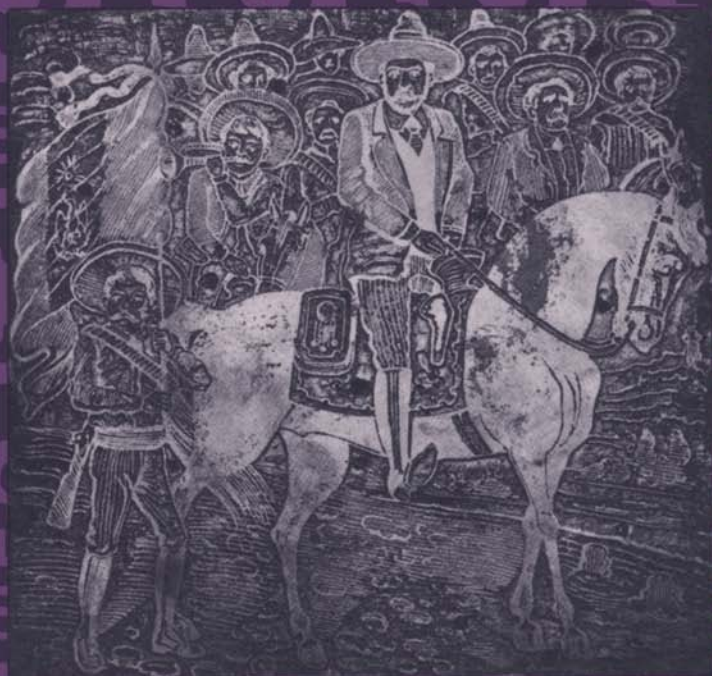


PERSISTENT OLIGARCHS

Elites and Politics in
Chihuahua, Mexico

1910—1940



MARK WASSERMAN

Persistent Oligarchs

P E R S I S T E N T
O L I G A R C H S

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Chihuahua, Mexico

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Mark Wasserman

D U K E U N I V E R S I T Y P R E S S

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*This book is dedicated with
great love to two generations: to my mother and father,
Deborah S. and Herbert B. Wasserman, and to my children,
Aaron and Danielle*

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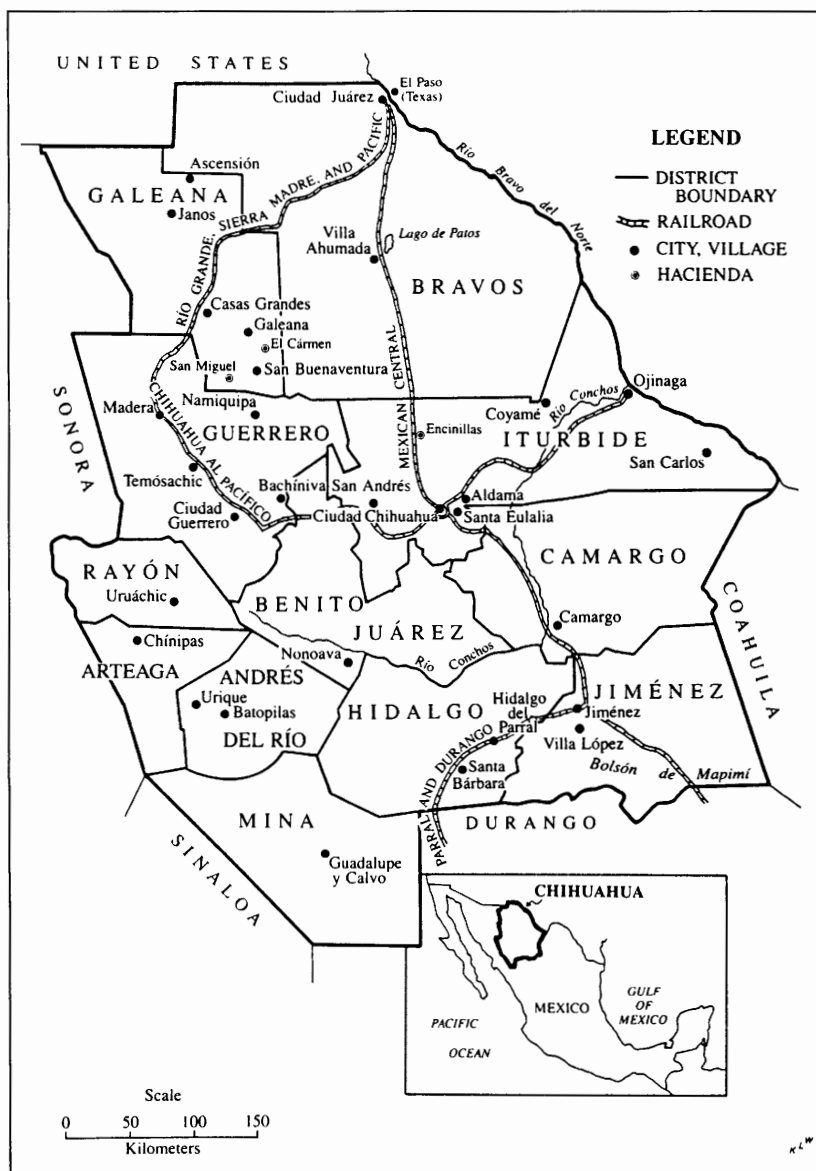
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Persistent Oligarchs



Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910. Reprinted, by permission of the publisher, from *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1854-1911*, by Mark Wasserman. Copyright © 1984 by the University of North Carolina Press.

1 Introduction

The three watersheds of Mexican history are the Conquest (1519–21), the Hidalgo revolt (1810), and the Revolution (1910–20). None of the three was a clearly definable event or set of events in terms of either chronology or effect. One could argue that the Conquest lasted a hundred years. The wars for independence begun and symbolized by Hidalgo's uprising dragged on for more than a decade (and the chaos they created lasted considerably longer). When, exactly, the Revolution ended is still much debated. The most violent civil wars concluded in 1917, but the overthrow of Venustiano Carranza in 1920 and the end of the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1940 are other benchmarks often used. In the case of each of the three watersheds, their outcomes are the source of long-standing, ongoing, historical controversies. In all three instances, the core of the debate over their impact revolves around the concepts of continuity and change.

Revolutions must be measured by the transformations they wreak. But it is not enough to prove that change resulted, because some change will take place over time regardless of cataclysmic events. Simply put, we must separate the changes that would have or might have taken place without revolution from those brought about by the revolution. This is not an easy assessment to make. The whole concept of revolutionary transformations is, moreover, often greatly exaggerated. The possibilities for extensive alterations in society and economy are at best limited; the likelihood of immediate, earth-shattering change is even less. In sum, most aspects of social and economic life remain the same or change very slowly regardless of larger events. The concept of revolutionary change therefore applies to only a few, though crucial, aspects of politics and economy.

Defining change requires making a series of value judgments and

imprecise measurements. The extent of change that can be defined as revolutionary is subject to continuing discussion. In the case of the Mexican Revolution, historians have divided into traditional and revisionist camps over these judgments. Three central questions have emerged: (1) to what extent did the Revolution destroy the ruling class (elite) of the old regime? (2) to what extent has the new ruling class (if there is one) or the state or regime changed its methods? and (3) to what extent was there popular participation in the Revolution?¹

The traditionalists maintain that the Revolution brought about profound political and economic change: the old elite was destroyed—or at least rendered noncompetitive; there was a substantial redistribution of wealth, especially from the old, landed elite to the peasantry; and a new, democratic political system replaced the dictatorship. Furthermore, armed peasants and workers played a pre-eminent role in causing these transformations. Revisionists counter that the Revolution retained the major characteristics of the old regime: centralization, cooptation, and corruption. They argue that, although the popular classes were to some extent the soldiers of the upheaval, they had no lasting effect on its outcome.

