the Rio Grande.”⁶⁰²



Figure VI-2. Overview of the Mexican American War Fronts – 1846-1848

This map shows the overview of the four separate fronts that the United States and Mexico fought in during the course of the war.

⁶⁰² Speech of Samuel H. Hempstead to the Democratic State Convention at Little Rock, Arkansas, Jan. 3, 1848. Printed in *The Arkansas Banner* (Feb. 1, 1848), 1.

Texas insisted on the Rio Grande boundary for two reasons. The first was to secure its claim to west Texas and the trans Pecos, and to capture the Santa Fe Trade from St. Louis (figure VI-2).⁶⁰³ The second was to establish a buffer between Mexico and Texas. Furthermore, Texas did not want to have an independent buffer state on its southern border because that state likely would have insisted on its northern border being the Nueces River.⁶⁰⁴

Mexico rejected this argument, claimed the Nueces Strip, and said the Nueces River should be the provisional boundary of the break-away state of Texas.⁶⁰⁵ This would have respected the fact that the Lower Rio Grande Valley, between Matamoros and Del Rio, functions as a unit for the people in it. The river is a highway that connects people on either side of it. Borderlands scholars confirm this historical cross-border connectivity.⁶⁰⁶ The political geographer Charles B. Fawcett likewise argues that rivers surrounded by accessible terrain facilitate, rather than obstruct, human movement.⁶⁰⁷ A border on the Nueces River would have preserved the natural unity of the lower Rio Grande Valley, but it would also have left very little ground between Texas and its belligerent neighbor to the south.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰³ Meinig, *Imperial Texas*, 39-40.

⁶⁰⁴ Vigness, "Relations of the Republic of Texas and the Republic of the Rio Grande," 321. This author outlines the official neutrality of Texas when it came to the question of the breakaway "Republic of the Rio Grande." Though individual Texans did offer their support, in the form of arms, the government remained neutral for fear of damaging its own chances at international recognition. This case also supports the geopolitical argument I outline here, it was not in Texas' interest to advocate for a separate state that would occupy the buffer it desired to have between itself and Mexico, especially when supporting that state would likely damage its international reputation.

⁶⁰⁵ This analysis is taken from Marshall, "The Southwestern Boundary of Texas," 281-282.

⁶⁰⁶ González-Quiroga, *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880*, 70-79. This section talks about Texas' military cooperation with the Republic of the Rio Grande specifically. The whole book's thesis is about cross-border cooperation, which fits with my understanding of the geography of the Rio Grande Valley as a geographic unit.

⁶⁰⁷ Fawcett, *Frontiers: A Study in Political Geography*, 52-55.

⁶⁰⁸ Nance, *After San Jacinto*, 21. Nance offers the best account of the reasoning for the Rio Grande for the border. Texas thought that they could force the Mexican army across miles of inhospitable terrain if they controlled the land between the Rio Grande and the Nueces. If cattle were driven out of these lands, the Mexican Army, so reasoned the

Mexico Brings a Disastrous War on Itself

Texas was formally annexed by the United States on December 29, 1845. Mexico considered this an act of war since, nearly ten years after the debacle at San Jacinto, it still maintained that Texas was Mexican territory. In reality, the only question was the exact location of the western boundary of Texas, and most urgently the status of the debatable Nueces Strip. When it joined the United States, the Republic of Texas' handed this question to the Federal government of the United States.

It was no secret that the United States also wanted to annex California and New Mexico, so in November, 1845, a Louisiana congressman named John Slidell was sent to Mexico to settle the Texas boundary question and purchase California and New Mexico for somewhere between thirty and fifty million dollars.⁶⁰⁹ Meanwhile, General Zachary Taylor had been ordered to advance from Fort Jessup into Texas.

Taylor's force of about 4,000 men was at first called an "army of observation" because Texas was still formally independent when he landed at Corpus Christi in August 1845. Two weeks after Texas was officially annexed, Taylor, now at the head of an army of occupation, was ordered to advance south and take a position on the left bank of the Rio Grande. By March Taylor had raised Fort Texas (later Fort Brown) at the current site of the city of Brownsville, across the Rio Grande from Matamoros.

Texans, would be half-starved by the time they reached any notable strategic or population center, and would be more easily repelled.

⁶⁰⁹ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, xix. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*, 255. Vázquez, "The Texas Question in Mexican Politics, 1836-1845," 343-344.

Taylor's supply line ran forty miles east from Fort Texas to Point Isabel and the Brazos Santiago inlet, and Mexican-American war was triggered by Mexican attempts to destroy Fort Texas by bombardment or by cutting this supply line. This was the context of the Thornton Affair.⁶¹⁰

The Thornton Affair is so named because a detachment of US troops under the command of Captain Seth Thornton was attacked by a larger Mexican force in what the United States said was United States' territory. Thornton had been sent upriver from Fort Texas to investigate reports that a Mexican reconnaissance force had crossed the river in advance of a larger army that would encircle Fort Texas and cut the supply line to Point Isabel. The reports of a Mexican incursion proved to be correct when Thornton walked into an ambush. Thornton's diminutive force was overwhelmed by the numerically superior Mexican force and was routed. And thus, as President James Polk said in his "Mexican War Message" two weeks later, "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon the American soil."⁶¹¹

The Thornton Affair served as the spark that sets off the wider Mexican-American War. The United States said that its national border had been violated and that it would prove its sovereignty over the Nueces Strip by delivering violence to Mexico. Mexico likewise said that its national border had been violated and that it would prove its sovereignty over the Nueces

⁶¹⁰ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 85-90.

⁶¹¹ Irelan, *History of the Life, Administration and Times of James Knox Polk*, vol. 11, 240.

Strip by delivering violence to the United States.⁶¹² However, Mexico's ability to deliver violence was very limited because Mexico was a failing state.

Thomas Jefferson's counsel of patience was vindicated by events in the Nueces Strip north of Matamoros in April 1846. Thirty-seven years earlier, Jefferson had said of such adjacent territories, "we know that they are ours the first moment that any war is forced upon us for other causes." Mexico must sooner or later offer a provocation that would allow the United States to attack Mexico in self-defense. Thus, in his State of the Union Message of 1846, President Polk explained that the United States had not sought war, but that it now expected "ample indemnity" for the costs of the war that Mexico had started.

"The war has not been waged with a view to conquest; but having been commenced by Mexico, it has been carried into the enemy's country, and will be vigorously prosecuted there, with a view to obtain an honorable peace, and thereby secure ample indemnity for the expenses of the war . . ."⁶¹³

Although there was undoubtedly some guile in Polk's words, it is also true that Mexico had brought the disastrous war upon herself because Mexico would not admit that it was a failing state. We may indeed state it as a general rule that failing states aggravate their failure because they are too vain to admit—perhaps to even see—their own failure. Santa Anna might have held Texas west of the Guadalupe River, but vanity made him insist on the Sabine and he therefore lost the entire state. Mexico might have avoided war with the United States if vanity had not compelled it to maintain a preposterous revanchist claim on Texas, and a perilous resolve to defend the Nueces Strip. President Polk turned the preposterous revanchist claim on Texas

⁶¹² Stephens, *Speech of Mr. Stephens, of Georgia, on the subject of the Mexican War*, 6. Stephens reproduces the communication from Gen. Ampudia to Gen. Taylor. This letter is important because it illustrates that Mexico was going to war over their national honor being violated by the American military presence in their territory. Mexico viewed the American presence in the Trans-Nueces Strip as an act of war. This letter demonstrates that point.

⁶¹³ Irelan, *History of the Life, Administration and Times of James Knox Polk*, vol. 11, p. 346.

against Mexico, and made that state appear the imperial aggressor, in his State of the Union Message of 1846.

“But Mexico herself has never place the war which she has waged upon the ground that our army occupied the intermediate territory between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. Her refuted pretension, that Texas was not an independent State, but a rebellious province, was obstinately persevered in; and her avowed purpose in commencing a war with the United States was to reconquer Texas, and to restore Mexican authority over the whole territory, not to the Nueces alone, but to the Sabine.”⁶¹⁴

If Mexico had seriously wished to stop failing, it would not have repudiated the Treaty of Velasco and would not have fallen into the trap of entering a war it could not win to enforce its claim to the nearly worthless Nueces Strip. If Mexico had seriously wished to stop failing, it would have negotiated with John Slidell and sold the United States all of its territory east of the Rio Grande and west of the Colorado River. With thirty or fifty million dollars, Mexico could have paid its most pressing debts and put its army in order. Then it could have offered the United States Apacheria for a few million more.

But the failure and weakness of Mexico forced it to pretend it was much stronger than it actually was, and as a result of this vain braggadocio, the United States got everything it wanted for barely half of the money Slidell was prepared to pay out. Because of vain braggadocio, Mexico also had to suffer the humiliation of invasion, defeat, and occupation of its capital by an American army. We might call this tendency to self-destructive vanity the madness of a failing state.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

New Mexico and the Southern California Trail

As we have seen, President Polk's minimum design was to take possession of all Mexico's territory east of the Rio Grande and west of the Colorado. This would have limited overland access to the northern California Trail to San Francisco, through South Pass, past the Great Salt Lake, and over Donner Pass to Sacramento Valley. Bad weather closed this route for much of the year. The key to a southern California Trail was New Mexico. This can be seen in the route General Kearny took from Leavenworth, Kansas, to California during the Mexican-American War. Leaving the Great Bend of the Missouri, Kearney went southwest along the trail to Santa Fe, and beyond that to Los Angeles.⁶¹⁵ Because of this connection, Santa Fe was viewed as the link for overland routes from the focal points of US commerce in the East and their manifest goal in California in the West.

Although the United States valued California much more than New Mexico, the United States valued New Mexico because it was what the geographer Ellen Churchill Semple calls a "transit region."⁶¹⁶ A transit region is often a barren highland like New Mexico, but its value lies in its situation between two populous and productive regions. Within New Mexico, the United States valued the oasis of the upper Rio Grande as what Semple calls a "way station."⁶¹⁷

The Rio Grande, between El Paso and its source forms a natural unit, much like the Rio Grande between Del Rio and the Gulf. The river runs through a rift valley that is, a connective river valley. New Mexico was initially an isolated outpost on the far northern frontier of New

⁶¹⁵ Lawrence, "Mexican Trade Between Santa Fe and Los Angeles, 1830-1848," 27-28. Lawrence shows the overland trade routes between Santa Fe and Los Angeles traversing through Utah's Wasatch Mountains. General Kearny took a more southerly route than this, however, the point remains, Santa Fe was the connecting point between the Mississippi River core of US commerce and California.

⁶¹⁶ Semple, *Influences of Geographic Environment*, 530

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152

Spain and Mexico. When the United States took possession of New Mexico, it became a way station on two great imperial roads from the eastern core to California.⁶¹⁸ One road began at Kansas City and passed through New Mexico at Albuquerque. The other began in New Orleans and passed through New Mexico at El Paso.

Mexico's Main Tracks, the Four Fronts of the War

The American strategy in the Mexican-American War shows that the United States understood the strategic geography of Mexico.⁶¹⁹ Mexico's inability to repulse the invasion shows that Mexico was still a failing state. The United States invaded Mexico on four major fronts.⁶²⁰ Those fronts were The Trans-Rio Grande, New Mexico, California, and the Mexican Core through the Gulf port of Veracruz (figure VI-2). California and New Mexico were not *strategically* valuable to Mexico since their loss did not reduce Mexico's ability to wage war, but their prompt occupation was essential to the American's geopolitical design to take possession of these territories.⁶²¹ It would not do if Britain or France slipped into California while the United States was fighting Mexico farther south.

The fronts in the Trans-Rio Grande and the Mexican Core were strategic because here the United States pursued the immediate aim of the war, which as Clausewitz says is always

⁶¹⁸ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 150.

⁶¹⁹ Cornish, *Strategic Geography of the Great Powers*, 66, 75.

⁶²⁰ Other commentaries of the Mexican American war typically focus on "two fronts." For example, Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, has a chapter, which starts on page 243, called "planning for a second front." This second front was referring to the invasion of Veracruz to strike at the heart of Mexico, Mexico City. This focus on two fronts ignores the important conquests of California and New Mexico, which were vital for US claims to these lands at the negotiating table. Though these fronts were not crucial to the US success in the war, they were vital to achieving the US objective of territorial acquisition.

⁶²¹ Richards, "The Texas Moment: Breakaway republics and contested sovereignty in North America, 1836-1846," 342 discussing California's remoteness; Dudlo, "Marial Borderland: the armed incorporation of New Mexico, 1598-1912," 74-75 for discussion on New Mexico's remoteness.

“overthrow of the enemy.” Once the enemy is overthrown, the victor may take territory as they please; if the enemy retains their power, no conquered territory is secure. As Clausewitz puts it,

“It is not by conquering one of the enemy’s provinces, with little trouble and superior numbers . . . but by seeking out constantly the heart of the hostile power, and staking everything in order to gain all, that we can effectually strike the enemy to the ground.”⁶²²

In most cases the heart of the hostile power is its army and the political apparatus gathered in its capital, so that destruction of the army and occupation of the capital are the means by which an enemy is struck to the ground. A war is over when the enemy is disarmed, decapitated, or both.

The Trans-Rio Grande Front

The Trans-Rio Grande Front (figure VI-3) opened by the Thornton affair and entered Mexican territory when Zachary Taylor crossed the Rio Grande and captured Matamoros two weeks later. The Trans-Rio Grande is a triangular area bounded by the lower Rio Grande, the Gulf, and the eastern scarp of the Great Mexican Plateau. This front was strategic because it had long faced pressure from French Louisiana, tumultuous Texas, and the United States. It was also fortified because the main roads from the Mississippi Valley to the Mexican core ran through the Trans-Rio Grande. This conformed to Clausewitz’s dictum:

“Amongst a number of great roads leading from the enemy’s country to ours, we should first of all fortify that which leads most directly to the heart of our dominions . . . The assailant then encounters these works, or should he resolve to pass them by, he will naturally offer a favorable opportunity for operations against his flank.”⁶²³

⁶²² Clausewitz, *On War*, 107.

⁶²³ Clausewitz, *On War vol. 2*, 210.

This explains the fortification of cities like Saltillo and most especially Monterrey. Additional Mexican forces had also been marched north to the Trans-Rio Grande Front when relations with Texas and the United States deteriorated.

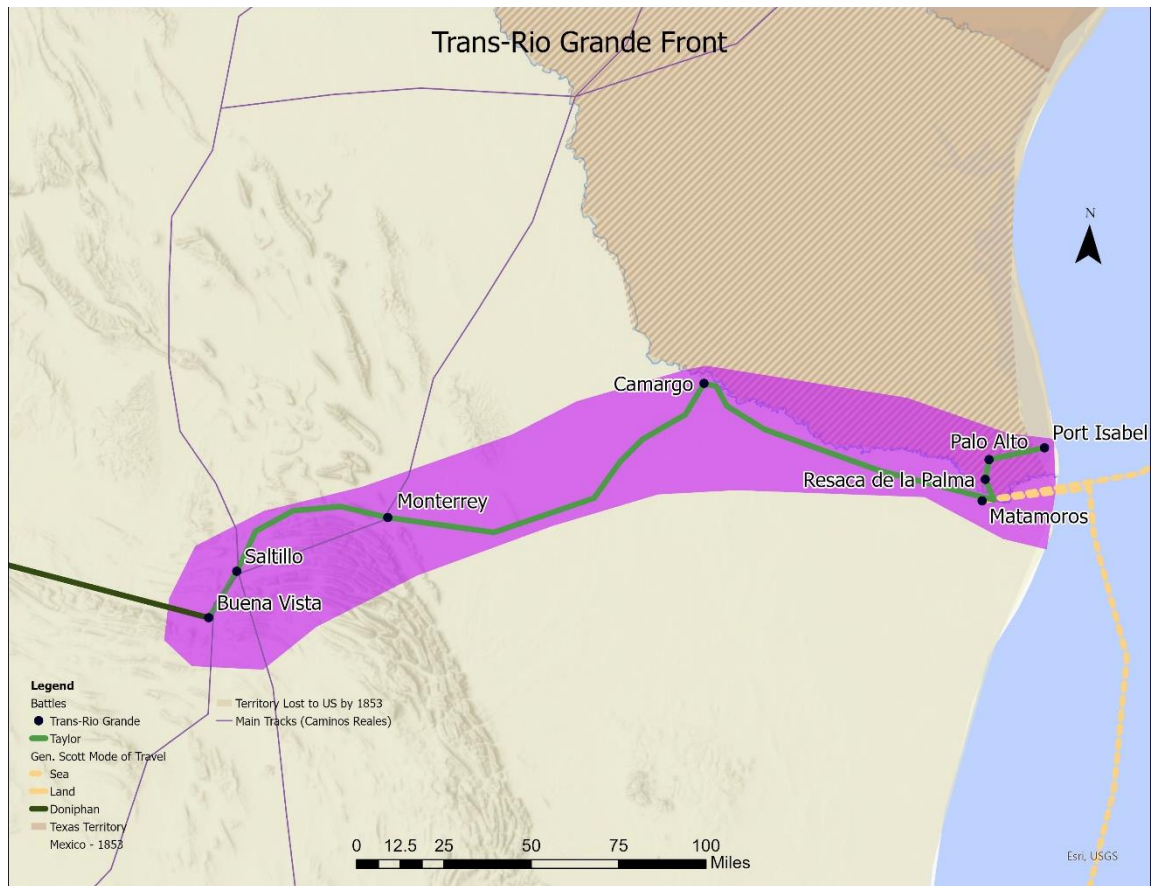


Figure VI-3. Trans-Rio Grande Front

This map shows the overview of major places and battle sites in the Texas-Buena Vista Front. The campaign began at Port Isabel, General Taylor's supply depot, and progressed to the Battle of Buena Vista which secured the Texas frontier for the United States.

By striking the enemy to the ground in the Trans-Rio Grande, Taylor hoped to bring Mexico to the negotiation table.⁶²⁴ This hope was disappointed, but the battles at Saltillo,

⁶²⁴ Buchly, "Comparison of the Effect of Military Geography of Mexico on the War of 1845-7 with the Effect the Military Geography would have on a Present-day Campaign against Mexico," 3.

Monterey and Buena Vista destroyed men and material that might otherwise have moved south to join the defense of the Mexican capital, or north to terrorize San Antonio and Houston.

This was the first strategic front because the United States initially planned to force Mexico to negotiate by driving overland towards Mexico City. Although victorious in the Trans-Rio Grande, General Taylor determined that it was not practicable to actually attack Mexico City from the Trans-Rio Grande. It would be eight hundred miles to Mexico City, through rough country, on a bad road, among hostile partisans, if the American army made it to Mexico City, it could have no confidence in its supply lines or lines of retreat.

To take his position on the left bank of the Rio Grande, General Taylor marched overland from Corpus Christi to Point Isabel (now Port Isabel, northeast of Matamoros) to enforce American sovereignty in the Nueces Strip.⁶²⁵ The Thornton Affair happened just south of Point Isabel and it was shortly followed by the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma on American territory. Both battles were American victories that demonstrated the feebleness of the Mexican Army. After winning battles at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma on May 8 and 9, Taylor crossed the Rio Grande and took the city of Matamoros on May 18.⁶²⁶ From Matamoros, Taylor moved west along the Rio Grande towards Monterrey and the road to Mexico City.⁶²⁷

In mid-July Taylor occupied the city of Camargo, at the confluence of the Rio Grande and San Juan Rivers. Camargo's position on the Rio Grande allowed the Americans to use steam ships to transport troops and supplies, reducing the friction of distance. Even with this

⁶²⁵ Thonhoff, "Taylor's Trail in Texas," 7.

⁶²⁶ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 140-141.

⁶²⁷ Dates of the battles are taken from Wheelan, *Invading Mexico* and the University of Texas at Arlington's online timeline of the Mexican American War.

advantageous geography, there was still a supply bottleneck at Port Isabel because of a lack of steamships.⁶²⁸ After sorting out his supply situation, Taylor moved up the San Juan River towards Monterrey, the capital of Nuevo Leon, at the foot of the eastern scarp of the Mexican Plateau. He left Camargo with about 6,500 of the 15,000 troops he had at his command. He divided his army because he felt he could not supply the whole force away from the steamboats, and because he needed to guard his supply lines and line of retreat. Taylor was concerned that Mexican forces in the area would devolve into guerrilla bands that would harass his supply lines and make his advance less efficient.⁶²⁹

Taylor and his 6,500 troops fought General Ampudia and roughly 10,000 Mexican soldiers in the fortified city of Monterrey. The battle lasted three days, from September 21 to 24.⁶³⁰ Upon the conclusion of the battle, the Americans and Mexicans signed an eight-week armistice.⁶³¹ Capturing Monterrey was important because it controlled the road from the towns on the right bank of the Rio Grande to Saltillo on the plateau, and from Saltillo the core of Mexico much farther south.⁶³² Two weeks later the United States naval squadron captured the port of Tampico and the Trans-Rio Grande Front was under American control.⁶³³

⁶²⁸ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 162-167.

⁶²⁹ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 164, 175.

⁶³⁰ The troop figures vary slightly based on the resource here, the University of Texas at Arlington's summary of the battle gave Taylor's force as being 6,500 while Wheelan's *Invading Mexico* had it at about 6,000. It is safe to conclude that the Mexican forces outnumbered the American forces and had the advantage of being able to fortify their positions along the key avenues of approach.

⁶³¹ UTA, "Battle of Monterrey."

⁶³² Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 184. Santa Anna had ordered Gens. Ampudia and Mejia to withdraw from Monterrey, but they disobeyed the orders to try and protect their control over the mountain pass.

⁶³³ Dates of these battles come from the University of Texas at Arlington timeline for the Mexican American war.

Shortly after this victory Taylor began to advocate opening a second front in the Mexican core.⁶³⁴ He was staring down the desolate land between Saltillo and San Luis Potosi, the next two major stops on his planned campaign to the capital, and did not like his supply prospects. He had already left half his force in Camargo to secure his supply line and, and he was not even to Saltillo. Taylor specifically said that he would “constantly,” need “two regiments” to keep open the line of communication with his headquarters in the United States.⁶³⁵ As Santa Anna discovered in his disastrous San Jacinto campaign, a victorious army is rapidly depleted by an advance into an enemy country because its lines of supply and retreat must be secured. As Clausewitz explained,

“The roads which lead from the position of an Army to those points in its rear . . . have a double signification; in the first place they are lines of communication for the constant nourishment of the combatant force, and next they are roads of retreat.”

And Clausewitz goes on to say that these lines of supply and retreat are subject to severe friction of distance:

“These great channels of life must therefore neither be permanently severed, nor must they be of too great length, or beset with difficulties, because there is always a loss of strength on a long road, which tends to weaken the condition of an Army.”⁶³⁶

⁶³⁴ The Mexican Plateau referring to the land between the mountains. The victory at Monterrey brought Taylor’s army out of the lower elevations and into the highlands of the mountains of Mexico.

⁶³⁵ Zachary Taylor letter to the Adjutant General, page 310 of House Executive Documents, H. Ex. Doc. 30-56 (Reference listing begins with “U.S. Congress”). Taylor is also quoted in Ripley, *The War with Mexico*, 316-318. Ripley here discusses Taylor’s view of advancing southward from Saltillo, noting that this advance would be possible, but Taylor estimated needing 25,000 troops for it. Taylor’s preference for taking Veracruz is discussed on page 322.

⁶³⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, vol. 2, 114

Military historians call the issue that Taylor faced an economy of force issue.⁶³⁷ To be successful, an army must strike a delicate balance between the size of its fighting force and its support force. Mexican guerillas likely would have been able to force the Americans into a bad economy of force situation by attacking long supply lines through Monterrey, Saltillo or San Luis Potosi. When a long supply line is “beset with difficulties” of this sort, it will require a heavy guard or it will be “permanently severed.”⁶³⁸ A long and unguarded line of retreat.

Despite these concerns, the American military advanced to Saltillo, state capital of Coahuila, taking this city on November 16. Controlling Tampico, Matamoros, and Saltillo effectively confined Mexican military operations to the central plateau south and west of Saltillo. The United States cinched its control over the Trans-Rio Grande Front when General Taylor defeated Santa Anna’s numerically superior force at the battle of Buena Vista.

By advancing into Mexico as far as Saltillo, the American Army had demonstrated that Mexico was a failing state, but it had also discovered that Mexico was not so far advanced in failure as many Americans had originally supposed. Before the war many Americans believed “that only one bold, swift dash would be needed—no dull, plodding, grimy campaigning year after year.”⁶³⁹ With the Trans-Rio Grande Front in American hands and Mexico still defiant, it was evident that a bolder campaign was required.

⁶³⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, vol. 1, 221.

⁶³⁸ This idea is also called the loss of strength gradient by Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory*, 245-246.

⁶³⁹ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, vol. 1, 125.

Conquering California, The First Conquest Front

California was a conquest front because the United States fought in California to take possession of California, and not to overthrow Mexico's center of gravity. The United States feared that Mexico might suddenly sell California to Britain, or even Prussia, to raise much needed revenue and foil the geopolitical design of the United States.⁶⁴⁰ This is why the United States rushed to plant its flag in California and could not wait for the peace treaty to be signed.

It was commonly believed that Britain had persuaded the Californians to declare independence and then request that Britain take California under its protection. This was to be accomplished by Britain's large Pacific squadron under Sir James Seymour, then anchored on the west coast of Mexico at Mazatlán. It was said that Britain would then supply California with up to ten thousand Irish Catholic immigrants, thereby denying it to the United States and securing it as a Catholic land.⁶⁴¹

To prevent the establishment of a second Australia, the United States had also placed its Pacific squadron at Mazatlán. Commodore John D. Sloat was under orders to sail for Monterey, the capital of Mexican California, as soon as he was certain that Mexico had declared war on the United States. Once arrived in Monterey, his marines were to plant the flag and declare California American territory. News of the Thornton affair came to Sloat on May 17, three weeks after the fact, but the cautious Commodore waited for news of the pitched battles at Palo Alto and Resaca before he started for California on June 8.

⁶⁴⁰ Smith, *The War with Mexico*, vol. 1, 319.

⁶⁴¹ Willard, *Last Leaves of American History: Comprising Histories of the Mexican War and California*, 182; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 539.

Sloat arrived at Monterey on July 2 and claimed California for the United States on July 7 (figure VI-4). Sloat was old and not very bold, but, as one historian puts it, “the idea that Sir George Seymour, admiral of the British Pacific fleet . . . might appear at any hour and raise the British flag, drove him into action.”⁶⁴² This was, however, enough action for John D. Sloat, so the old Commodore two weeks later retired and appointed Robert F. Stockton as the new Commodore of the Pacific squadron. Meanwhile, Sir George Seymour had arrived in Monterey, found the Americans in possession, and departed.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴² Smith, *The War with Mexico*, vol. 1, 334.

⁶⁴³ Willard, *Last Leaves of American History*, 193.

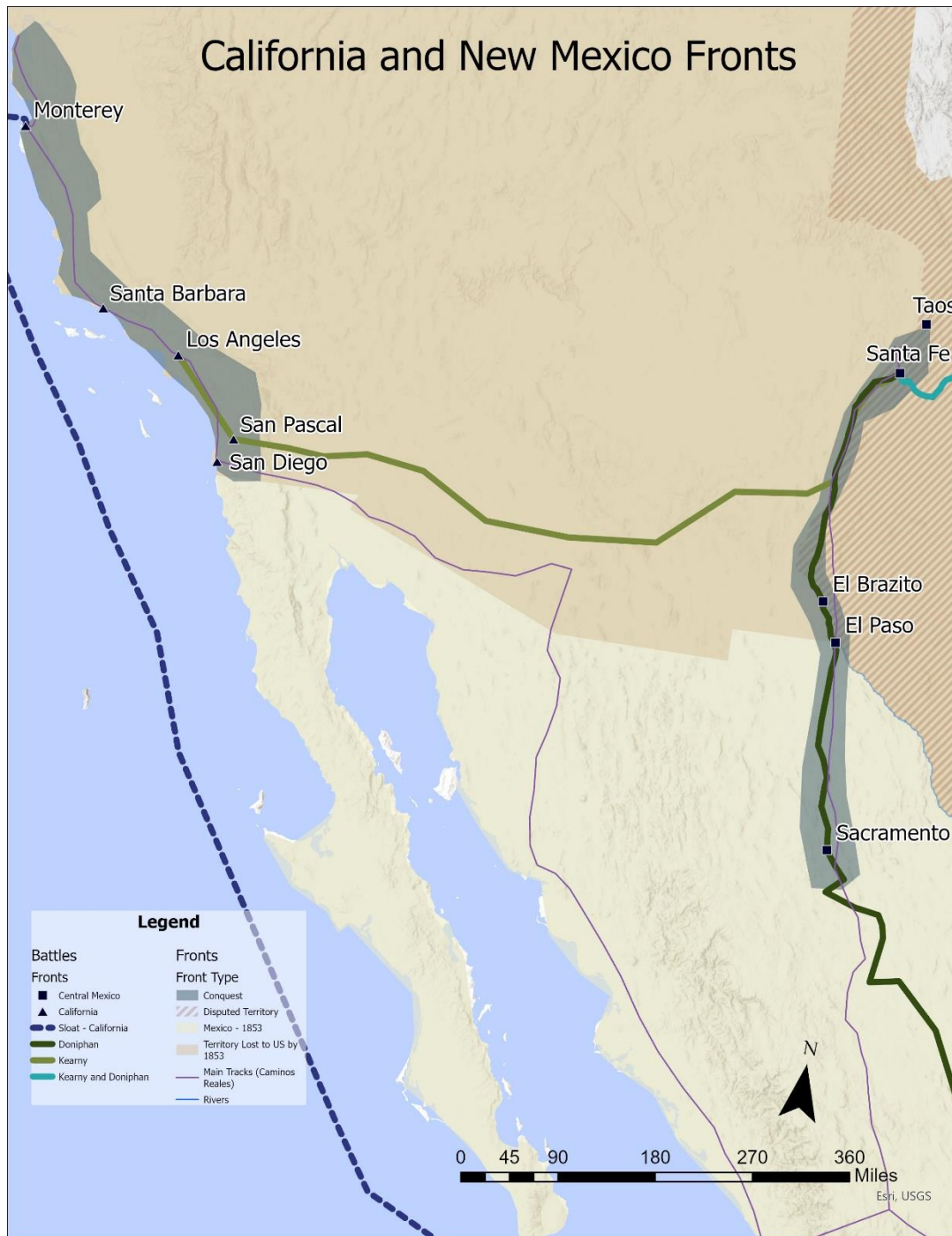


Figure VI-4. California and New Mexico Fronts

This map shows the reader the major points of conflict in the California front. Kearny arrived from the east and helped to take Los Angeles back from the Mexicans, who had kicked out the Americans after an initial unopposed conquest. The navy and the use of the coast were key for the Americans, as Kearny's troops likely would not have been sufficient to take the desired territory.

In Monterey, Commodore Stockton joined forces with the California Battalion of John C. Frémont. Frémont was an American Army officer and explorer who had gone to California to incite a rebellion of the Americans who were settled northeast of San Francisco, in the Sacramento Valley. Frémont's "Bear Flaggers" were mostly "restless, undisciplined, and shiftless hunters and trappers," and their breakaway California Republic resembled the Green Flag and Fredonia Republics in Texas.⁶⁴⁴ Indeed, the Sacramento Valley was the California counterpart of east Texas, being cartographically Mexican but effectively American.

There was little actual territory for the Americans to conquer in Mexican California. The cartographic territory was large, but Spain and Mexico had largely failed to populate California, and the population south of San Francisco was largely confined to a narrow strip between the coast and the first coastal mountain ranges.⁶⁴⁵ Because of this littoral settlement pattern, southern California was quickly subdued by the Pacific squadron and the California Battalion. Frémont landed in San Diego in late July and took the pueblo without firing a shot. Stockton landed in Santa Barbara in early August.⁶⁴⁶ Two weeks later their armies joined to enter Los Angeles unopposed. The military force under Mexican Governor Castro dissipated, and Castro withdrew to Chihuahua. After receiving official news that the US and Mexico were at war, Stockton issued another proclamation claiming California for the US and a military government over the territory until a legitimate civilian one could be established.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁴ Marti, *Messenger of Destiny*, 76.

⁶⁴⁵ Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico by the forces of the United States in the Years 1846 & 1847*, 17.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

Despite the initial optimism of a quick and nearly bloodless conquest, the Californios did not accept American rule without a fight. Allegedly chafing under military abuses, the Californios in Los Angeles rebelled against the new government on September 23.⁶⁴⁸ The resistance to American rule was organized in the south around Los Angeles by the recently deposed governor, Pio Pico, and Comandante General, Jose Castro.⁶⁴⁹ This did not represent the return of the Mexican State, however, but was really an expression of anarchic localism.⁶⁵⁰

In December, General Stephen W. Kearny arrived in California from Santa Fe and fought the battle of San Pasqual near San Diego. Although Kearney lost eighteen men, this was really an ambush and not a battle.⁶⁵¹ It was also the last significant resistance to the American occupation of California, which had taken about six months and was completed just as Zachary Taylor wrapped up his campaign in the Trans-Rio Grande. The conquest of California did not help the United States win the war with Mexico because it was far outside of Mexico's center of gravity. But it did prevent the sudden sale or stealthy foreign occupation of California, and also allowed the United States to claim California as a de facto possession at the negotiating table at the end of the war.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁵⁰ Warren, "Operations in California During the Mexican-American War," 43.

⁶⁵¹ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 213-214.

Neutralizing New Mexico, The Second Conquest Front

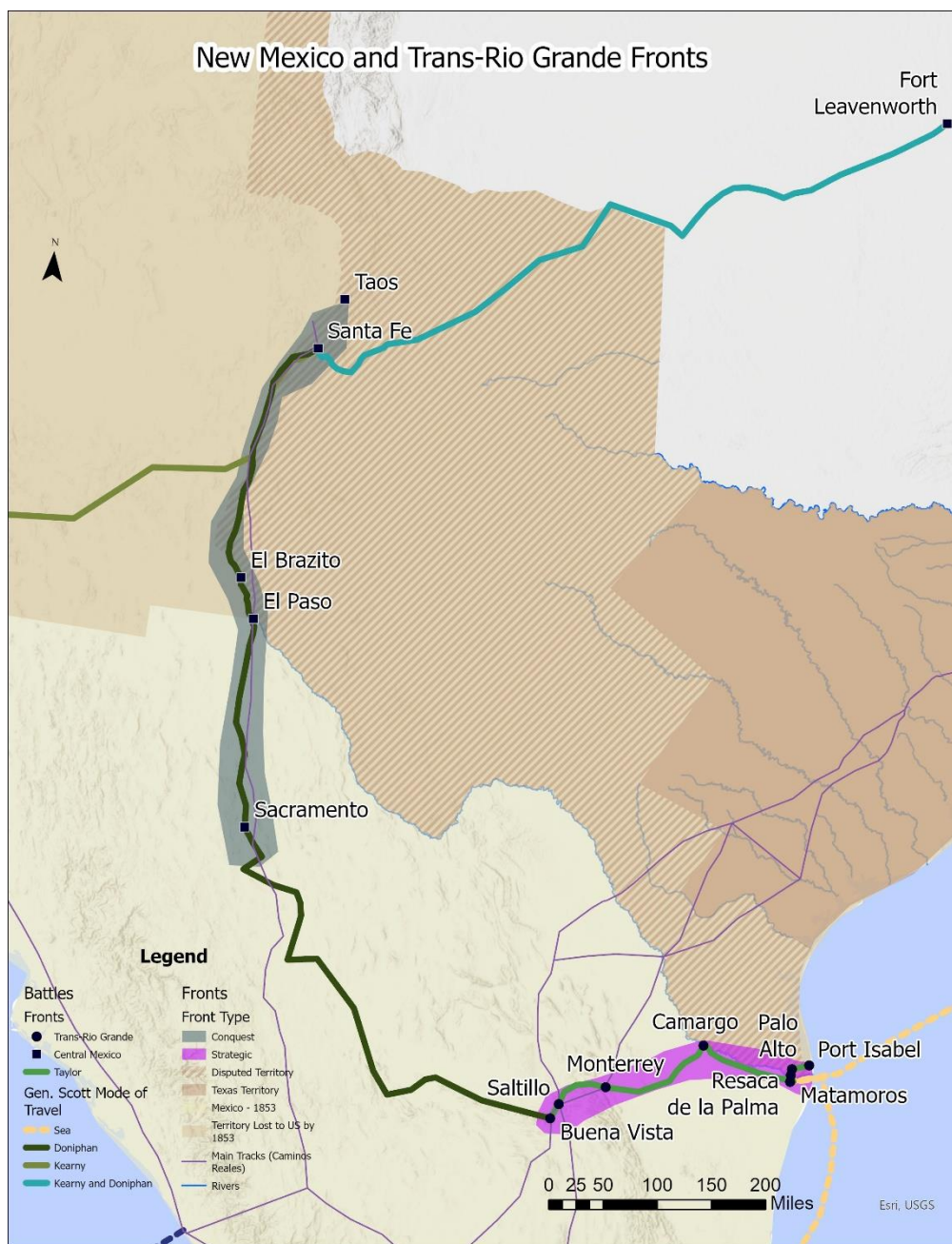


Figure VI-5. New Mexico and the Trans-Rio Grande Front

This map provides the reader with a snapshot of the conquest front in New Mexico. American troops advanced out of Fort Leavenworth. They occupied Santa Fe unopposed, at which time the force split, with Doniphan leading his troops south to take Chihuahua (Battle of Sacramento) and Kearny taking his troops west, to aid in California's conquest.

The New Mexico Front was also in the Mexican Sphere and it was the second conquest front in the Mexican-American War (figure VI-5). This front was opened shortly after Commodore Sloat claimed California for the United States on July 7. General Stephen W. Kearny led the Army of the West out of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His ultimate goal was southern California, but he was first tasked with taking Santa Fe and New Mexico for the United States.⁶⁵² As we have seen, New Mexico was slated to be a transit region, and the oasis of the upper Rio Grande Valley would be the main way station on the southern California trail. Kearny's initial march of eight-hundred-mile across the Great Plains was an impressive exhibition of overland power-projection.⁶⁵³

Santa Fe was the state capital of New Mexico and should have been a bastion of the Mexican state's strength. If Mexico had been a healthy state, Santa Fe would have been garrisoned by well-equipped soldiers who were ready to defend Mexico from foreign invasion. The lack of such troops illustrates Mexican weakness, especially when we consider that Santa Fe stood at the head of Mexico's central main track leading south to the silver mines.

The governor of New Mexico, Manuel Armijo, caught wind of the approaching Army of the West and sought to defend his country from these invaders. His problem was that his troops consisted of local volunteers, not comparatively well-trained and equipped regulars from the Mexican Army. However, Armijo had, in his favor, the rugged terrain in the vicinity of Santa Fe. Ten miles southeast of the city the Santa Fe trail curves around the end of the Sangre de Cristo

⁶⁵² Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 125.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

Mountains and passes through the defile of Apache Canyon. So, it was at this choke point that Armijo proposed to defy the Americans.

According to British traveler George Ruxton, Armijo believed that the Americans were advancing with 3,000 men. Ruxton adds a footnote saying that the American force was only 1,500. Armijo told Ruxton that he had 75 men to defend Mexico's sovereignty.⁶⁵⁴ These were not well-trained Spartans, but poorly equipped New Mexicans, and Apache Pass did not become a second Thermopylae. Staring down the barrel of sure defeat, Armijo disbanded his troops and allowed the Americans to enter Santa Fe unopposed.⁶⁵⁵ He likely disbanded his forces because he feared their slaughter, as many of them were lacking in combat experience, even though he occupied the highly defensible Apache Canyon.⁶⁵⁶

As in California, the invading American army did not face spirited resistance in New Mexico. At this great distance from the national core in Mexico City, the power of the Mexican state had died. The Americans were able to conquer the territory easily.⁶⁵⁷ As in California, they were later obliged to suppress a local uprising, but the Taos rebellion had no hope of restoring Mexican power.

When Kearny continued west to southern California, Colonel Doniphan turned south to the Mexican state of Chihuahua. Doniphan fought the battle of El Brazito in southern New Mexico as he moved over the old Presidio Line and into the Mexican domain. Doniphan had roughly 850 men and no artillery.⁶⁵⁸ His objective was to take control of El Paso and shatter the

⁶⁵⁴ Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico*, 205.

⁶⁵⁵ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican American War*, 132.

⁶⁵⁶ LeCompte, "Miguel Armijo and the Americans," 60; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 132.

⁶⁵⁷ Minge, "Frontier Problems," 334.

⁶⁵⁸ Naughton, "Forgotten Conflict and a Tale of Two Nations: The Battle of El Brazito," 774.