Persistent Oligarchs explores these questions of change by studying the survival of the elite of the old regime, the rise of a new revolutionary elite, and the relations between the two in the post-revolutionary era in the northern state of Chihuahua from 1920 to 1940. The interaction of old and new elites shaped Mexican and Chihuahuan political and economic development, and thus the outcome of the Revolution.

In order to provide the necessary context for the study, I will first present a brief overview and interpretation of the causes and course of the Revolution; then a short summary of national and state politics in the postrevolutionary era, followed by a sketch of the role of the elite; and, finally, an outline of my themes.

The Mexican Revolution: An Overview

Mexico entered the twentieth century on the tide of its first economic “miracle.” The wave of United States and European in-

vestment since the 1880s had created an extensive railroad network, a large mineral export industry, and an export agriculture boom. The nation's government and politics seemed to be secure in the hands of the president-dictator Porfirio Díaz and his military and bureaucratic henchmen. But dictatorship and export-led economic development, while in the short term consolidating the hold of the alliance of landowners, military, and bureaucrats (then known as *científicos* and more recently as *técnicos*), in the long run undermined the political and social order.

During his thirty-four years in power (1877–1911), Díaz constructed a pragmatic network of alliances with regional political bosses that employed the technique of reward and punishment (*pan o palo*, or “bread or the club”). After his first decade and a half of rule, he rarely had to resort to harsh measures: a lucrative concession or tax exemption usually sufficed to win over the uncooperative. The system required steady, if not spectacular, economic growth to operate smoothly. In both 1902 and 1907, downturns, caused by declines in export commodity prices, eroded the cement that held together the carefully crafted mosaic of the Porfirian regime. Competition for suddenly scarce resources (credit and water were the most bitterly contested) reminded those who had “sold out” to Díaz just how crucial regional and local political power was to their economic interests. The Díaz government made a series of decisions between 1907 and 1910 that adversely affected the economic holdings of a number of regional elite families, once competitors for political power in their home states, who had lost out to Porfirista factions during the 1880s and 1890s, but who had remained generally quiescent (except in the early 1890s) in return for access to wealth. Revolutionaries like José María Maytorena and Francisco I. Madero came from these families.

At the same time, particularly in the north, the economic boom created a new, entrepreneurial middle class. As in the case of the regional elites, they did not raise widespread objections to an inherently unfair system so long as the economy continued to expand. When the depression of 1907 crushed their dreams, they, too, learned the lesson of economics and politics: they could never obtain equal opportunity until they had influence in the political process. Joining forces with the dissident elites described above, the middle

class proved a powerful force in overthrowing the Díaz dictatorship in 1911.

But even together, the regional elites and the entrepreneurial middle class could not have defeated the Díaz regime; they needed soldiers to fight their battles. The disruptions caused by the formation of the export agricultural sector furnished armies of rural dwellers (*campesinos*, or country people) comprised of villagers and smallholders, robbed of their ancestral lands by large landholders and politicians who sought to increase commercial crop production. Added to their numbers were industrial workers (most importantly, miners) left unemployed by the depression of 1907.

The contradictions inherent in this multiclass alliance are easily apparent. The dissident elites and middle class sought, at the very least, reform of the political system to include them so that they would have equal opportunity and, at the most, control of the system to use it for their own advantage. Peasants and workers, on the other hand, often sought profound changes in the distribution of property and income. They, too, realized that political control was crucial, but in the case of the *campesinos* or peasants, they saw the importance only of local or, at most, regional political power.

The multiclass alliance of 1910-11 was victorious because its internal differences were subsumed in the face of a common enemy and because the dictatorship fell victim to a fatal internal crisis (in the form of a dual failure of elite will and coercive power). The triumph was relatively quick because of the recognition by the Porfirian elite of the possibility that the predominant aims of the rebels were not revolutionary. If forced to do so by the deterioration of their coercive power, this elite was willing to share with a new group. And had the matter ended with the ascendance of Francisco I. Madero as president in 1911, there would have been no revolution, merely a transfer of hegemony from one faction of the elite to another and, perhaps, the opening of ranks to some new blood from the middle class. Porfirio Díaz knew better, for as he left (albeit an apocryphal tale), he warned his country of having "unleashed a tiger." There were, as it turned out, two tigers: regionalism and the popular classes.