Mexican Army's ability to operate in the northern half of the country by taking Chihuahua, the capital city of the state of Chihuahua.⁶⁵⁹

The governor of Chihuahua had issued a call for troops to help repulse this invasion, and he ended up with a force that "was the advance guard of the entire Mexican Army in Northern Mexico," a force of between 500 and 1,200 troops of varying training levels headed by Major Antonio Ponce de Leon.⁶⁶⁰ Although de Leon surprised Doniphan at El Brazito, the Americans repulsed the Mexican attack and effectively shattered the Mexican army in the north-central desert. This victory allowed Doniphan to take El Paso unopposed on December 27 and then to destroy the Mexican Army at the Battle of Sacramento one month later.⁶⁶¹ After the Battle of Sacramento Doniphan's army walked into the city of Chihuahua and a Mexican official said "the Americans, now masters of our frontiers, entered the country in different directions."⁶⁶² By marching southeast from Chihuahua, Colonel Doniphan was able to join forces with General Taylor at Saltillo on May 21.⁶⁶³

Crushing the Center of Gravity, Mexican Core Front, The Second Strategic Front

The fourth front in the Mexican-American War was the Mexican Core, specifically the capital, Mexico City, by way of Veracruz (figure VI-6). Mexico's center of gravity was its capital, and by conquering its capital, the US could force the Mexican government to the

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 775.

⁶⁶¹ Naughton, "Forgotten Conflict and a Tale of Two Nations: The Battle of El Brazito," 775-782.

⁶⁶² Naughton, "Forgotten Conflict and a Tale of Two Nations: The Battle of El Brazito," 782. Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 236-239 says that the battle took place a little closer to Chihuahua and that it ended in early March, 1847.

⁶⁶³ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 240.

negotiating table.⁶⁶⁴ A capital is the national headquarters where top decision-makers and administrators are housed. A State will therefore fall into paralysis, impotence, or confusion if these decision-makers and administrators are captured or scattered by an enemy invasion. As a Prussian General wrote in his reflections on strategy, in a capital,

“the channels of the administration run together, and private and public resources are united, from which the needs of the army can be supplied. On this account the occupation of the capital by the enemy seriously disturbs the whole government machinery and impairs the efficiency of the army.”⁶⁶⁵

Conquest of a national capital also tends to demoralize a nation because it is taken as strong evidence that the State had absolutely failed.

⁶⁶⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 105-107. In this section of Clausewitz’s book, he creates the concept of a “center of gravity” for an army. This center of gravity should be the focal point for military operations, as defeating, or conquering that center will result in the termination of the conflict. In particular, he says that “in States torn by internal dissensions, this centre generally lies in the capital.” Mexico was certainly a state torn by internal dissention at this moment in history, and consequently, its center of gravity was the capital.

⁶⁶⁵ Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, *Letters on Strategy*, vol. 1, 253.

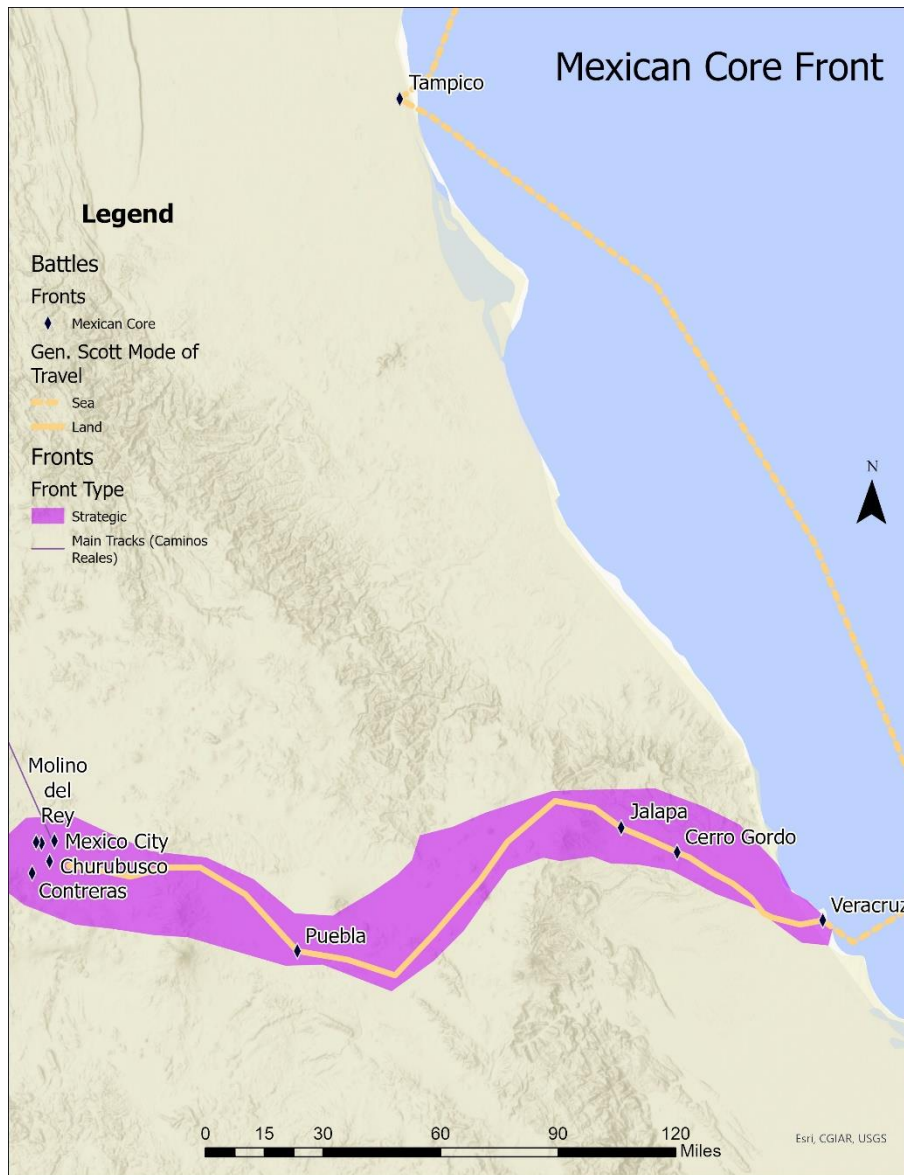


Figure VI-6. Mexican Core Front
Shows The overview of the Mexican Core Front opened by General Winfield Scott in March of 1847 when he landed troops at Veracruz.

President Polk made the decision to invade Mexico through Veracruz in November, 1846, because victory in the Trans-Rio Grande Front had not achieved the aim of bringing

Mexico to the negotiation table and he feared the American Army would bog down in a costly, unpopular, and ineffective war.⁶⁶⁶ Polk's position is clear when we look at the following quote

“It would encourage Mexico to persevere, and tend to protract [the war] indefinitely... A border warfare of the most savage character, extending over a long line, would be unceasingly waged. It would require a large army to be kept constantly in the field, stationed at posts and garrisons along such a line, to protect and defend it.”⁶⁶⁷

Polk wanted to avoid what military historians call “a quagmire,” and the fastest way to end the war, the US realized, was to take the fight to the Mexican core.⁶⁶⁸

For all of recorded history, the “cockpit” of Mexico has been the valley of Mexico and Mexico City. From this valley the reigning State, whether it was Aztec, Spanish, or Mexican, sent its tendrils of power up the plateau and down to the coasts to dominate the surrounding land. To conquer this “cockpit,” Hernán Cortes and Winfield Scott both took essentially the same route, from the coast at Veracruz, up the mountainous scarp of the Mexican Plateau, and into the Valley of Mexico from the east.⁶⁶⁹ Veracruz, though being 280 miles from Mexico City, is the “gateway to Mexico City.”⁶⁷⁰

The United States did not wish to conquer all of Mexico.⁶⁷¹ California was what it was after. And although it already conquered California, it wished to give that conquest external sovereignty by making Mexico agree to it in writing. Holding a knife to the Mexican capital was deemed to be the most efficient way to achieve this objective. Had Mexico been a strong state, it

⁶⁶⁶ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 248, 256.

⁶⁶⁷ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 256.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁶⁶⁹ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, xv notes the connection between where Gen. Scott landed and where Hernán Cortes landed in the 1500s.

⁶⁷⁰ Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, xv.

⁶⁷¹ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 147-150.

would have been able to repulse this invasion into its core, or at least hold the Americans in the lowlands and let the yellow fever do its work. But Mexico was a failing state and could only slow down the American advance.

Santa Anna tried to hold the Americans in the *tierra caliente*, where they would succumb to *el vómito*. He established his stronghold near Cerro Gordo on the National Highway that ran from Veracruz to Mexico City.⁶⁷² Holding the Americans in the lowlands, Santa Anna was also aided by Mexico's "lawless roads," since Scott's supply line was "highly vulnerable to the murderous bandits that prowled the National Highway." Even while on the offensive, the Americans were harassed by partisans and wished to end the war quickly.⁶⁷³

The United States was able to take the fight to the Mexican core because it made use of the Gulf of Mexico. As we have seen, General Taylor realized that his army would be consumed by a negative economy of force if it attacked Mexico City overland from the Rio Grande.⁶⁷⁴ Thus the United States chose to exploit its enormous maritime advantage and run the lines of communication from New Orleans across the Gulf to Veracruz.⁶⁷⁵ For this leg of the journey, the friction of distance was minimal and the supply line was perfectly secure. General Winfield Scott subsequently defeated Santa Anna at Cerro Gordo, drove onto the plateau, entered the Valley of Mexico, conquered the Mexican capital, and earned the phrase "the halls of Montezuma" a place in the Marine Corps hymn.

⁶⁷² Wheelan, *Invading Mexico*, 323.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 322 on the "specter of an unwinnable guerrilla war" and 333-334 on the dangers facing the supply lines.

⁶⁷⁴ Buchly, "Comparison of the effect of military geography," 3.

⁶⁷⁵ De la Peña, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 9. This subordinate was one who made the point that the Mexican invasion should have gone over the water, as it would have been "less costly" than transporting the army overland.

Mexico's Day of Reckoning

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that Mexico was bounded on the north by an “imaginary boundary.” The terms of the Adams-Onís treaty of 1819 allowed map makers to draw that boundary with apparent accuracy, but this boundary had no more substance than the boundary Alexander von Humboldt had described ten years earlier.

“We are uncertain as to the limits which ought to be assigned to New Spain to the north and east. It is not enough that a country has been run over by a missionary monk, or that a coast has been seen by a vessel of war, to consider it as belonging to the Spanish colonies of America.”⁶⁷⁶

As we have seen, the civilization of Spain and Mexico in many places *failed* to follow its missionary monks and vessels of war. North of a line drawn from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific—the Presidio Line of the Marquis de Rubí—the *actual territory* of Mexico was limited, fragmentary, and insecure. In 1840 there was no indication that this actual territory was expanding, consolidating, or safer than before. Instead, Texas had revolted, Comancheria and Apacheria were expanding, and the enclaves of New Mexico and California were about to collapse with barely a show of resistance.

Meanwhile the United States was projecting its power over the imaginary boundary and into Mexico's nominal sphere. Texas east of the Colorado was settled by Americans who traded with New Orleans and then founded their own breakaway Republic. The upper Rio Grande was an economic colony of Saint Louis, and American traders were common deep into Chihuahua. North of San Francisco Bay, California was effectively American. As General Winfield Scott prepared his siege of Mexico City, Joseph Smith led his Mormon colony into Utah unopposed.

⁶⁷⁶ Humboldt, Alexander von. *Political Essays on the Kingdom of New Spain*, Vol. 1, 273.

It is therefore hard to quibble with the assessment of the British diplomat and historian James Bryce, who in 1888 said of the relations between the United States and Mexico.

“It is almost impossible for a feeble State, full of natural wealth which her people do not use, not to crumble under the impact of a stronger and more enterprising race.”⁶⁷⁷

In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States obtained the boundary adjustment that President Polk had most desired. Mexico surrendered its revanchist claims on Texas and yielded the buffer zone of the Nueces Strip. The new boundary ran up the great river to El Paso, and then west along lines geometric and natural to the Colorado River. The transit region of New Mexico and Arizona was therefore American territory. From the confluence of the Gila and Colorado Rivers, the boundary ran straight to the Pacific Ocean, placing the great prize of California securely in American hands.

In early February 1847, a young captain named Robert E. Lee neatly summarized the situation in a letter to his wife.

“It is certain that we are the conquerors in a regular war, and by the laws of nations are entitled to dictate the terms of peace. We have fought well and fought fairly. We hold and continue to hold their country, and have a right to exact compensation for the expense of a war continued, if not provoked, by ignorance and vanity on the part of Mexico. It is true we bullied her. For that I am ashamed, for she was the weaker party, but we have since, by way of offset drubbed her handsomely and in a manner no man might be ashamed of. They begin to be aware how entirely they are beaten. The treaty gives us all the land we want; the amount we pay is a trifle, and is the cheapest way of ending the war.”⁶⁷⁸

The United States certainly “bullied” Mexico into starting a disastrous war that it could not win, but Mexico had also provoked the war through ignorance and vanity. Earlier in this chapter I

⁶⁷⁷ Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, Vol 3, 261

⁶⁷⁸ Lee, *General Lee*, 43-44.

described this self-destructive vanity as the madness of a failing state. A failing state typically aggravates its failure because it is too vain to admit—perhaps to even see—its own failure. Like Mexico in 1847, it is only when they fail absolutely that “they begin to be aware how entirely they are beaten.”

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CHAPTER VII A GEOGRAPHIC COUNTERFACTUAL, THE GULF OF MEXICO AND MEXICAN EXPANSION

“It is said to be the manifest destiny of this race to spread over this whole continent, carrying with it its laws, institutions and enterprise . . . In process of time, the whole of North America may possibly be covered by our population, and may be governed by our laws; but *there is nothing in the nature of things whereby this may be accomplished without our own direct action.*”

Andrews Norton, *A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity* (1839)

The preceding chapters have offered an analysis that some might accuse of environmental or geographic *determinism*. Such critics would say that political events cannot be explained by geographic facts such as distance, the shape of the continent, variations in climate and terrain, the character and arrangement of rivers, and the relation between Mexico and the Gulf that bears its name. I have certainly given considerable weight to such geographic facts, but I have not said that they *caused* the political events I have described. I have indeed tried to “avoid the two equally undesirable extremes of the usual ignoring of geographical factors in history, and the naïve doctrine of geographic determinism.”⁶⁷⁹

The words just quoted are from the American historian Harry Elmer Barnes, writing in the 1920s, just as “geographic determinism” was falling out of favor among American geographers. I have bracketed the phrase “geographic determinism” because American geographers were never “naïve” or “extreme” determinists. The same cannot always be said of their critics. An overreaction against the bugbear of geographic determinism unfortunately caused some geographers to join with other social scientists in what Barnes calls “the usual ignoring of geographic factors in history.”

⁶⁷⁹ Barnes, *The New History and the Social Sciences*, 290.

Geographic facts do not *cause* human actions in a simple or direct way. A river does not, for example, act on the human mind in the simple and direct way that gravity acts on an apple that is plucked by the wind. There is instead an interaction between the river and a cultured human mind that is pursuing some plan, and that is stocked with certain notions about the character and uses of rivers. This is why the geographer Carl Sauer said that “environment is a term of cultural appraisal.”⁶⁸⁰

Beyond the complexities of environmental perception, geographic facts *condition* human actions by favoring or opposing their success. Thus, the historian Barnes wrote,

“It would seem that one of the chief obstacles to the adequate appreciation of geographical data by professional historians would be removed if we ceased to talk of geographic influences as of a *determining* character and recognized that rather they are extremely important *conditioning factors*.”⁶⁸¹

The geography of Texas did not, for example, *cause* Santa Anna to attempt reconquest of the break-away state. The cause lay in the hubristic psychology of Santa Anna, and in the tumultuous precarity of Mexican politics. But the geography of Texas was certainly an “extremely important conditioning factor” favoring the catastrophic failure of Santa Anna’s attempted reconquest.

This is how most geographers have traditionally understood geographic influences. Writing at the same time as Barnes, the so-called environmental determinist Ellsworth Huntington said,

⁶⁸⁰ Sauer, “Foreword to Historical Geography,” 8.

⁶⁸¹ Barnes, *The New History and the Social Sciences*, 70.

“Physical environment never compels man to do anything; the compulsion lies in his own nature. But the environment does say that some courses of conduct are permissible and others are impossible.”⁶⁸²

Physical environment never compels a nation to attempt to build a continental empire, for instance. As the American theologian Andrews Norton says in the epigraph to this chapter, in 1839 the United States might become a continental colossus, but there was “nothing in the nature of things whereby this may be accomplished without our own direct action.”⁶⁸³ That compulsion lay in the nature of the nation, its institutions, and its leaders. But, once a nation has undertaken to build an empire, the character and configuration of the physical environment will condition—will favor or oppose—its success.

Nor can it be said that unpropitious geography, physical or political, causes state failure or compels a state to fail. State failure begins with political failures within the failing state. But once a state begins to fail, its circumstances of physical and political geography will be very important conditioning factors favoring or opposing recovery. Mexico was not destined to failure because of its geographic circumstances, but, once it began to fail, its geographic circumstances favored failure.

It mattered that Spain did not know how the Mississippi flowed until La Salle floated down it. It mattered that Texas river bottoms were not littered with gold, and that the mountains of the Gran Chichimeca were plump with precious silver. It mattered that the Comanche had horses and controlled a high plain that drove a wedge between New Mexico and Texas. It mattered that Santa Anna was a landlubber who ignored the Gulf of Mexico when he invaded

⁶⁸² Huntington, *The Human Habitat*, vi.

⁶⁸³ Norton, *Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity*, 33.

Texas, just as it mattered that Winfield Scott exploited the Gulf to reduce the friction of distance and deliver violence to the Mexican core. Human actors interacted with geography to create the story of Mexican state failure that I have outlined in the preceding pages. But the geography these humans danced across did not make their decisions for them.

An Uncertain Destiny

A notable popular geopolitician, Peter Zeihan, recently argued in his book *The Accidental Superpower* that the geographic circumstances of the United States are just too good to screw up.⁶⁸⁴ He asserts that the United States will always remain a world superpower, no matter how blundering and incompetent the leaders at its helm. He believes that geography has determined that the United States will be forever invincible, or “inevitable”, like the character Thanos in Marvel’s *Avengers*. Zeihan tells us that success is inevitable because the United States controls the best part of a continent, fronts the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, has a populous core with navigable rivers, and is insulated by two oceans from geopolitical events happening in other parts of the world.

If we set aside Mackinder’s theory of the World Island and suppose that Zeihan is correct, we may still ask whether this enviable geographic position was itself inevitable.⁶⁸⁵ Was this enviable geographic position the “manifest destiny” of the infant United States? What if the Appalachian Mountains halted westward expansion? What if France had decided to settle rather than sell Louisiana? What if Mexico had delivered overwhelming violence into Texas and

⁶⁸⁴ Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*.

⁶⁸⁵ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 171.

welded that state into its domain there, halting the US? What if, instead of a manifest destiny, the infant United States had an *uncertain destiny*?

The remainder of this conclusion will use a geographic counterfactual to argue that Mexico's state failure was not *determined* by its geography. Mexico's state failure was *caused* by political turmoil, economic folly, and military fiasco. But once Mexico's state failure had begun, the physical and human geography of Mexico *avored failure*. Examining the melancholy ruins of Mexico just after the war with the United States, a Mexican writer said,

“The Mexican Republic . . . had among other misfortunes of less account, the great one of being in the vicinity of a strong and energetic people. Emancipated from the parent country, yet wanting in that experience not to be acquired while the reins of her destiny were in foreign hands, and involved for many years in the whirlwind of never ending revolutions, the country offered an easy conquest to any who might desire to employ against her a respectable force.”⁶⁸⁶

Counterfactual Geographies

The geographer D. W. Meinig uses counterfactual geographies to “jar” his readers “out of habits of mind” and make them see that the current boundary between Mexico and the United States was not inevitable.⁶⁸⁷ State boundaries are not determined by “the nature of things,” but by human acts that are conditioned by things. As Lord Curzon said in his Romanes Lecture of 1907,

“the boundaries of the majority of States are purely political, and find their origin in the events of history; although geographical conditions . . . have not been without influence in their selection.”⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ Alcaraz, *The Other Side: Or Notes for the History of the War Between Mexico and the United States*, 1-2.

⁶⁸⁷ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 2, 215.

⁶⁸⁸ Curzon, *Frontiers*, 36-37.

Meinig shows his readers some of the ways the United States might have looked if the Mexican war had been settled differently. He proposes two alternate geographies of the United States, one greater and one lesser. In the first scenario, Meinig imagines a greater United States that annexed the Yucatan Peninsula and the Mexican isthmus down to the line of Tampico. In the second scenario he imagines a lesser United States that either eschewed or lost the Mexican War. In this second scenario, New Mexico remains part of Mexico, but Texas, California and Deseret are independent buffer states.

Like counterfactual history, counterfactual geography is a thought experiment that tests the significance of a fact by imagining a world in which that fact was absent or greatly modified. The great sociologist Max Weber described the counterfactual method this way:

“The judgment that, if a single historical fact is conceived of as absent from or modified in a complex of historical conditions, it would condition a course of historical events in a way which would be different in certain historically important respects, seems to be of considerable value for the determination of the ‘historical significance’ of those facts.”⁶⁸⁹

The altered historical fact of my geographic counterfactual is Mexico’s neglect of the Gulf of Mexico. My counterfactual antecedent is that, rather than neglect the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico maintained an adequate navy, multiple ports, and a vigorous coasting trade. Had Mexico done this, I submit that it could have delivered overwhelming violence to Texas in 1836 and prevented an American army landing at Vera Cruz in 1847. In other words, it was policy and not geography that caused Mexico to fail. Indeed, geography offered Mexico the key to success.

The preceding chapters have shown the geopolitical significance of the Gulf of Mexico. In chapter two, the Gulf was key to the establishment of Spanish control over the Valley of

⁶⁸⁹ Weber, *On the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, 166.

Mexico. Spanish ships moved from east to west, pulling silver out of Mexico and establishing the Gulf as a main track of the Spanish empire. Veracruz anchored Spanish shipping on the east coast of Mexico and was the only authorized entrepot on the Gulf.⁶⁹⁰ This restriction ensured that the provinces of northern New Spain developed as a sphere—as *Provincias Internas*—since New Mexico and Texas would have developed very differently if Spain had allowed unrestricted trade through Copano, Matagorda, and Galveston bays (figure VII-1).

⁶⁹⁰ Haring, *Trade and Navigation Between Spain and the Indies in the Time of the Hapsburgs*, 138.

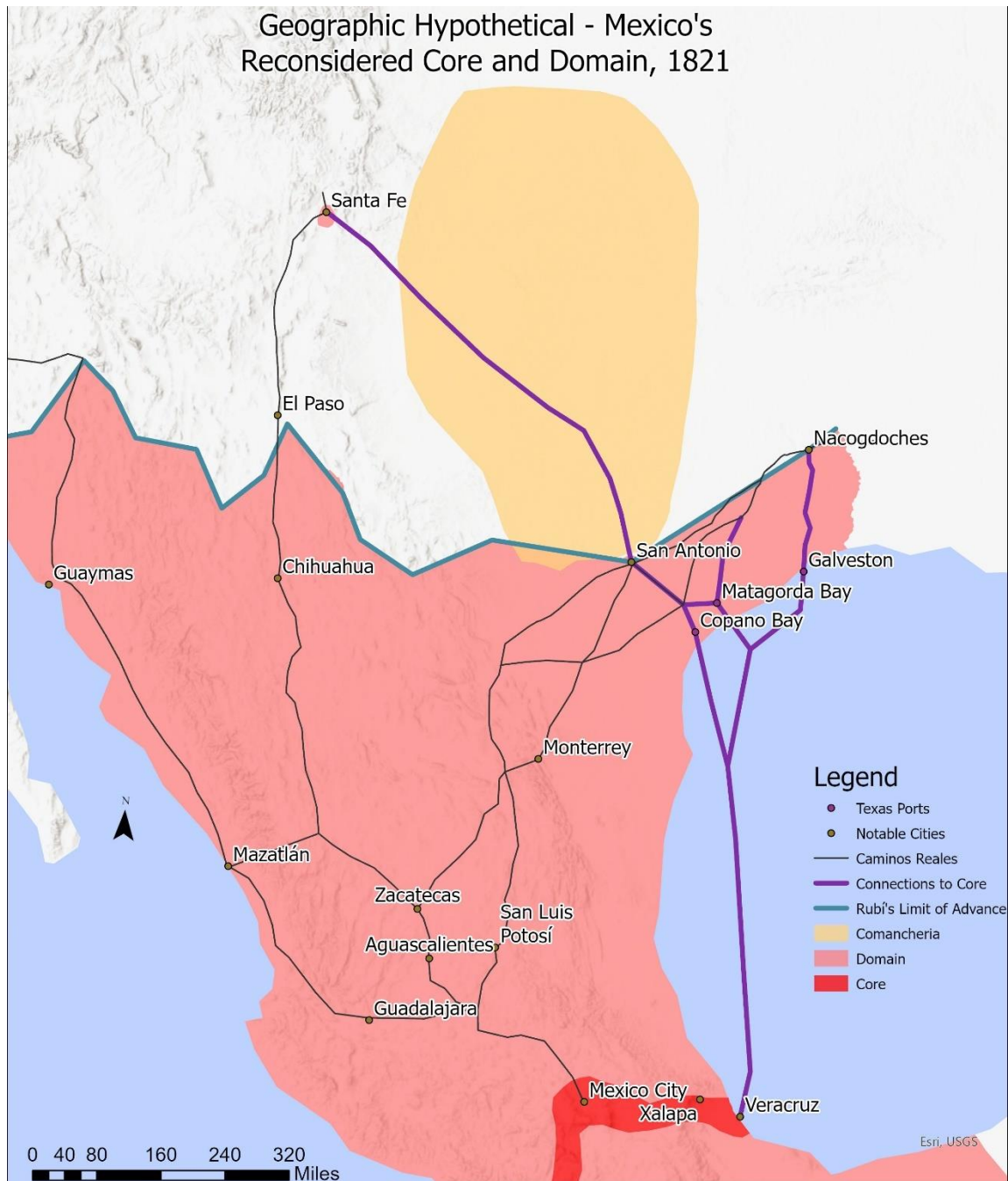


Figure VII-1. Geographic Hypothetical – Mexico’s Reconsidered Core and Domain, 1821
 This map shows the growth of the domain in Texas that could have been possible if Spain had allowed ports to develop along the Texas coast earlier in Texas’ history. These ports would have enabled a tighter connection to develop between Texas and the core. This tighter connection would have better enabled Mexico to control Texas after it gained independence in 1821.

The importance of the Gulf is also illustrated in every major military conflict outlined in this dissertation. In chapter five, Santa Anna ignored the Gulf at his own peril, choosing to try and deliver violence overland to Texas. Chapter six saw the invading Americans use the Gulf to reduce the friction of distance they faced in conquering the Mexican capital. Any power that successfully invaded Mexico did so by taking control of Veracruz and following Cortez's path over the Sierra Madre Oriental into Mexico City. So, clearly, controlling the Gulf was key to controlling Mexico.

After all, the Gulf is called the Gulf of *Mexico*, not the Gulf of the *United States of America!*

The Connective Power of the Gulf of Mexico – Creating the Domain in Texas

The northern sphere of New Spain was not naturally isolated, but was rather artificially isolated by Spain's policy of restricting international trade to authorized entrepots like Veracruz. In my counterfactual geography, I therefore imagine that Spain allowed unrestricted trade through Copano, Matagorda, and Galveston bays. This would have facilitated maritime ties to the core of New Spain, other Spanish colonies, and even the mother country across the sea. Straggling frontier outposts like San Antonio, Los Adaes, and even Santa Fe, would have bloomed with relative prosperity and attracted more immigrants. For as Adam Smith would soon point out,

“Every town and country . . . in proportion as they have opened their ports to all nations; instead of being ruined by this free trade, as the principles of the commercial system [i.e. mercantilism] would lead us to expect, have been enriched by it.”⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 85.

This Gulf-bound shipping would have kept Spanish officials in regular contact with their subordinates in Texas and would have eliminated smuggling through French Louisiana. Because connections to Louisiana were reduced, the Spanish spoken by the Tejanos would not have acquired as distinct a regional accent. Because the Tejanos felt well looked after by their government, they would have felt more inclination to obey that government. And more immigrants would have been attracted to Texas if they had been assured of ready access to overseas markets and imported goods.

Intelligent use of the Gulf of Mexico would also have reduced the distance decay of power when Spanish sovereignty was challenged by geopolitical rivals in Texas. These rivals were the French and the plains Indians, principally Apache and Comanche, who obtained firearms from French traders. In my counterfactual geography, Spain would have effectively opposed all three of these groups by efficiently delivering violence to Texas by way of the Gulf. By securing the lives and property of Tejanos, Spain would have inspired loyalty and engendered legitimacy for the state. Like improved access to markets, improved security would have made Texas more attractive to immigrants and fostered settlement of the territory.

I do not suppose that Spain would have been able to remove the Comanche from Comancheria, but it is reasonable to suppose that it would have been able to more effectively defend Tejanos from Comanche raids. This defense would have hinged on regular reinforcements and supplies delivered to the Texas coast, as well as regular visits from colonial administrators. In 1768, instead of drawing a line across the continent at the narrowest point, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of California, we may imagine that Rubí recommended that

Texas be made an injection point for Spanish military power and a natural extension of the domain of New Spain.

When the United States acquired Louisiana in 1803, the Spanish crown would not have been concerned because Texas would have been a prosperous and populous province and not a desolate and defenseless waste. Spain could have enforced its sovereignty, policed its border, and expelled any American squatter who crept over the Sabine River. That Spain could not, in fact, do any of these things was the result of Spain's colonial policy and not the physical geography of New Spain. This policy restricted foreign trade to the entrepot of Veracruz in order to simplify taxation and guarantee the monopoly of a cartel of favored merchants. To once again quote Adam Smith, when foreign trade is restricted to a single port,

“The profit of those merchants would be . . . exorbitant and oppressive. The colonies would be ill supplied, and would be obliged to buy very dear, and to sell very cheap. This, however, has always been the policy of Spain, and the price of all European goods, accordingly, is said to be enormous in the Spanish West Indies.”⁶⁹²

The situation is very different when foreign trade is conducted through many ports, even when there is a tariff.

“In this case the number and dispersed situation of the different traders renders it impossible for them to enter into any general combination [i.e. a cartel], and their competition is sufficient to hinder them from making very exorbitant profits. Under so liberal a policy the colonies are enabled both to sell their own produce and to buy the goods of Europe at a reasonable price.”⁶⁹³

New Spain and later Mexico failed because they were run for the benefit of a commercial, military, and religious oligarchy, and because this oligarchy was repeatedly riven by wars

⁶⁹² Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 171-172.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

between rival factions. Public policies strengthened and enriched this oligarchy, or one faction of this oligarchy, but weakened and impoverished Mexico. As one American historian and diplomat explained,

“During all this time nothing was undertaken in Mexico for its own interests, but solely for the benefit of Spain; then came independence . . . For whose profit was independence proclaimed? . . . For a Mexican oligarchy, divided into two pretty nearly equal parties, the liberals and the conservatives, who were constantly fighting with each other . . . Nature had done everything for the prosperity of the country, but man seemed bent on its ruin.”⁶⁹⁴

The disastrous neglect of the Gulf of Mexico was one aspect of oligarchic misrule. Because of this misrule the “ruined” country could not hope to resist what Ratzel called “encroachment and usurpation” by its more vigorous neighbor. As another historian explained,

“In the midst of this internal struggle the aggressions of the Anglo-Saxon neighbor in the Texas episode and subsequent Mexican War fall as a disastrous interlude. The westward sweep of land-hungry Americans could not wait for self-government to mature in Mexico. In international politics the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong.”⁶⁹⁵

The Texas Domain Under Mexico

The great French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache is remembered for his doctrine of geographic possibilism. Vidal taught that every geographic environment contains many latent possibilities, only one of which will be realized by the men and women who control that environment. As we just saw, development of the northwest coast of the Gulf of Mexico was a geographic possibility, but this possibility was not realized, or perhaps even recognized, by the majority of oligarchs of Mexico and New Spain. As Vidal put it, “one might say that for each

⁶⁹⁴ Bigelow, *Retrospections of an Active Life*, vol. 2, 485.

⁶⁹⁵ Priestly, *The Mexican Nation: A History*, xiii- xiv.

stage of development there is a corresponding fresh grasp of possibilities for appropriation of natural resources”⁶⁹⁶

My counterfactual geography has so far supposed that Spain grasped the ruinous tendencies of its oligarchic policy and opened ports on the coast of Texas. Realizing the possibility of free trade, Spain made the province more prosperous, populous and secure. Thus, instead of inheriting Texas as an isolated, desolate, and poorly-defended territory in 1821, Mexico would have inherited Texas as part of its domain. Crucially, a much larger population of prosperous and secure Tejanos would have recognized the legitimacy of the Mexican state and there would have been no temptation to diversify Texas with large numbers of American colonists.

A more populous Texas could have become a state independent of Coahuila in 1834. Thus, the Tejano’s desire for regional autonomy could have been satisfied without secession and within the Mexican system. Because of the conditioned loyalty of Mexicans living in Texas, the cause of independence would have found few followers. If malcontents managed to start a rebellion, Mexico could land a large, rested, and well-supplied army on the coast and speedily put down the rebels. The Battle of San Jacinto would likely have ended differently if a Mexican squadron had landed Santa Anna’s army on the shore of Galveston Bay.

The question of Texas remaining a part of Mexico would likely not have been decided solely by events in of Mexico, as the expansionist interests of the United States would still have aimed to march westward to the Pacific Ocean. However, Mexico would have been in a much better position to deter or resist the expanding United States if it had not neglected the Gulf of

⁶⁹⁶ Vidal de la Blache, *Principles of Human Geography*, 110.

Mexico. We have already seen, if Spain and Mexico had paid intelligent attention to the Gulf of Mexico, there might have been no Republic of Texas, no annexation to the United States, and no *casus belli* in the Nueces Strip. Because Texas would not have become independent, the United States could not have annexed Texas and subsequently complained that “American blood was spilled on American soil.”

If patience had rewarded the United States with another pretext for war, the counterfactual Mexican-American War would not have been fought in the same way it was actually fought. The war could have been fought for a similar reason, perhaps over the disputed territory in East Texas between the Red and Sabine Rivers.⁶⁹⁷ However, Mexico would have been better able to discourage or thwart a United States’ invasion with an insuperable logistic problem. We saw in chapter five that a strategic retreat increases the relative strength of the *retreating army*, and a Mexico bordering the United States on the Sabine River would have afforded Mexico six hundred additional miles of strategic retreat.

More significantly, my counterfactual antecedent is that Mexico had not neglected the Gulf of Mexico and was, indeed, a maritime power in the western Gulf. In reality, the Mexicans had hired a navy in their war against Spain, but then immediately allowed it to decay. The Mexican commodore in the war against Spain was, in fact, an American mercenary, and much of the Mexican fleet was American built.⁶⁹⁸ And Mexico neglected this navy. As a contemporary historian wrote:

“The Mexican navy consisted in 1826, of nineteen vessels, one ship of the line, two frigates, one schooner, four gunboats, one corvette, four launches and two

⁶⁹⁷ Haggard, “Neutral Ground.” Entry on Texas State Historical Association’s website. Content can be found [here](#).

⁶⁹⁸ Niles, *A View of South America and Mexico*, 125-126.

pilot boats. After Com. Porter left Mexico, the Marine fell into disuse and has never been respectable since that period.”⁶⁹⁹

Eighteen years later, on the eve of the American invasion

“The Mexican navy, consisting of two expensive steamers and nine brigs and schooners, also helped to increase the difficulties arising from the want of money; and served no other purpose than to display the folly of maintaining a small fleet to guard a coast stretching five thousand miles upon the Pacific Ocean and two thousand five hundred upon the Gulf. Tempestuous seas, shallow water, the *vomito*, and violent winds, formed a better protection against the approach of a hostile squadron.”⁷⁰⁰

In any event, none of these defenses protected the east coast of Mexico, where the United States Army was able to land troops and supplies without any real opposition, first at Point Isabel, then at Tampico and Veracruz.

My counterfactual geography does not suppose an unrealistically formidable Mexican Navy, simply a fleet sufficient to increase the friction of distance between New Orleans and the Mexican coast. As the great American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan explained, harassment of the attacker’s supply lines is the primary role of a navy in coastal defense. We saw in chapter six that, after the Battle of Buena Vista, Zachary Taylor was daunted by the “long road” to Mexico City because he fully understood the distance decay of power. He had no doubt studied Clausewitz and knew what the master had said about supply lines.

“These great channels of life must therefore neither be permanently severed, nor must they be of too great length, or beset with difficulties, because there is always a loss of strength on a long road, which tends to weaken the condition of an Army.”⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ Young, *History of Mexico*, 225.

⁷⁰⁰ Young, *History of Mexico*, 302.

⁷⁰¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, vol. 2, 114.

Because Mexico lacked any effective navy, the great channel of life for the American Army would not be “beset with difficulties” so long as it ran through the Gulf. As Mahan explained, the task of a navy in coastal defense is to “attack on the communications of the besiegers.”

Indeed, Mahan went on to say that no coast is defensible without naval “molestation.”

“Napoleon said that no position can be permanently maintained if dependent upon defense only. The enemy must be disturbed or he will succeed . . . In a properly coordinated system of coast defense this counter-action, molestation, the offensive-defense, belongs to the navy.”⁷⁰²

In my counterfactual geography, therefore, the road to Mexico City was simply too long by land and too long by sea. The United States did not, therefore, attempt “to plant the stars and stripes upon the halls of Montezuma and the shores of California” because it would, by either road, be worn down and defeated by the distance decay of power.⁷⁰³

My purpose in writing this counterfactual geography has been twofold. First, I have aimed to show that facts of physical geography do not determine the course of human history, but that they are at the same time “extremely important conditioning factors.” The configuration of the Gulf of Mexico did not determine the ultimate location of the international boundary, but we cannot understand the ultimate location of the international border if we do not understand the configuration of the Gulf of Mexico. And we do not understand the *significance* of the configuration of the Gulf of Mexico until we understand the different ways in which the Gulf of Mexico was *evaluated* by Spain, Mexico, and the United States. This is why the geographer Wreford Watson wrote,

⁷⁰² Mahan, *Naval Strategy*, 142-143.

⁷⁰³ George Ashmun, Speech in the House of Representatives, July 27, 1846.

“Not all geography derives from the earth; some of it springs from our idea of the earth. This geography within the mind can at times be the effective geography to which men adjust.”⁷⁰⁴

The configuration of the Gulf of Mexico was important but not determinative because its “effective geography” was a consequence of economic and geopolitical theories, or what Watson calls “geography within the mind.”

Physical geography did not make failure and dismemberment the manifest destiny of Mexico, but physical and human geography were very important conditioning factors once Mexico began to fail. Geographic determinism is disproven by the fact that the United States succeeded in enforcing its sovereignty throughout what had been Mexico’s unruly northern sphere; geographic conditioning is evident in the persistence of Mexico’s main tracks and Rubí’s Presidio Line. The “environmental determinist” Ellen Churchill Semple wrote,

“Political dismemberment, lack of cohesion due the presence of physical barriers impeding intercourse, is the inherent weakness of mountain peoples . . . Mountain policy tends to diminish the power of the central authority to the vanishing point . . .”⁷⁰⁵

What she should have said is that physical barriers diminish the power of the central authority and favor dismemberment when the central power *fails*. As I said above, New Spain and later Mexico failed because they were run for the benefit of a commercial, military, and religious oligarchy, and because this oligarchy was repeatedly riven by wars between rival factions. Public policies strengthened and enriched this oligarchy, or one faction of this oligarchy, but weakened and impoverished Mexico. Thus, it was easy for physical barriers of distance and terrain to “diminish the power of the central authority to the vanishing point” because the central authority

⁷⁰⁴ Watson, “The Role of Illusion in North American Geography,” 10.

⁷⁰⁵ Semple, *Influences of Geographic Environment*, 590-591.

had very little authority. This eyewitness description of the fall of Veracruz will serve as a symbol of Mexican state failure as a whole:

“Had not dissention arisen among the parties in the capital, a sufficient force . . . might have gathered to the relief of the city before it should have fallen. But ‘whom the god’s would ruin . . .’—everyone knows the rest of this often quoted adage; the truth of its sentiment let him read in the civic dissentions, amounting to civil war, in the city of Mexico, *at this moment of the nation’s difficulties*, which formed THE CRISIS of its power and weakness—freedom or subjugation—integrity or dismemberment . . . Veracruz and its castle are now safely reposing beneath the folds of the American flag.”⁷⁰⁶

Wrapping Everything Up

This dissertation has offered a geographic interpretation of Mexican state failure between 1836 and 1848. I have not drawn on new archival sources, but I have told an old story in a new way. I have at least tried to satisfy Harry Elmer Barnes’ call to “avoid the two equally undesirable extremes of the usual ignoring of geographical factors in history, and the naïve doctrine of geographic determinism.” I have also tried to follow the example of D.W. Meinig and tell the story in a manner that can enlighten the scholar but also appeal to students and the general public. I agree with George Demko’s address to the Association of American Geographers and believe geographers should write more geographic interpretations for the general public. As Demko said, “they wouldn’t have to ask what we do if we did our job and wrote intelligent but understandable books for the educated public.”⁷⁰⁷

My hope, then, is that this dissertation clearly communicates the importance of geography to states that are trying—and more especially states that are failing—to govern their territory. I have done this in a way that I hope will remind geographers of the grim fact that

⁷⁰⁶ Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*, 405-406.

⁷⁰⁷ Demko, “Geography Beyond the Ivory Tower,” 576.

violence and coercion are essential to a successful state. I believe that too many political geographers have forgotten Lord Acton's admonition that "the supreme conquests of society are won more often by violence than by lenient arts," and that those who have not forgotten this admonition simply deplore it.⁷⁰⁸

Much of the current literature in political geography eschews violence. There are frequent allusions to abstract violence, and violence against certain groups is condemned; but there is little appetite for examination of the minute instruments of military science and police power. I believe almost all political geographers would profit from a closer and less squeamish study of actual tactics and strategy. We may all wish that it were otherwise, but social order ultimately rests on the threat or application of violence, and a social science that does not know *how* this is done must be half blind.

A society that does not know when this ought to be done must be half savage. As Sir Charles Napier wrote in his journal while suppressing the slave trade of Scinde in 1844,

"Severity, injustice, violence, smite! smite! smite! If an oak is to be felled you must smite and not reason with spectators. I listen to nothing and make prisoners of all accused, condemn without proof, punish without mercy, and before January 1848, not a slave shall be in Scinde . . . I will cut down my oak."⁷⁰⁹

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⁷⁰⁸ Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, 35.

⁷⁰⁹ Napier, *Life and Opinions*, vol. 3, 191-192.

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CHAPTER VIII

TEACHING A GEOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF STATE FAILURE, ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES USING NOVEL CARTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF FAILED STATES

Introduction

The field of geography faces an ever-present problem of clearly communicating what geographers do to outside audiences, which is succinctly described by former AAG president George Demko below:

“...to strengthen academic geography, the profession must create an unambiguous image through relevant, clearly written research on significant issues. Geographers...must play a role in exploring the frontier by appropriately training students...and creating a clear and important image of geography for the public.”⁷¹⁰

Part of this lack of clear communication with outside audiences stems from the overall diversity in the field which can prevent geographers from concisely summarizing what different subfields of geography examine to the general public.

Indeed, political geography also appears to be struck by this long standing issue, in that, even its practitioners are not always sure what its core principles are.⁷¹¹ If there is uncertainty in what the subfield’s core principles are, it is very difficult to communicate them to outside audiences. This author agrees with John Agnew who, in 2003, wrote that “political geography involves the application of geographical perspective and concepts to political issues of various types...” and should focus on concepts like “territory, space, place, network, and scale.”⁷¹² Julian

⁷¹⁰ Demko, “Geography Beyond the Ivory Tower,” 575.

⁷¹¹ Antonsich et al., “Interventions on the ‘moribund backwater’ forty years on,” 388.

⁷¹² Agnew, “Contemporary political geography: intellectual heterodoxy and its dilemmas,” 604.

Minge argues that “political geography is concerned with the interaction of geographic area and political process,”⁷¹³ and that the state is a core concept in the field, as are “partition, territorial discontinuity, boundary change, changes in boundary function, disputed areas, disputed resources, frontier regions, etc.”⁷¹⁴ The last point to make is one borrowing from Kevin Cox, who writes that all good political geography has an element of historical geography to it.⁷¹⁵

Because the state is a core concept in political geography, effective communication of political geography must include elements of historical geography, as a state’s borders change over time. Consequently, using a historical case study of a failing state, or a state whose borders are shrinking over time, ought to make a useful organizing topic for an introductory political geography lecture that could clearly communicate key themes in political geography to an outside audience.

The study here builds tangentially on recent work in the field of political geography education that addresses both content and method in secondary to undergraduate education on the subject. Some of this work has focused on concepts that would be applicable in studying state failure, such as state shape,⁷¹⁶ boundaries,⁷¹⁷ and geopolitics.⁷¹⁸ Other scholarship in this arena has focused less on concepts and more on a specific method for instructing political geography, notably using political cartoons,⁷¹⁹ connecting political geography concepts to current affairs,⁷²⁰

⁷¹³ Minge, “Teaching Political Geography,” 362.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁷¹⁵ Raento et al., “Interventions in teaching political geography in the USA,” 192.

⁷¹⁶ Albert, “Potholes and (in) Geography: Studying State Shapes in the Neighborhood,” 63.

⁷¹⁷ Kerski, “Teaching about Political Boundaries using WebGIS Tools and Data,” 179-181; Seidel et al., “Representations and Concepts of Borders in Digital Strategy Games and Their Potential for Political Education in Geography Teaching,” 1.

⁷¹⁸ Gavris, “Geopolitical music to the students’ minds,” 204.

⁷¹⁹ Hammet and Mather, “Beyond Decoding: Political Cartoons in the Classroom,” 103.

or asking students to create a personal sketch map showing political geography in their own lives.⁷²¹

ESRI StoryMaps are a spatial application that have been shown to be an effective educational tool for teaching various geographic concepts to students such as physical geography, human geography, and quantitative and qualitative research methods.⁷²² Prior research indicates that using StoryMaps and other web-based GIS programs can help teach students essential concepts and skills, especially when the students create the StoryMap themselves or instructors use a GIS as part of an inquiry-based lesson.⁷²³ StoryMaps are also used, though less commonly, to accompany a lecture given by a professor or teacher.⁷²⁴ However, the efficacy of StoryMaps in political geography education or teaching state failure concepts has yet to be explored.

More broadly than just relating to using StoryMaps in teaching political geography, there appears to be little emphasis within the academy, especially from political geographers, to study effective teaching methods in political geography courses. This is reflected by Pauliina Raento, who states, “few political geographers *study* teaching, and few compilations about what political

⁷²⁰ Pande, “Connecting lectures to current affairs: the ‘letters to newspapers’ assignment,” 220; Williams et al., “Interventions in teaching political geography: Reflections on practice,” 32-33.

⁷²¹ Morrill, “Political Geography, sketch maps and introductions in Dyads,” 27.

⁷²² Cope et al., “Developing and Evaluating an ESRI Story Map as an Educational Tool,” 1; Dickinson and Telford, “The Visualities of digital story mapping: teaching the ‘messiness’ of qualitative methods through story mapping technologies,” 1; Songer, “Using Web-Based GIS in Introductory Human Geography,” 1; Groshans et al., “Digital Story Map Learning for STEM Disciplines,” 1.

⁷²³ Treves et al., “Student authored atlas tours (story maps) as geography assignments,” 279; Battersby and Remington, “Story Maps in the Classroom,” 63-65; Tabor, “Service-Learning and Geospatial Skills: What Do the Students Think?” 141. Tabor used a Story Map as part of an experiential learning assignment. De Miguel González and De Lázaro Torres, “WebGIS Implementation and Effectiveness in Secondary Education Using the Digital Atlas for Schools,” 74.

⁷²⁴ Maddox et. al, “Designing Geographic Inquiry: Preparing Secondary Students for Citizenship,” 261.

geography is about address pedagogy or acknowledge its seminal pieces.”⁷²⁵ Though written in 2010,⁷²⁶ these words remain true today.

This study, inspired by frequently poor communication of geographic concepts, examines the efficacy of alternative ways of communicating geopolitical concepts to better train the next generation of political geographers. In addition, this research aims to determine whether or not the maps made for this dissertation on state failure can be used to improve how well students learn the basic concepts of state failure.

This chapter addresses the gap in formal reflection in pedagogical methods in political geography and on using StoryMaps to teach political geography concepts. To do this, this chapter presents a learning experiment that assesses how novel representations of a failing state affect student learning outcomes in an Introduction to Human Geography course.

Hypotheses

Specifically, this research utilizes static and dynamic (Esri StoryMaps) maps that depict the gradient in a state’s ability to control its territory to assess 1) if static or dynamic maps are more effective for student learning outcomes regarding the concept of distance decay and 2) determine whether interactive mapping tools like Esri StoryMaps increase student understanding of state failure topics and basic concepts taught in political geography. To answer this question, this research tests the following hypotheses:

⁷²⁵ Raento et al., “Interventions in teaching political geography in the USA,” 190.

⁷²⁶ Raento et al., “Interventions in teaching political geography in the USA,” 190.

Hypothesis 1: Students who receive traditional geopolitical maps during an introductory political geography lecture accompanied by a PowerPoint:

H₀₁: Do not exhibit significant changes (positive or negative) in general political geography subject matter proficiency compared with those who receive the alternative methods (e.g., Esri StoryMaps).

H₀₂: Do not exhibit significant changes (positive or negative) in state failure subject matter proficiency compared with those who receive the alternative methods (e.g., Esri StoryMaps).

Hypothesis 2: Students who receive traditional geopolitical maps during an introductory political geography lecture accompanied by a PowerPoint:

H_{A1}: Do exhibit significant changes (positive or negative) in general political geography subject matter proficiency compared with those who receive the alternative methods (e.g., Esri StoryMaps).

H_{A2}: Do exhibit significant changes (positive or negative) in state failure subject matter proficiency compared with those who receive the alternative methods (e.g., Esri StoryMaps).

For this research, "traditional geopolitical maps" refer to maps pertaining to political geography that already appear in the published record. An example of a traditional geopolitical map is a political world map that depicts every country as one solid color (see figure VIII-1). Other less well-known examples include a map from *The Art of Not Being Governed* by James

C. Scott, which depicts the distance decay effect.⁷²⁷ Another map showing territorial control by a state *vis-à-vis* rebel groups is also used in this study (See attached teaching materials for reproductions of the photos).

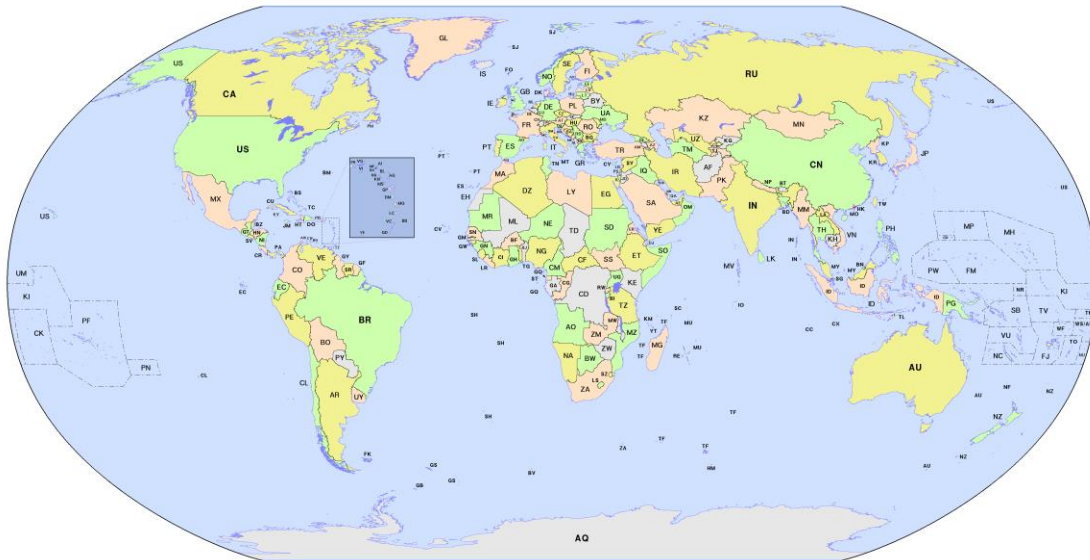


Figure VIII-1. Traditional Political Map of the World

This is a traditional map of the world where each country is depicted as one color. Image in the public domain, created by Ian Macky.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁷ Image not reproduced here for concerns of copyright of the original author. See figure two for the ideal representation of the distance decay effect.

⁷²⁸ Image produced in the public domain, accessed on Ian Macky's website.

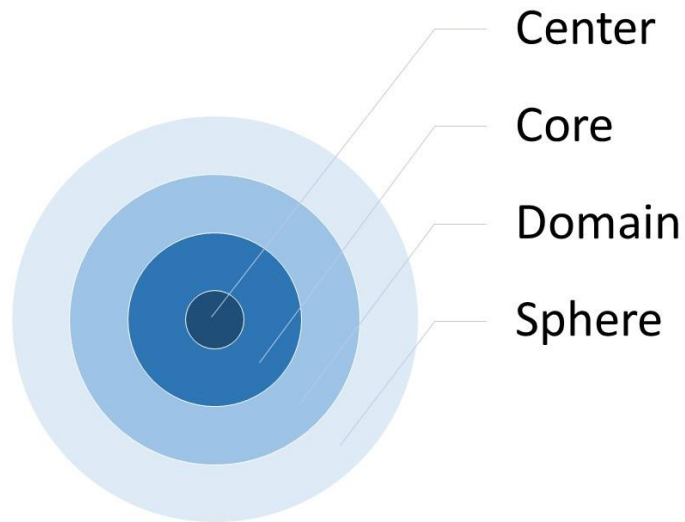


Figure VIII-2. A State's Ideal Core, Domain, and Sphere

This is a depiction of the distance decay ideal. James C. Scott's map adds in the restrictive impact that terrain has on a state's reach. He shows the distance a state official could reasonably walk in a day, two days, and three days in the terrain surrounding the state's capital. Each day marks a circle on the map. He compares the ideal distance to the actual distance to convey the idea of the distance decay effect.

These hypotheses will determine if students who receive experimental, tri-chromatic political geography maps of states (see attached learning materials for the StoryMap, and figure VIII-2) during an introductory political geography lecture have higher subject matter proficiency than students given traditional instruction. It is important to note that state failure concepts are used to test this hypothesis because such maps show the distance decay of a state's power, which is the core idea of the experimental explanation of state failure.

Methods

Undergraduate students at Texas A&M enrolled in an Introduction to Human Geography course section were selected as the research subjects because they are likely to have little formal education in the study of failed states. An in-depth study of this topic is usually reserved for upper-level undergraduate seminars and graduate seminars.

Mapping State Failure

For the experiment, the author did not create new static maps of state failure for the day one and control group lectures. The lecture for the control group only contained traditional, preexisting geopolitical maps depicting state failure (see appendix A for the PowerPoint that was presented in class on day one and in the control group).

The experimental group, in contrast, was given a lecture that contained dynamic maps of state failure created by the author in an Esri StoryMap format. This StoryMap examined a case study of Mexican state failure from 1521 to 1876. Mexico was chosen as the case study for this project because of its territorial growth and contraction over this time period, which makes it an excellent case of state failure to interpret geographically.

The aim of the StoryMap is twofold. First, the interactive format of StoryMap applications allows for a series of maps to be viewed in a cohesive story format that explains the geographic reasons for *why* Mexican historical events unfolded the way they did. Second, StoryMaps can dynamically show where the Mexican state could enforce its sovereignty. For this project, none of the maps that the author made were used in the control group.

Maps serving the first purpose (see appendix B for the StoryMap link and the maps it contains), to help students understand the geographic context for Mexican history, are ones like the map titled “The Pacific Orientation of the Spanish Empire.” The author produced this map to demonstrate that most of Spain’s rival geopolitical competitors for control over the Western Hemisphere came from the east. Spain’s geopolitical rivals during the 16- and 1700s consisted of countries like France, England, and Portugal. Spain needed large swaths of land to help secure its vast territorial claims in North and South America. These series of maps in the StoryMap

environment provide the learner context for Spain's decision-making process throughout the period under study. For example, Spain was willing to cede control over the Louisiana territory quickly but would have fought bitterly to retain control over Panama. This is because Spain valued the Panamanian Isthmus much more than Louisiana, as the former connected their globe-spanning Empire, while the latter was simply viewed as a geopolitical buffer for Spanish silver mines in northern Mexico.

The second series of maps in the StoryMap aimed to drive home the point that states do not exercise equally distributed control over their territory. The prime example of this type of map is the map titled "Mexican Core, Domain, Sphere 1821," which serves as the third section of the StoryMap. This map's primary purpose is to visually drive home the distance decay effect as it relates to a state's ability to control its territory. States are better at controlling areas closer to their centers of power (e.g. its capital). It is harder for the state to exercise control over its territory the further away from the capital one goes. While distance is not the only variable affecting a state's ability to control its territory, it is the primary variable that this lesson focused on.

State failure is denoted through changes in size of a state's core, domain, and sphere. Failing states see shrinking overall shrinking cores and domains. The author defined the core, domain, and sphere qualitatively, based on an analysis of mostly secondary literature. The major differentiation to note is that between the domain and sphere. The imaginary line dividing these regions is determined by where the state could violently defeat a rebellion. As with any region though, there is no easy line of demarcation to separate them, and all borders are, to some extent,

arbitrary lines on a map and not true reflections of reality. Therefore, the author made final determinations on a state's core, domain, and sphere.

All the inset maps in the StoryMap applications were created using ArcGIS Pro and ArcGIS Online. Various data sources were used to create the layers in each map, whose citations can be found at the end of the StoryMap (Appendix B) and Appendix C, which serves as an additional annex for the map sources in this project.

The Assessment Instrument

Students were given a pre-and post-test based on political geography and state failure learning outcomes to assess how overall student learning outcomes changed as a result of a two-lecture series. The pre-test was deployed before a two-lecture series covering basic political geography and state failure concepts.⁷²⁹ After completing the lecture series, students were given two days (48 hours) to complete the post-test.

The objective of using this assessment was to analyze the differences in pre- and post-test scores across the study groups to assess how much students learned due to listening to lectures on political geography and state failure. The pre- and post-test assessments were identical to ensure they could be statistically examined for significant changes and differences. The assessment consisted of ten questions. Eight of the questions were multiple choice, and two were short-answer.⁷³⁰ Seven of the questions pertained to general political geography concepts, such

⁷²⁹ Other researchers in the field of Geography Education use pre- and post- tests to assess the impacts of different teaching interventions or activities on student learning outcomes. For example see Demirci, "Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) at Schools Without a Computer Laboratory," 49-59 and Lee and Bednarz, "Effect of GIS Learning on Spatial Thinking," 183-198.

⁷³⁰ Bourke and Mills, "Binaries and Silences in Geography Education Assessment Research," 5. Bourke and Mills would likely recognize this type of assessment as a summative one, where the researcher is using grades as proxies for student achievement.

as sovereignty, the definition of a state, and the definition of centripetal forces. Three of the questions focused specifically on state failure concepts (Table 1).

Table 1. Assessment Instrument Questions

Question	Topic Area
Which of the following is the most complete definition of a state?	General Political Geography
What are the five key characteristics that most scholars use to define a state?	General Political Geography
What is the definition of sovereignty?	General Political Geography
What is the Weberian Theory of a State?	General Political Geography
What are two fundamental functions a state must perform?	General Political Geography
What is the most basic public good that a state can provide its citizens?	General Political Geography
What are centripetal forces as they relate to political geography?	General Political Geography
What is a failed state?	State Failure
In your own words, describe the term "distance decay" as it relates to a state's power.	State Failure
Explain whether any state perfectly controls all of its territory? Why or why not?	State Failure

The question on the definition of a failed state was multiple-choice. In contrast, the other two questions required a short answer response. The short-answer questions were evaluated using criteria that the author established before reading the assessment results.

To receive credit for the question on distance decay, students had to convey that they understood the concept by demonstrating in their answer that it becomes progressively more challenging for a state to control its population the further that population resides from the capital. To receive credit on the question about the state's ability to perfectly control its territory, the students had to link the concept of distance decay to a state's ability to control its territory.

Assessment Deployment

Both pre-and post-assessments were developed to mirror typical course module quizzes often used to assess students' comprehension of course learning outcomes. The assessment was meant to look like a standard course quiz because it assessed the student's comprehension of required concepts. The students were graded on the assessment as part of their course. However, the state failure questions were graded solely for completion, not for correctness, to ensure that no students were unfairly treated during the course.

Because of the split between basic political geography concepts and state failure concepts, the course instructor could also use these assessments to gauge how well the students understood basic political geography concepts that were already course requirements. As such, these assessments could be used in any Introduction to Human Geography course.

This study has been approved through Texas A&M's IRB protocol IRB 2022-0986M.

Presenting the Material

The experiment was designed to fit into a regular class week and into normal class activities to minimize the disruptions to the student participants' learning environment. The author taught the entirety of three lectures over the course of a traditional 50-minute, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday class as a guest lecturer in an Introductory Human Geography course. The author served as an outside guest lecturer to reduce experimenter and observer bias that could occur if a teacher were to hold the experiment in their own classroom.

The first lecture (Monday) covered basic political geography concepts traditionally included in introductory human geography courses. For this lecture, the author primarily used materials provided by instructors in the Texas A&M Department of Geography, many of which

are based on materials developed by Pearson for their textbook *Places and Regions in a Global Context* written by Knox and Marston.⁷³¹ The instructor modified these materials to provide greater continuity between each lecture. However, they formed the basis of this initial lecture because they covered ideas that are traditionally taught in Texas A&M's Introduction to Human Geography courses.

As students entered the classroom for their Monday morning lecture, they were each given a notecard with a "1" or a "2" to randomly assign them into control and experimental groups for the Wednesday and Friday lectures. Students with a "1", who served as the control group, were asked to come to Wednesday's lecture. Students with "2", who served as the experimental group, were asked to attend Friday's lecture.

After receiving the notecard assignments, students immediately took the pre-test to establish a baseline level of knowledge. Once students completed the pre-test, the author began the lecture by introducing general political geography concepts. After the lecture, students were given directions and explanations for the rest of the week based on their assigned test group. Students were asked *only* to attend one lecture for the rest of the week. Students who violated this rule were not included in any statistical analyses of the assessments.

On Wednesday, the control group received a fifty-minute lecture using a PowerPoint presentation on state failure using traditional materials and images found in the literature. On Friday, the experimental group received a fifty-minute lecture using the Esri StoryMap with images primarily created by the author. These lectures covered the same conceptual ideas; however, the StoryMap was built around a specific case study and interpretation of state failure

⁷³¹ Knox and Marston, *Places and Regions in a Global Context*.

(Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Thus, this historical story was taught alongside the conceptual information in the experimental group.

After the conclusion of each lecture, each group was given 48-hours to complete the post-test. Students were also verbally instructed to complete the post-test without using their notes. In addition, the lecture materials were not distributed to the students until the Monday after the experimental group's quiz period closed to lessen the likelihood that students used outside materials to aid their quiz completion.

Statistical Analysis of Pre- and Post-Tests

Before comparing pre-and post-assessment scores, the data were tested for normality using JMP statistical software using both the distribution and the "fit to normal" functions. Initially, the response distributions appeared normal; however, further statistical testing using a Shapiro-Wilks test revealed that the data were not normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilks value of .0191), which violates parametric statistical assumptions. As a result, parametric statistical methods, such as t-tests, could not accurately describe differences or changes in assessments.⁷³² Using the correct statistical tests for the data type is important because if the wrong test is used, the statistical output may not be valid or repeatable.⁷³³

As a result, nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests were used to assess the statistical significance of the difference between pre-test and post-test scores for matched student pairs.

With normally distributed data, a paired T-test would be used to examine how learning outcomes change over time. While the overall sample size of 79 provided sufficient observations that there

⁷³² Swienton et al., "Direct Injuries and Fatalities of Texas Tornado Outbreaks from 1973 to 2007," 3. These authors conduct similar statistical tests upon learning their data are not normally distributed.

⁷³³ Osborne and Waters, "Four Assumptions of Multiple Regression That Researchers Should Always Test," 1.

should have been little functional difference between the result of the t-test and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, the non-normal distribution of the data requires that the nonparametric statistical analyses be used to ensure statistical accuracy.

All statistical analyses were conducted using JMP software. The analyses examined matched pairs for each question in the assessment, overall pre- and post-test scores, and state failure questions in isolation. In each of these cases, the author was most interested in understanding if the teaching intervention was a significant variable in improving student scores and determining if there was a significant difference between the improvement (if any) noted in both groups.

Because these pre- and post- scores from the same individuals in the respondents' sample were analyzed to determine changes in subject matter proficiency, matched pair Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests were conducted to determine if changes in pre- and post-test scores were due to random chance or not. JMP simultaneously assesses the mean difference between each group (control and experimental) as it tests the overall group's pre- and post-test scores. This allows the program to determine if the differences in each group's pre- and post-test scores are statistically significant from one another.⁷³⁴ Matched pairs Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests are used in instances when testing for knowledge acquisition, because the researcher is trying to determine the effect of an experimental variable on the same individual. Matched pair Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests assume that each tested pair comes from the same individual in the same population, not two

⁷³⁴ Edey et al., "Closing the Gender Gap in Natural Hazards Education for Young Adults," 243-247. This research project is similar as these authors are examining the difference between pre- and post-test scores. These authors are more interested in role that gender plays in the improvement of learning outcomes, however, their statistical analysis is similar in that they conducted matched pairs tests to understand, on average, if there was a significant improvement in learning outcomes after exposure to a curriculum.

separate population samples.⁷³⁵ Unpaired t-tests are used when the averages between two independent sample populations are compared to determine if the averages are significantly different.⁷³⁶

Generalized Linear Models

Generalized linear models (GLMs) were then conducted using JMP to assess what factors could have driven the results of the experiment other than the teaching intervention itself (Table 3). Because the data have non-normal distributions, a GLM was conducted in lieu of a classical OLS regression model. Generalized linear models do not assume that the data are normally distributed and can consequently be used with nonparametric data.⁷³⁷

GLMs were conducted for all respondents grouped together, as the test group was used as an independent variable in the model. GLMs were run on pre- and post- test results as well as percentage differences between these sets of results. Three GLMs were conducted for all of the assessment questions grouped together and three were conducted for the state-failure questions. A total of six GLMs conducted for this analysis (Table 2).

⁷³⁵ JMP, *The Statistics Knowledge Portal*, “The Paired t-Test.”

⁷³⁶ Gleichmann, *Technology Networks Informatics*, “Paired vs. Unpaired T-Test: Differences, Assumptions and Hypotheses.”

⁷³⁷ Fox, *Applied Regression Analysis and Generalized Linear Models*, 379. Fox notes on this page the different types of distributions that GLMs can be used for. Parker et. al, “There is no need to be Normal: Generalized Linear Models of Natural Variation,” 355.

Table 2. GLM Equations for the Six Conducted Models

Dependent Variable (Y _i)	=	Independent variables (β _n X _n)
GLM 1		
All Respondents All Questions Pre-Test Percentage	=	$\beta_0 + \beta_{\text{Race}}X_1 + \beta_{\text{Gender}}X_2 + \beta_{\text{Ethnicity}}X_3 + \beta_{\text{FirstGen}}X_4 + \beta_{\text{Language}}X_5 + \beta_{\text{SchoolYear}}X_6 + \beta_{\text{TestGroup}}X_7$
GLM 2		
All Respondents All Questions Post-Test Percentage	=	$\beta_0 + \beta_{\text{Race}}X_1 + \beta_{\text{Gender}}X_2 + \beta_{\text{Ethnicity}}X_3 + \beta_{\text{FirstGen}}X_4 + \beta_{\text{Language}}X_5 + \beta_{\text{SchoolYear}}X_6 + \beta_{\text{TestGroup}}X_7$
GLM 3		
All Respondents All Questions Diff. Pre-Post Test Percentage	=	$\beta_0 + \beta_{\text{Race}}X_1 + \beta_{\text{Gender}}X_2 + \beta_{\text{Ethnicity}}X_3 + \beta_{\text{FirstGen}}X_4 + \beta_{\text{Language}}X_5 + \beta_{\text{SchoolYear}}X_6 + \beta_{\text{TestGroup}}X_7$
GLM 4		
All Respondents State Failure Only Pre-Test Percentage	=	$\beta_0 + \beta_{\text{Race}}X_1 + \beta_{\text{Gender}}X_2 + \beta_{\text{Ethnicity}}X_3 + \beta_{\text{FirstGen}}X_4 + \beta_{\text{Language}}X_5 + \beta_{\text{SchoolYear}}X_6 + \beta_{\text{TestGroup}}X_7$
GLM 5		
All Respondents State Failure Only Post-Test Percentage	=	$\beta_0 + \beta_{\text{Race}}X_1 + \beta_{\text{Gender}}X_2 + \beta_{\text{Ethnicity}}X_3 + \beta_{\text{FirstGen}}X_4 + \beta_{\text{Language}}X_5 + \beta_{\text{SchoolYear}}X_6 + \beta_{\text{TestGroup}}X_7$
GLM 6		
All Respondents State Failure Only Diff. Pre-Post Test Percentage	=	$\beta_0 + \beta_{\text{Race}}X_1 + \beta_{\text{Gender}}X_2 + \beta_{\text{Ethnicity}}X_3 + \beta_{\text{FirstGen}}X_4 + \beta_{\text{Language}}X_5 + \beta_{\text{SchoolYear}}X_6 + \beta_{\text{TestGroup}}X_7$

For the GLMs analyzing pre- and post- test scores the GLM was run using a normal distribution and a logit link in JMP. These settings were chosen because pre- and post-test scores range between 0 and 1, making the logit link function the most appropriate choice. Additionally, the normal distribution was chosen as it was the best option for the datasets out of those available

in JMP.⁷³⁸ In contrast, to OLS regression models, which use adjusted R^2 values to measure model fit, GLMs measure model fit and significance using the Akaike information criterion (AIC).

For analyses examining percentage differences in scores, the GLM was run using a normal distribution and the default identity link. The normal distribution was chosen as this was still the best option for the dataset of those available in the software. The identity link function was chosen in place of the logit and log link options, however, because percentage differences can have negative values, making the other two options inappropriate.

Additionally, the author compared the logit link with the identity link to test model fit. For the model looking at all of the questions together (GLM 3), the AIC value was marginally lower for the identity link and identified the same independent variables as significant. For the model analyzing the state failure questions (GLM 6) the logit link did not identify the test group as a significant value, which contradicted the results of the matched pairs analysis, indicating to the author that it was an inappropriate choice. The identity link, has a lower AIC value than the logit link, is the default link function for the normal distribution, and is useful when response values are negative as well as positive.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁸ Other options presented by JMP are exponential, Poisson, and Binomial.

⁷³⁹ These decisions outlined in this section are informed by a presentation created by JMP that helps familiarize users with their software. It can be found on the JMP User Community in the article titled “Developer Tutorial: Selecting the Appropriate JMP Pro Generalized Regression Distribution for Your Response.” Specifically, slide 35 outlines that an AIC can be used to make decisions between models. For decisions on response distributions, see slide 39. For decisions on the link function, see slide 19 which outlines that logit is useful when responses fall between 0 and 1, like the percentages in the pre- and post-test score datasets. This slide also notes that the identity link is useful when negative values are present.

Results

Sample

After the completion of the experiment, 79 viable responses out of 121 were used for analysis. Respondents were removed from the analysis if they did not consent to have their results used in the experiment's analysis or if they attended more than one class lecture.

The sample's demographics were as follows (Table 3):

Compared to Texas A&M University's (TAMU) undergraduate population, the experiment sample exceeded university averages in the number of white and male students, suggesting the overrepresentation of these demographic groups in the results (Table 3). In contrast, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino population and first-generation college students in the sample were comparable to TAMU's.⁷⁴⁰ The intent of this comparison is to assess how representative the sample was to the TAMU undergraduate student body. Unfortunately, TAMU does not publicly report its English as a Second Language (ESL) student figures, so comparing the sample population to the university student body is impossible. Regardless, this study's sample comprised 19% of ESL students.

With respect to the groups within the study. Overall, both groups have similar demographic compositions. The control group had 40 total students, 77.5% of whom identified as white, 22.5% as BIPOC, 72.5% as non-Hispanic/Latino, and 27.5% as Hispanic/Latino. Regarding gender, 70% of students were male or declined to answer, and 30% were female or non-binary. 15% of this group identified that English was not their first language and 22.5% that were first-generation college students. This population was slightly younger than the

⁷⁴⁰ Texas A&M Student Demographics, "Student Demographics." Numbers are for Fall 2022.

experimental group, with 75% freshmen, 17.5% sophomores, 5% juniors, and 2.5% who declined to provide a class year.

The experimental group had 39 total students, 74.4% of whom identified as white or declined to identify a race, 25.6% as BIPOC, 74.4% as Hispanic/Latino, and 25.6% as non-Hispanic/Latino. Regarding gender, 64.1% were males or declined to respond and 35.9% females or non-binary students. 23.7% of students identified that English was not their first language and 17.9% were first-generation college students. The population was made up of 66.6% freshmen, 25.6% sophomores, and 7.7% juniors.

Table 3. Sample Demographics

Demographic Category	Sub-category	Control Group	Experimental Group	All Students	Sample Percentage	University Percentage
Race	White	31	29	60	76%	54.72%
	BIPOC	9	10	19	24%	45.28%
Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic	29	29	58	73.42%	74.85%
	Hispanic	11	10	21	26.58%	25.15%
First Gen.	Non-First Generation	31	32	63	79.75%	78.43%
	First Generation	9	7	16	20.25%	21.57%
Gender	Male/	28	25	53	67%	53.3%
	Declined to answer					
	Female/	12	14	26	23%	46.7%
	Non-Binary					N/A
Language	ESL	34	9	43	19%	N/A
	Non-ESL	6	30	36	81%	N/A
Total Students in Group		40	39	79	---	---

Matched Pairs Analysis

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results comparing overall pre- and post-test scores found that students in the control group who received instruction by PowerPoint had

significantly higher overall post-test scores. The control group's mean pre-test score was 4.3 out of 10. The mean post-test score was 8.1 out of 10, with a significant Wilcoxon Signed Rank value for this matched pairs test. The mean difference was 3.8. In contrast, the experimental group also experienced significant increases in pre-and post-test scores, but the difference was not as great as the control group. The experimental group's mean pre-test score was 4.38 out of 10. The mean post-test score was 6.92 out of 10. The mean difference was 2.54 (Table 4).

This indicates that both groups experienced significant improvement in overall geopolitical subject-matter proficiency, but the control group demonstrated greater improvement than the experimental group. Additionally, the F statistic when conducting a Matched Pairs analysis by Test Group indicates that the difference between the means in each group is significantly different.

Table 4. Matched Pairs Analysis, Overall Test Results

	Control				Experimental				All Respondents			
	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Percentage Change	p-value	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Percentage Change	P-value	Pre-test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Percentage Change	P-value
OVR Score	42.00%	81.00%	39.00%	<.0001	43.85%	69.23%	25.38%	<.0001	43.34%	75.19%	31.77%	<.0001
Mean difference between the Control and Experimental groups was analyzed with a matched pairs analysis and the difference in the within pairs analysis was found to have an F statistic of .0041												

State Failure-Specific Question Results

For the three questions pertaining only to state failure concepts, the control group showed a greater, significant improvement in scores when compared to the experimental group. The control group scored an average of .9 points (30%) on the pre-test and 2 points (67%) on the post-test for the state failure-specific questions. In contrast, the experimental group scored an

average of 1.05 points (35%) on the pre-test and 1.6667 points (56%) on the post-test. Both groups show significant increases in state failure subject-matter proficiency (Table 5).

Both groups demonstrated significant increases in state failure subject-matter proficiency in pre- and post-test scores, indicating that both teaching interventions improved student learning outcomes. However, when both groups were compared, the within-pairs difference was significant, suggesting that the traditional teaching intervention influenced student learning outcomes at a greater magnitude than the experimental teaching intervention.

For question-specific analysis, the state failure questions had two of the three results return statistically significant differences. Question eight, asking for the definition of a failed state, and question ten, asking if any state controlled its territory perfectly, were the questions with significant Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results. These results indicated that there was significant improvement between the pre-test and the post-test answers for these questions, regardless of the group the student was in.

Question ten did not see significant changes in pre- and post-test scores based on the test group each student was in. This interpretation comes from a non-significant F-statistic. Question eight returned a significant within-pairs analysis, meaning that the group the student was assigned to did affect their learning outcomes differently.

In contrast, question nine, which asked about distance decay, did not show significant improvement in subject-matter proficiency. Of the students who took the pre-test 57% answered this question correctly. On the post-test the students overall only improved slightly, with 62% choosing the correct response. The difference in these scores was not assessed as significant, with a p-value of .4363.

Table 5. State Failure Specific Questions, Matched Pairs Analysis

	Control				Experimental				All Respondents			
	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Percentage Change	p-value	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Percentage Change	p-value	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Percentage Change	p-value
Q8: Failed State	30.00%	92.50%	62.50%	<.0001	38.46%	74.36%	35.90%	0.00002	34.18%	83.54%	49.37%	<.0001
Q9: Distance Decay	57.50%	65%	7.50%	0.4738	56.41%	58.97%	2.56%	0.7436	56.96%	62.03%	5.06%	0.4363
Q10: Perfect Control	2.50%	42.50%	40.00%	<.0001	10.26%	33.33%	23.07%	0.0051	6.33%	37.98%	31.65%	<.0001
State Failure Scores	30%	66.67%	38%	<.0001	35.04%	55.56%	25.38%	<.0001	32.49%	61.18%	28.69%	<.0001
Difference between control and experimental overall state failure scores were significant with an F statistic of .0041												

Results – Generalized Linear Models

Generalized linear models⁷⁴¹ were conducted to assess what factors could have driven the results of the experiment other than the teaching intervention itself. See tables 6 and 7 for the full list of results. In table 6, the author reported the quiz scores (as decimal percentage figures). The author did this to give the reader a more concrete understanding of the differences between scores that occurred by demographic group throughout the experiment. As note, however, these demographic variables were also simultaneously affected by the experimental grouping in the study. So, the demographic variables and the experimental grouping all had some measurable impact, however, because experimental grouping has already been determined to have had a statistically significant impact on student learning outcomes, it will be omitted as a variable of

⁷⁴¹ Done in lieu of regressions because the data were tested for normality and found to be non-normal data. Generalized linear models do not assume that the data are normally distributed and can consequently be used with nonparametric data.

discussion in this section. Table 7 gives the GLM coefficients, with statistically significant variables marked with an * as well as with their ChiSquared Probability.

Generalized Linear Model – State Failure Questions

See table 7 for full reporting of the GLM outputs. Statistically significant results are noted with a *. GLMs 1 and 4 assessed the significance of demographic factors in pre-test scores. GLM 1 assessed the whole assessment while GLM 4 assessed the state failure questions in isolation. In GLM 1, the only demographic characteristic that was identified to have a significant impact on scores was a student's status as a first-generation college student. The coefficient was -.446 and favored students who were not first-generation college students. In GLM 4, however, school year was the only demographic factor that was identified as significant, with a coefficient of .5331.

GLMs 2 and 5 assessed the significance of demographic factors in post-test scores. GLM 2 looked at all of the assessment questions while GLM 5 examined the state failure questions. In GLM 2, Race (-.4004), Gender (-.3064), Language (.7108), and Test Group (-.6906) were all identified as significant factors that affected overall post-test scores. The direction of the coefficients indicated that white students, males, ESL students, and students in the control group all outperformed their comparison group. In GLM 5, Gender (-.5918) and Language (1.042) were both statistically significant. The direction of the coefficients indicated, similar to the results of GLM 2, that males and ESL students outperformed their comparison groups.

Lastly, GLMs 3 and 6 assessed the significance of demographic factors in the percentage differences between pre- and post-test scores. GLM 3 looked at all the assessment questions while GLM 6 examined the state failure questions. In GLM 3, Race (-.107), Language (.1322),

and Test Group (-.1182) were all statistically significant. The directions of these coefficients show that white students, ESL students, and students in the control group outperformed their comparison groups. In GLM 6, Gender (-.1410), School year (-.1968), and Test Group (-.1304) were all statistically significant factors. The directions of these coefficients show that males, younger students, and students in the control group, all outperformed their comparison populations.

Table 6. Pre- and Post-test Scores as Percentages and Percentage Change

		Pre-Test Mean Scores	% Change	Post-Test Mean Scores		Pre-Test Mean Scores	% Change	Post-Test Mean Scores
Demographics		GLM 4	GLM 6	GLM 5		GLM 1	GLM 3	GLM 2
Race	White	0.3389	0.2944	0.6333		0.4333	0.3367	0.77
	BIPOC	0.2807	0.2632	0.5439		0.4368	0.2579	0.6947
Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic	0.362	0.2586	0.6207		0.4655	0.2948	0.7603
	Hispanic	0.2222	0.3651	0.5873		0.3476	0.381	0.7286
First Gen.	Non-First Generation	0.3598	0.2698	0.6296		0.4603	0.3048	0.7651
	First Generation	0.1875	0.3542	0.5417		0.3353	0.3688	0.704
Gender	Male/ Declined to answer	0.327	0.3333	0.6604		0.4434	0.334	0.7774
	Female/ Non-Binary	0.3205	0.1923	0.5128		0.4154	0.2846	0.7
Language	ESL	0.3111	0.4	0.7111		0.3867	0.4133	0.8
	Non-ESL	0.3281	0.2604	0.5885		0.4453	0.2953	0.7406

Table 7. GLM Results as Coefficients

Term	Estimate (GLM 1) (PRE)	Prob>ChiSq (GLM 1) (PRE)	Estimate (GLM 2)	Prob>ChiSq (GLM 2)	Estimate (GLM 3)	Prob>ChiSq (GLM 3)	Estimate (GLM 4) (PRE)	Prob>ChiSq (GLM 4) (PRE)	Estimate (GLM 5)	Prob>ChiSq (GLM 5)	Estimate (GLM 6)	Prob>ChiSq (GLM 6)
AIC (Akaike information criterion)	-55.2946	N/a	- 100.3204	N/a	-38.6802	N/a	24.9180	N/a	29.6345	N/a	41.7679	N/a
P value	.0369*	N/a	<.0001*	N/a	.0003*	N/a	.0677	N/a	.0105*	N/a	.0005*	N/a
Intercept	-0.310224	0.1132	1.898793	<.0001*	0.4604253	<.0001*	-1.306524	0.0009*	1.4449518	<.0001*	0.6095977	<.0001*
Race	0.1469038	0.4004	- 0.400382	0.0142*	-0.106808	0.0231*	-0.14203	0.6800	-0.394439	0.2221	-0.066743	0.3870
Ethnicity	-0.346503	0.0551	-0.17645	0.3013	0.059463	0.2144	-0.603448	0.0879	-0.023804	0.9419	0.1051862	0.1872
Gender	-0.052222	0.7312	- 0.306436	0.0384*	-0.045927	0.2591	0.1288085	0.6519	-0.591782	0.0350*	-0.141032	0.0391*
Language	-0.099855	0.6130	0.710806	0.0004*	0.1322347	0.0104*	0.180202	0.6531	1.0418141	0.0107*	0.1368109	0.1068
First Generation	-0.445868	0.0316*	- 0.349324	0.0649	0.0446347	0.4081	-0.724244	0.0820	-0.459984	0.2062	0.0707163	0.4308
School Year	0.1634995	0.1834	- 0.146844	0.1959	-0.069683	0.0344*	0.5331497	0.0215*	-0.376089	0.0785	-0.196834	0.0005*
Test Group	0.0007108	0.9960	- 0.690604	<.0001*	-0.118209	0.0026*	0.1646955	0.5432	-0.484421	0.0685	-0.130378	0.0428*

Discussion

Control Group Performance Exceeded the Experimental Group

Given the statistical outputs presented in the previous sections, it can be concluded that, regardless of group, the teaching intervention resulted in increased student learning outcomes as measured by the overall increase between pre- and post-test scores. The control group, contrary to the author's expectations, experienced a greater gain in learning outcomes when compared to the experimental group.

The author has two leading potential explanations for this outcome. The first is that the StoryMap told a historical story *alongside* the state failure concepts. It is possible that students were distracted by the simultaneous presentation of historical and conceptual information. By distracted, the author means that the students were overwhelmed by too much novel information and did not retain the state failure concepts as well as their counterparts. The second is that the PowerPoint was simply more familiar to the students and was easier for them to follow.

Regarding the first point, that there was too much novel information being presented at one time, it is possible that both the novelty of the method and the novelty of the information interfered with student learning outcomes. Indeed, this idea finds support in cognitive load theory, where some authors note that overload can occur in the students' mind and interfere with their learning of new information.⁷⁴² Though that is not to say that students cannot learn when their cognitive load is high, as indicated by other research,⁷⁴³ just to say that high cognitive load could have contributed to this experiment's results.

⁷⁴² Bunch and Lloyd, "The Cognitive Load of Geographic Information," 212-214.

⁷⁴³ Koc and Topu, "Using three-dimensional geospatial technology in primary school: students' achievements, spatial thinking skills, cognitive load levels, experiences and teachers' opinions," 4925.

The conceptual information focusing on state failure in the StoryMap was also less clearly differentiated from historical information that was presented alongside the conceptual information on the assessment. As this assessment was focused on state failure concepts, it did not contain any questions that related to the historical information that also appeared in the Mexican state failure StoryMap. The PowerPoint used in the control group did not contain any such historical information outside of brief examples, like listing Colombia as a failing state. So, it is possible that students had an easier time focusing on the conceptual information that the instructor had on the assessment. The students in the experimental group could have been distracted by the *story* portion of the StoryMap.

By presenting the historical information alongside the conceptual information, it was expected that students would better retain the conceptual information because they would be able to actively see how these concepts could be applied in a case study. After all, prior research has indicated that students learn more when instructors use active learning techniques.⁷⁴⁴ Adding this to the fact that humans often learn and retain information through storytelling,⁷⁴⁵ the author anticipated that the Mexican state failure StoryMap would increase student learning outcomes more than just teaching using a PowerPoint. However, these results indicate that simply *seeing* the application of the concepts as they learned them was not enough to translate to better learning outcomes. Because students were not given time, or an activity to walk them through the StoryMap on their own, as an active learning technique likely would have done, it is possible that the Mexican state failure StoryMap was not “active” enough as it was utilized for this

⁷⁴⁴ Deslauriers et al., “Measuring actual learning versus feeling of learning in response to being actively engaged in the classroom,” 19251.

⁷⁴⁵ Strachan and Mitchell, “Teachers’ Perceptions of Esri Story Maps as Effective Teaching Tools,” 195-196.

experiment. The PowerPoint had no historical information presented alongside it, so that also meant that more time could be spent on explanations for conceptual information, which could also explain why the control group had greater improvement in their overall scores on the assessment.

With respect to the author's other leading possible explanation for the results, students are generally more familiar with PowerPoints than StoryMaps. This author went to high school and undergrad in the United States and PowerPoints were ubiquitous parts of the learning environment and previous research has shown that students often use PowerPoint to organize their own presentations,⁷⁴⁶ suggesting familiarity with the software. Additionally, others have commented on the ubiquity of PowerPoint in education and business environments.⁷⁴⁷ Furthermore, Learning Management Systems (LMS), though there are many flavors, are often used to host resources like PowerPoint slides and are familiar to students.⁷⁴⁸ Though a StoryMap *could* easily be used in this format, most public high school instructors likely do not have access to ESRI products (though the software is freely available to secondary schools), or the time to draft wholly new lesson plans, that would enable them to create their own StoryMap to deliver instruction.⁷⁴⁹ As such, the StoryMap presented information that the student had most likely not seen before, or at least, were less familiar with, due to some difficulties in its adoption and implementation in American high schools. Because of its novelty, the method of presentation

⁷⁴⁶ Marcello, "A Proposal for Assessment in Geography Education," 230; Lei and Zhao, "Technology uses and student achievement: a longitudinal study," 290.

⁷⁴⁷ Craig and Amernic, "PowerPoint presentation Technology and the Dynamics of Teaching," 147-148.

⁷⁴⁸ Bryson and Andres, "Covid-19 and rapid adoption and improvisation of online teaching: curating resources for extensive versus intensive online learning experiences," 611-612.

⁷⁴⁹ Strachan and Mitchell, "Teachers' Perceptions of Esri Story Maps," 198; Kerski, "The Implementation and Effectiveness of Geographic Information Systems Technology and Methods in Secondary Education," 131.

could have diverted students' attention from the information that the instructor wanted them to know.

Additionally, with respect to this classroom in particular, the author is familiar with the instructor of record's teaching methods. The instructor of record typically uses PowerPoint slides to deliver course material. So, for the control group, there was less disruption in routine and less difference from what the students were used to receiving in this particular class. Because there was less difference in their usual routine, the students could have been more receptive to the lecture's key points.⁷⁵⁰

The familiarity of the PowerPoint presentation and the likelihood that students had less distracting information given to them in the control group are two factors that likely impacted the superior improvement in the control group compared to the experimental group.

Demographic Differences

The second major area for discussion in this chapter are the demographic factors that the pre-test and post-test collected from the students. It is a common approach in geographic education research to ask students for demographic information so that researchers have a better idea of other variables affecting results, as instructional media are not the only variable that can impact learning outcomes.⁷⁵¹ The test that students were given also included several demographic questions to help keep track of some of these confounding variables. In particular, this discussion will cover gender's impact on scores, ESL students flipping existing achievement

⁷⁵⁰ Stronge et al., "What Makes Good Teachers Good? A Cross-Case Analysis of the Connection Between Teacher Effectiveness and Student Achievement," 348. These authors tie routines to effective instructor class management, when a classroom was well-managed, the instructor's students generally performed better.

⁷⁵¹ Collins, "The Impact of Paper Versus Digital Map Technology on Student's Spatial Thinking Skill Acquisition," 137, 139.

gaps with their respective reference groups, and achievement gaps that were created between white and BIPOC students.

Gender and Subject Matter Proficiency

Gender was identified as a significant variable in GLMs 2 (-.3064 [p=.0384]), 5 (-.5918 [p=.0350]), and 6 (-.1410 [p=.0391]) that were conducted as part of the results analysis. The negative coefficients indicate that males performed better on these portions of the assessments than their female/nonbinary counterparts (GLM 2 = Post-Test all questions, GLM 5 = Post-Test State Failure questions, GLM 6 = difference in pre- and post- test percentages for state failure questions).

These results align with previous studies in geographic education that found that male secondary students have performed better on tests of geographic knowledge than females.⁷⁵² Additional prior research has identified that students who identify more strongly as “male” over “female” scored better on an assessment testing their basic geographic knowledge.⁷⁵³ However, more recent research, conducted by Bednarz and Lee, has suggested that gender’s relevance as a factor on spatial thinking ability, specifically, is not consistent across studies⁷⁵⁴ even though some researchers, like Tomaszewski et. al, have identified gender as having a significant effect on spatial thinking ability.⁷⁵⁵ Additionally, authors such as Choi, have found inconsistent impact

⁷⁵² LeVasseur, “Students’ Knowledge of Geography and Geography Careers,” 265.

⁷⁵³ Hardwick, et. al, “Gender vs. Sex Differences: Factors Affecting Performance in Geographic Education,” 240-242.

⁷⁵⁴ Bednarz and Lee, “What Improves Spatial Thinking? Evidence from the Spatial Thinking Abilities Test,” 273.

⁷⁵⁵ Tomaszewski et. al, “Spatial Thinking Ability Assessment in Rwandan Secondary Schools: Baseline Results,” 47.

of gender within a single study, with females outperforming males in certain cases and the reverse being true in others.⁷⁵⁶

Given the lack of similar studies focusing on political geography, and the prior evidence cited above, notably Bednarz and Lee, the results from this experiment should not be broadly applied. This is especially important considering that while individual-student variables, such as student attitudes, have been shown to affect their learning outcomes in other studies,⁷⁵⁷ it is not necessarily likely that gender would be repeated as a significant variable in future studies conducted similar to this one.

The results of this study also counter other research which has suggested that females typically score better on constructed response (short answer) questions,⁷⁵⁸ as two of the three state failure questions were constructed response questions. However, as with the above point, additional research studies have shown little consistent impact of gender on how successfully students complete constructed response questions.⁷⁵⁹

Given that there is no clear direction of gender's impact in the broader literature, either in subject matter or based on question type, further research is needed to more broadly assess if gender has a consistent impact on student scores when teaching political geography and state failure. Furthermore, as ensuring gender equity is important, gender should also be studied further so that enduring achievement gaps are not created, or quickly observed if they exist.

⁷⁵⁶ Choi, "Geography Achievement and Opportunity to Learn: A Focus on Computer and Educational Technology," 234, 237.

⁷⁵⁷ Makowsky, "Geography Achievement and Opportunity to Learn: A Focus on the Attitudes of Teachers and Students," 225.

⁷⁵⁸ Fjellborg and Kramming, "Sustainable development: Exploring gender differences in the Swedish national test in geography for grade 9," 175.

⁷⁵⁹ Weaver and Raptis, "Gender Differences in Introductory Atmospheric and Oceanic Science Exams: Multiple Choice Versus Constructed Response Questions," 115-116.

These enduring impacts are important to assess, as some authors have noted unequitable outcomes between males and females in STEM fields.⁷⁶⁰

ESL Population and Achievement Gaps

The results of this experiment indicate that students who learned English as a Second Language (ESL) had significant differences in their levels of improvement on the assessment than students who learned English as their first language. ESL students flipped a non-statistically significant achievement gap in the overall assessment. ESL students' post-test scores (GLM 2) and the percentage differences between pre- and post-test scores (GLM 3) were significant with positive, significant coefficients (GLM 2, 0.711, [p=.0004] and GLM 3, 0.1322, [p=.0104]).

These results suggest that ESL students had slightly greater increases in understanding of geopolitical and state failure concepts than their native English-speaking counterparts.

Additionally, with respect to state failure specific questions, ESL student post-test scores (GLM 5, 1.042, [p=.0107]) were significantly higher than their comparison group.

It is possible that the achievement gaps recorded by the pre-tests were simply due to random chance, as they were not statistically significant based on GLM 1. This study also suffered from a low number of ESL students, so it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about this result. However, even with the possibility of the pre-test achievement gaps being due to chance, this result is worthy of further investigation. It is interesting that achievement gaps that existed in the pre-test were flipped in the post test. Given the novelty of this research project, it is difficult to assess language's impact on student achievement outcomes as there is little other

⁷⁶⁰ Matz et. al, "Patterns of Gendered Performance Differences in Large Introductory Courses at Five Research Universities," 1-2.

literature to compare this result to. However, the significance of the language variable of this experiment could be explained by ESL students using the images in the lectures for added “context,” which could explain the difference in scores.⁷⁶¹

DaSilva and Kvasnak note in their research that non-US-educated students, many of whom were ESL, performed at the same level as US-educated students in the geography course created by those authors. Though their results were not statistically significant, the discussion of their result hinges on this idea of “context.” As it relates to DaSilva’s and Kvasnak’s paper, their major argument was that the ESL students were able to keep up with, or even outperform, native English speakers, because they “constructed knowledge out of context.”⁷⁶² In their discussion, these authors were specifically addressing the fact that the images used in multimedia presentations helps English language learners as they are not left to solely try and interpret verbal or written text on its own. The ESL students are able to put the information being spoken by the instructor into the context of the presentation’s images. In this author’s experiment, the concepts of state failure were presented alongside images in both the control and experimental groups. Thus, the research findings in this study seem to provide support for DaSilva and Kvasnak’s non-statistically significant results. However, native-English speakers, both in this author’s research and in DaSilva and Kvasnak’s work, were exposed to the same images, thus prompting some consideration as to why native-English speakers did not similarly benefit from this context.

⁷⁶¹ DaSilva and Kvasnak, “Multimedia Technology and Students’ Achievement in Geography,” 23. These authors are discussing the achievement of English language learners who have also not been educated in the US. These authors are not specifically addressing impacts of prior knowledge on student achievement.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*

The answer to this question is provided by Goldstein and Alibrandi, who articulate that ESL students benefit more from these images because they learn the concepts associated with the words as a schema, rather than as isolated words.⁷⁶³ This means that the *idea* of state failure would all get wrapped up into one schema in the learner's mind, and anchor the associated vocabulary around that image. The schema helps the ESL student because "imagery, words, concepts, and applications are being activated simultaneously, thereby strengthening the retention of each." Other authors, for this reason, have noted that using geospatial technology to teach challenging curriculum to ESL students could benefit ESL students.⁷⁶⁴ This prior research points at a likely explanation for the performance of ESL students in this experiment. However, it must be noted that the author does not have any data on how recently the students began learning English as a Second Language, or if they have been bilingual most of their lives.

Achievement Gap Between White and BIPOC Students

As one final discussion point, the results identified a subject-matter achievement gap between white and BIPOC students. Interestingly, this achievement gap was not present in the pre-test scores in this experiment (GLMs 1 and 4). Other research has found achievement gaps between Black students, specifically, and white students within the subject of geography at the secondary education level,⁷⁶⁵ suggesting that, the pre-test results of this experiment diverged from the findings of prior research. However, the previous study compared white and Black

⁷⁶³ Goldstein and Alibrandi, "Integrating GIS in the Middle School Curriculum: Impacts on Diverse Students' Standardized Test Scores," 69.

⁷⁶⁴ Kangas et. al, "Using geospatial technology to teach language and content to English learners," 3-4. These authors call the "context" mentioned above "comprehensive input" and quote a piece written by Krashen in 1981 in utilizing that term. The argument being, that the images associated with the content allows ESL students to learn concepts with vocabulary that might normally be outside of their language capabilities.

⁷⁶⁵ Solem, "Geography Achievement and Future Geographers," 9; Solem et al., "Student- and School-Level Predictors of Geography Achievement in the United States, 1994-2018," 204-205.

students, so differences between white students and students of racial or ethnic groups represented by BIPOC identities were considered.

Race was identified as a significant factor in GLMs 2 and 3 (coefficients were -0.4004 [p=.0142] and -0.1068 [p=.0231], respectively), indicating that white students outperformed BIPOC students in the post-tests and the percentage difference in learning. As there were no existing significant achievement gaps between these groups of students in the pre-test, this result warrants further investigation to further uncover why students who identify as white seemed to show better overall improvement than students who identify as BIPOC.

In addition, it should also be noted that the total N for BIPOC students in both test groups fell below thirty students and the sample size's percentage of BIPOC students fell well below that of TAMU's (24% and 45% respectively), indicating the test sample underrepresents BIPOC student populations. Therefore, while the GLM returned a significant result based on race, it is possible that the sample is not representative of the whole TAMU population. As such, conclusions drawn from this model should be re-tested and re-verified in additional classrooms before making broad conclusions.

In terms of understanding why these results occurred, one possible explanation is that the BIPOC students did not identify with the author, who identifies as white, or that the author did not communicate in a way that resonated and engaged BIPOC students⁷⁶⁶ for the duration of the experiment. Prior research has shown that Latinx and Black students do perform better over long

⁷⁶⁶ Egalite et. al, "Representation in the classroom: the effect of own-race teachers on student achievement," 44. These authors note that same race teachers can serve as cultural translators for their students.

periods of time when taught by Latinx and Black teachers.⁷⁶⁷ Additionally, prior research has shown that Black students perform better when they are instructed by a Black teacher.⁷⁶⁸ Though this research is primarily speaking to longer time horizons than just one experiment, perhaps this experiment is a microcosm of that larger effect. Indeed, perhaps implicit instructor bias⁷⁶⁹ and stereotype threat,⁷⁷⁰ could manifest in a measurable impact much sooner than a school-year-long course. For the purpose of this discussion, this author is utilizing Steele's brief definition of stereotype threat which means "the threat that others' judgements or their own actions will negatively stereotype them in the domain."⁷⁷¹ Some authors have stated that stereotype threat can lead to reduced academic engagement and subsequently lower academic performance.⁷⁷² Though this paper does not have any specific data on implicit-bias or stereotype threat, further research should examine shorter term-impacts of same-race teachers on student learning outcomes to better understand if there are any short-term benefits or negative impacts of same or different race teachers on student learning outcomes. Regardless, further research is needed to determine what aspect of this experiment did allow for greater score improvement in white students.

⁷⁶⁷ Bristol and Martin-Fernandez, "The Added Value of Latinx and Black Teachers for Latinx and Black Students: Implications for Policy," 148-149.

⁷⁶⁸ Harbatkin, "Does student-teacher race match affect course grades?" 102081; Delhomme, "High school role models and minority college achievement," 102222. Delhomme specifically notes that, in Texas high schools, "race-matching raises minority students' course performance as well as...high school graduation [rates] and college enrollment [rates]."

⁷⁶⁹ Chin et. al, "Bias in the Air: A Nationwide Exploration of Teachers' Implicit Racial Attitudes, Aggregate Bias, and Student Outcomes," 566-567, 571.

⁷⁷⁰ Steele and Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans," 797-800; Steele, "How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance," 613, 616-618.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 613.

⁷⁷² Egalite et. al, "Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement," 45.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the study is in reference to the fact that the study population did not appear to be representative of Texas A&M's larger undergraduate student body. The study's disproportionately large size of white students means that there were comparatively fewer students who identified as BIPOC in this particular class at Texas A&M. This sample limits the conclusions that can be generalized from this study. The same issue of a low N should be noted for ESL students. There was likely not a representative sample of ESL students in this classroom, as such, conclusions that are being drawn in relation to this group of students should not be widely generalized. Consequently, if this research is to be done again, the author suggests recruiting in more than one class to help alleviate this problem.

The author only deployed this research experiment in one class at Texas A&M largely because of IRB concerns and time constraints. The author instructed one section of Geography 201 in the same semester the experiment was conducted. But the author did not deploy the experiment in his class due to IRB concerns. There was one other in-person section of Geography 201 being taught during this semester, which consequently limited the places that the study could be deployed. There also could have been an impact of the timing of the experiment during the semester. The experiment was conducted at the end of October into the start of November. During this point in the semester, in-person sections of Geography 201 at Texas A&M typically have reduced attendance when compared to day one attendance.⁷⁷³ This means that there could have been unintentional selection bias in the study's participants, as they could have been students who were more likely to be actively involved in class.

⁷⁷³ This observation is drawn from the author's experience as both a TA and an instructor of record of this course.

This study would have benefitted from delivering a post-study survey to students who participated so that the author could better understand levels of student engagement, what they liked about the lecture they received, what they did not like about the lecture they received, and other qualitative data that likely would have aided in interpreting the quantitative test results. The study was limited as designed because of this lack of qualitative data. The study could have benefitted from some hands-on assessment for the students or allowing students to manipulate the StoryMaps on their own time as well, as this could have increased their mastery of the lesson objectives.⁷⁷⁴

Lastly, the study also would have benefitted from assessing students on their understanding of the *history* that accompanied the StoryMaps and not just the concepts of state failure themselves. To address this point, if the author were to conduct this study in the future with fewer time constraints, the experiment would follow a similar set-up, but have two experimental lectures and two control lectures for each group. The first lecture in each group would focus on key terminology of state failure, and the second would focus on a historical example of state failure. In this way, the Mexican state failure StoryMap could be used for the second lecture in the experimental group, while the control group would receive a traditional PowerPoint. This method would better isolate the StoryMap's impact on student learning outcomes.

⁷⁷⁴ Gebelein, "Blending History with Geographic Information System Technology: Using USS Arizona GIS Data to Engage Students in Technology and History of the Pearl Harbor Attack," 2013-2019. Gebelein's paper seems to indicate that students are more engaged when given learning activities that force them to use a GIS, so, perhaps doing something similar, like asking students to map a failed state's core, domain, and sphere, would better help them understand and retain the concepts being presented to them.

Alternatively, the questions that were asked in the pre- and post-tests may not have been the correct ones. Perhaps it would be better to ask the students about historical questions following the receipt of the Mexican state failure StoryMap as opposed to conceptual ones. Perhaps the StoryMap and the geographic context for the history that was presented in the experimental lecture made more sense than a traditional history lecture would have. Both of these alternatives offer ways for further research to build on this project and to further systematize teaching political geography as a whole.

Lastly, students were allowed to take the post-test at home, so it is possible that some students looked at resources on the internet. However, this effect would likely appear in both groups and likely would not cause student performance to differ drastically between groups. It is possible that some groups of students may have felt pressure to get a better grade on the post-test and looked at internet resources. However, it is difficult for the author to determine that. The instructor of record could examine Canvas records, but the author did not request access to that information because of FERPA concerns. Students also would not have been able to look up any of the answers to the test questions on the internet directly, as the questions were written by the author for this assessment and were not drawn from an existing assessment.

Conclusion

This experiment was conducted in the manner it was because maps are excellent tools for telling spatial stories,⁷⁷⁵ and this experiment was designed to empirically assess if using a StoryMap to tell the story of state failure spatially would aid in students better learning the core concepts of political geography and state failure. However, the results of this experiment

⁷⁷⁵ Strachan and Mitchell, "Teachers' Perceptions of Esri Story Maps as Effective Teaching Tools," 195-196.

indicated that the null hypotheses listed above should not be rejected. They should not be rejected because students in the experimental group did not outperform students in the control group.

Despite these results, StoryMaps can still be used as effective educational tools. Indeed, previous studies have found that students can feel more engaged when being taught in conjunction with the use of a StoryMap,⁷⁷⁶ with this increased engagement being thought to lead to better learning outcomes. StoryMaps have more of a proven track record in benefiting students when they create the StoryMaps themselves or when they were allowed to engage with the StoryMap on their own.⁷⁷⁷

Though the results of this study did not immediately support full replacement of PowerPoints with StoryMaps, this study still makes a contribution to the field of geographic education as an effort to better formalize political geography education of undergraduates in American universities. This merit lies in putting forth the idea that state failure may be an interesting and engaging topic to organize some political geography lessons and content around. Though state failure may not be the best method to solely organize a whole political geography course around, considering that state failure as it was presented in this experiment does not engage particularly well with critical geopolitics⁷⁷⁸ or feminist political geography,⁷⁷⁹ using it as

⁷⁷⁶ Egiebor and Foster, "Student's Perception of Their Engagement Using GIS-Story Maps," 54-55.

⁷⁷⁷ Tian et. al, "Understanding high education students' developing perceptions of geocapabilities through the creation of story maps with geographical information systems," 687; Cyvin et. al, "Using StoryMaps to prepare for field course – A Case study of students in Geography," 1-2; Mukherjee, "Exploring cultural geography field course using story maps," 216-217.

⁷⁷⁸ Some entry points into critical geopolitical scholarship are: Moore and Perdue, "Imagining a Critical Geopolitical Cartography," 892-901; Dodds, "Political geography III: critical geopolitics after ten years," 469-484; O Tuathail and Agnew, "Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy," 190-204; Kelly, "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics," 24-53.

a discussion tie-in for an introductory class could capture student interest and lead to more engaged students. The instructor can foster student engagement by leading discussions using current events linked to state failure, like the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. No approach to teaching political geography will be perfect, however, the field would benefit from some standards across how political geography is taught at the undergraduate level so that the field's relevance to outsiders can be more legible, thus returning to George Demko's quote cited above.

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⁷⁷⁹ Some entry points into recent scholarship in Feminist Political Geography are: Mountz, "Political geography III: Bodies," 759-769; Fall, "Territory, sovereignty and entitlement: Diplomatic discourses in the United Nations Security Council," 102208; Hyndman, "Mind the gap: bridging feminist and political geography through geopolitics," 307-322; Pain, "Everyday terrorism: Connecting domestic violence and global terrorism," 531-550.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHING MATERIALS FOR THE LEARNING EXPERIMENT

Teaching Materials for the learning experiment can be found at the following, public, Google Drive location:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1zE_OY54ZFxakQYeAR5YyJwiu7zcW72Hy

The file titled “Chapter10_PoliticalGeographies...” is the file that was used to instruct the class on day one of the learning experiment. The file titled “State Failure 101...” is the file the was used to instruct the control group during that group’s individual lecture.

APPENDIX B
STORYMAP LINK

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5667afb251f740e9bdbb3cfbddd89533>

APPENDIX C MAP SOURCING INFORMATION

This appendix provides additional and more in-depth bibliographic information on the maps produced in this dissertation. This appendix attempts to highlight and clearly outline what source material was used to create the layers in the maps appearing throughout the document. The maps themselves were all created by the author using ArcGIS Pro and ArcGIS Online using a license from Texas A&M's Department of Geography.

Overall Notes

For all of the maps produced in this dissertation, the layers that represent the ocean and land were made with Natural Earth data. Free vector and raster map data at [naturalearthdata.com](https://www.naturalearthdata.com). Large Scale and Small-Scale datasets were used for this dissertation.

See: Natural Earth. *Downloads*. Accessed 15 February 2022.

<https://www.naturalearthdata.com/downloads/>.

Texas River datasets are from were taken from the Texas Water Development Board's website, located here: <https://www.twdb.texas.gov/mapping/gisdata.asp>. The file used for this project was the "Major Rivers" file. This dataset appears in Figures IV-1, IV-2, V-1, and V-2.

See: Texas Water Development Board. *GIS Data*, Natural Features, Major Rivers Shapefile. Accessed 3 March 2022. <https://www.twdb.texas.gov/mapping/gisdata.asp>.

Chapter I Notes

For Figure I-2, Mexico's Core, Domain, and Sphere:

The distinction between the domain and the sphere is drawn by reproducing a line of presidios that was drawn on page 31 of the article titled "Presidio and the Borderlands: A Case Study," written by Paige Christiansen.

See: Christiansen, Paige W. "Presidio and the Borderlands: A Case Study." *Journal of the West*, Vol 8 (1969): 29-37.

Chapter II Notes

For Figure II-1:

The boundaries of the "Maximum extent of Spanish Territorial Claims" used an open-source image that can be found here:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spanish_North_America.svg. The author independently verified these territorial claims using academic sources. The image was used by the author to trace the territorial claims into ArcGIS Pro to create an editable layer.

See: Wikimedia Commons. "File:Spanish North America.svg." Accessed 18 January 2022. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spanish_North_America.svg.

The line that delineates Spain's furthest eastward territorial claim can be found in Devine's "Territorial Madness: Spain, Geopolitics, and the American Revolution." This line also appears on the image above.

See: Devine, Michael J. "Territorial Madness: Spain, Geopolitics, and the American Revolution." Master's Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1994.

<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5617&context=etd>. Accessed 20

October 2021.

For Figure II-2:

The trade routes layer was based on the source listed below. The author of this dissertation was using this information to highlight the importance of the Isthmuses of Panama and Tehuantepec to the maintenance of Spain's globe-spanning empire.

See Pages 164 and 165 of: La Follette, Cameron and Douglas Deur. "Views Across the Pacific: The Galleon Trade and Its Traces in Oregon." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2018): 160–91. <https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.119.2.0160>.

Information on the silver mines was found in the source listed in the next paragraph.

See Page 117 of Abad, Leticia Arroyo and Nuno Palma, "The Fruits of El Dorado: The Global Impact of American Precious Metals," in *The Fruits of the Early Globalization: An Iberian Perspective*, edited by Rafael Dobado-González and Alfredo García-Hiernaux, 95-131. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Territory under Spanish control south of Panama was based on the map on page XVII in the source in the next paragraph.

See: Kamen, Henry. *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power 1492-1763*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

European Threats were depicted by the author.

For Figure II-3, "Caminos Reales of New Spain – Circa 1790."

Northernmost Presidio line is based on the line drawn in Christiansen, “The Presidio and the Borderlands,” page 31. This map’s date is after geopolitical threats prompted Spain to put more concerted effort into developing the Eastern and Western branches of the Camino Real.

Silver Producing areas are based on the distribution of silver mining centers found [here](#), on page three of the ebook version of this publication: Murillo, Dana Velasco. *Urban Indians in a Silver City: Zacatecas, Mexico, 1546-1810*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

Additional support for the location of the silver mines is seen in the Abad source listed above.

The area identified as the Spanish Core corresponds to the area under Spanish Control in by 1600 in Peter Gerhard’s *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*, page 6.

See: Gerhard, Peter. *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

For constructing the layer depicting the Camino Reales see the paragraphs below. The sources for the Caminos Reales remain consistent throughout the project:

For the “De Tejas” route, the US National Park Service produces maps of the portion of the Camino Real in Texas which can be found online. See: US National Park Service. *El Camino Real de los Tejas*. Maps. Accessed 20 February 2022.

<https://www.nps.gov/elte/planyourvisit/maps.htm>. Page 18 of the following source also contains a good map of the Camino Real in Texas: Torget, Andrew. *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

For the “De California” route the following sources helped determine the depiction of this route. For the portion in California proper: Kittle, Robert A. *Franciscan Frontiersmen: How*

Three Adventurers Charted the West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017.

Additionally, page 31 of Osio, Antonio María, Rose Marie Beebe, and Robert M.

Senkewicz. *The History of Alta California: A Memoir of Mexican California*. Madison:

University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. For portions of the route not in California itself, see page 2

of Stevens, Robert Conway. "Mexico's Forgotten Frontier: A History of Sonora, 1821-1846."

PhD. Diss., University of California Berkeley, 1963.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/302116213/48D29B424944465BPQ/1?accountid=7082>.

For the "De la Tierra Adentro" route the following sources helped determine the depiction of this route. Pages 157 and 162 of the following source: United States Bureau of Land Management. New Mexico State Office, Gabrielle G. Palmer, June-el Piper, and Stephen L. Fosberg. *El Camino Real De Tierra Adentro*. Santa Fe, N.M.: Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, 1999.

Figure II-4. "The Northern Frontiers of New Spain – 1549"

The areas under Spanish and Aztec control are based on maps originally appearing on pages 4 and 8 of Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*. See: Gerhard, Peter. *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*. Vol. Rev. ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

The term "high northern frontier" is used by Oakah Jones Jr. in her book *Nueva Vizcaya Heartland of the Spanish Frontier*.

The Gran Chichimeca boundaries are drawn from Philip Powell's article titled "The Chichimecas: Scourge of the Silver Frontier in Sixteenth Century Mexico," pages 320-321. The article can be found using this reference information: Powell, Philip Wayne. "The Chichimecas:

Scourge of the Silver Frontier in Sixteenth-Century Mexico.” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 25, no. 3 (1945): 315–38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2507968>.

Figure II-5. “Advance of Spanish Actual Territory 1600-1819.”

The growth of Spanish territorial control is seen in maps produced by Peter Gerhard in his book *The Northern Frontier of New Spain* on pages 6-8. Territory controlled by Spain in 1524 was drawn from Peter Gerhard’s book, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*, on page 8. See: Gerhard, Peter. *The Northern Frontier of New Spain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. See also, Gerhard, Peter. *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

Gerhard’s identification of a territory as “controlled” most closely resembles this project’s definition of “sovereignty” in a given territory. That is, the state can defeat a violent rebellion there.

Chapter III Notes

Figure III-1.

The online collection of the Military Maps of the Texas Revolution, kept by the University of Texas at Arlington also provided assistance in locating some of the routes appearing on this map. In particular, map number six, found here: University of Texas at Arlington. The Portal to Texas History. “Military Maps of the Texas revolution Slide 6 of 10.” *Military Map of Texas and Coahuila as Mexican Territory, 1835-36*. Accessed 11 November 2022.

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph2489/m1/6/?q=%22Texas%20Revolution%22>.

Routes were also depicted in a map produced by Jack Jackson found here: Jackson, Jack. “Texas at the Time of Almonte’s Inspection 1834.” [Online Map]. The Portal to Texas History by the Texas State Historical Association. Accessed 12 November 2022.

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph296837/m1/22/>.

Figure III-2: The primary source for this map is José Mariá Narvaez’s map of California produced in 1830. This map is reproduced in Gonzalez, “War and the Making of History: the Case of Mexican California 1821-1846,” page 6. See the following reference for full bibliographic information: Gonzalez, Michael. “War and the Making of History: The Case of Mexican California, 1821— 1846.” *California History* 86, no. 2 (2009): 5–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40495206>.

Figure III-3: Overview of New Mexico – 1837

The division between the Rio Arriba and Rio Abajo was drawn from information on the Rio Arriba County’s website. This information can be found here: Ortiz, Raymond and Lauren Reichelt. Rio Arriba County. *County History*. Accessed 6 January 2023. http://www.rio-arriba.org/places_to_see_things_to_do/local_history/index.html#:~:text=The%20name%20%E2%80%9CRio%20Arriba%E2%80%9D%20means,everything%20south%20of%20Santa%20Fe.

Figure III-4: Sonora, Mexico Circa 1837

The shapefile for the state boundaries of Sonora were found on the University of Texas Library’s website for geographic data. This information can be found in the following source: University of Texas Libraries. 2015 Sonora, Mexico State Boundary. 12 June 2022. <https://geodata.lib.utexas.edu/catalog/nyu-2451-37065>.

The road connecting Guaymas, Hermosillo and Ures was found on a map produced in Voss, *On the Periphery of Nineteenth Century Mexico*, 107-108. See the reference list for full bibliographic information.

The other paths were found on maps located on pages 57 and 73 in *Sonora: Its geographic personality* written by Robert West. See the reference list for full bibliographic information.

Figure III-5: Republic of the Rio Grande

Information appearing on this map and Figure III-1 uses the sources for Figure III-1.

Some of the political boundaries were depicted referencing a map produced by Henry Tanner in 1834, found on the David Rumsey collection of maps. This map can be found here: Tanner, Henry. *Mexico & Guatemala* [Online Map]. 1:11,850,000. Philadelphia: H.S. Tanner, 1842. In David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~266971~90041501:Mexico-and-Guatemala-?sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No&qvq=q:mexico%201840;sort:Pub_List_No_InitialSort%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=2&trs=146. Accessed 6 January 2023.

Additionally, the book, *Searching for the Republic of the Rio Grande* had helpful maps to identify some of the towns in the map produced by the author. The book is written by Paul Lack. See the reference list for full bibliographic information.

The Mexican States information that was used to create the layer depicting the boundaries of the proposed Republic of the Rio Grande was located using Esri's data finding

tools through ArcGIS Pro. This information can be found at the following source: Mexico State Borders part of Political Boundaries Overlay. Created by NOAA. Published 19 February 2016, updated 31 January 2018.

<https://hub.arcgis.com/datasets/12d021ac5db44bc6a5de61f2ec439a02/explore?layer=5&location=11.511101%2C0.252100%2C2.64&showTable=true>. Accessed 1 June 2022.

Chapter IV Notes

Figure IV-1: the Three Major Regions of Texas.

The boundaries of Comancheria are drawn from Pekka Hamalainen's book, *the Comanche Empire*. See reference list for full citation information.

The other two regions were drawn by the author.

Figure IV-2:

Commercial Routes were determined using Torget *Seeds of Empire* as well as Poyo's chapter titled "Community and Autonomy" in the book *Tejano Journey, 1770-1850*. See the reference list for full citation information.

Chapter V Notes

Figure V-1, Mexico Boxing in the Texian Colonists:

This map was produced using information on Terán's military measures found in sources like *Texas by Terán*, Johnson's *A History of Texas*, and various entries on the Texas State Historical Association's website. See the reference list for full citation information for these sources. The association's website was particularly helpful for locating some of the forts whose locations were not well described by other sources.

Figure V-2, Overview of the Texas Rebellion:

This map is the author's own reproduction of maps depicting the Texas revolution. Stephen Hardin's book *The Alamo 1836* was the most impactful for the production of this map. Page 6 of this source contains the map showing Houston and Santa Anna's troop movements after the battle of the Alamo. See the reference list for full citation information.

Chapter VI Notes

Figure VI-1, Overlapping Spheres of the United States and Mexico:

This map was produced using publicly available sources for territory owned by the United States and Mexico in 1846. The US National Park Service has resources on the Santa Fe Trail that helped in the creation of that layer. This information can be found here:

<https://www.nps.gov/safe/index.htm>. It was last accessed by the author on 6 January 2023.

Figure VI-2, Overview of the Mexican American War Fronts – 1846 – 1848:

Routes of the various troop movements were pulled from maps available on the US Library of Congress's website. The most influential map is found below in the following source: McConnel, James. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* [Online Map]. Chicago: McConnel Map Co, 1919. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3701sm.gct00482/?sp=29&r=-0.121,-0.017,1.297,0.79,0>. Accessed 9 January 2023.

The University of Texas at Arlington also has a map that provided help in locating the routes of the combatants in the northern sphere. That map can be found here: University of Texas at Arlington. *Col. A.W. Doniphan's Route through the States of New Mexico, Chihuahua, and Coahuila*. https://library.uta.edu/usmexicowar/collections/image/usmw-E405-2-E26_map.jpg. Accessed 15 January 2023.

The University of Texas at Arlington has a wonderful collection of maps of the War that helped the author produce this map. This collection of maps is located at library.uta.edu/usmexicowar/maps.

All other maps in this chapter are based off of Figure VI-1 and contain the same sourcing information.

The fronts are defined and depicted by the author.

Chapter VII Notes

Figure VII-1, Geographic Hypothetical – Mexico’s Reconsidered Core and Domain
1821:

This map has layers produced using sources cited above. The connections to the core layer was produced by the author, as was the modified domain and the modified “Rubí’s Limit of Advance.”

Chapter VIII Notes

Figure VIII-1. Political Geography Map found in the public domain at Ian Macky’s website. URL: <https://ian.macky.net/pat/map/world.html>.

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