Madero became a man in the middle. On one side he faced a Porfirian elite (many of whom were his relatives) not entirely willing

to place full confidence in him and not unwilling to combat his regional agents. The prerevolutionary regional elites, in particular, saw an opportunity to reassert their long-lost autonomy. On the other side, he confronted the popular classes—the most dangerous being the campesinos—who were not satisfied with temporizing land reform. Not surprisingly, Madero, who had little control over either the regions or the popular classes, did not last long. His replacement and murderer, Victoriano Huerta, took the reins in 1913, enduring for little more than a year. Huerta represented the resurgence of the Porfirian elite. He, too, failed to meet the challenge of the two tigers, regionalism and the popular classes.

By 1914 the military and political situation had greatly fragmented. For the next three years, there was, in effect, no Mexican state (national government). At the state and local levels conditions were little better. The civil war among the groups which had defeated Huerta, led by Francisco Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Venustiano Carranza, raged for three years. The centrifugal force of regionalism pulled the country apart. Carranza had won by 1917, though Zapata (until 1919) and Villa (until 1920) remained in the field. The victor represented a coalition of former dissident elites (of whom Carranza was one) and the entrepreneurial (predominantly northern) middle class. The losers were the popular class movements.

The triumphant alliance endured only until 1920, when the entrepreneurial middle class, led by Carranza's best general, Alvaro Obregón, and his Sonoran cohorts, threw out Carranza. The ouster of the so-called First Chief represented an important realignment, for the Sonorans, though unwilling to enter into an equal partnership, recognized the need to satisfy some of the demands of rural people and workers. They had shown this inclination earlier, when they concurred in the radical Constitution of 1917. Carranza had adamantly refused. He had, instead, sought allies among the ranks of the Porfirian elite.

The balance of political power was quite uncertain in 1920. The Sonorans, or middle class, stood uneasily among the popular classes, twenty or so regional factions, powerful revolutionary generals (out for their own good), Porfirian oligarchs, and local bosses. None alone could challenge them, so they had to satisfy the demands of

each group enough to keep it from allying with one or more of the others. Obregón (1920–24) and his successor, Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–28), proved adept at maintaining the equilibrium sufficiently to withstand the challenges of three major revolts—de la Huerta (1923–24), Cristero (1926–29), and Escobar (1929). Even when one of the contending groups rebelled, Obregón and Calles managed to prevent the others from joining. Many of the generals joined Adolfo de la Huerta, but the popular classes stayed loyal to the regime. Western peasants became Cristeros, but the other groups were quiet. As the threat lessened, so did the responsiveness of the Sonorans.

Two other crucial considerations affected the regime after 1920. Most important, it had to begin repairing the enormous material and economic damage done by the civil wars. It was an effort just to feed the population. The needs of recovery often would be set off against the needs of the popular classes. The demand for agrarian reform, for example, contradicted the need to increase agricultural production. In addition, the Sonorans confronted the hostility of the United States. Any major reforms encountered vociferous objections from the U.S. government.

Over the course of the 1920s, the entrepreneurial middle class concluded that the Sonoran dynasty of Obregón and Calles, however capable, was not the long-range solution to the dilemma of conflicting interests and demands. The assassination of the recently reelected Obregón in 1928 proved that the nation required permanent structures, not personalism. For the next six years, with Calles running the government from behind the scenes as *jefe máximo*, through a series of three presidents, Emilio Portes Gil (1929–30), Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–32), and Abelardo Rodríguez (1932–34), the middle-class winners sought the formula that would satisfy or defeat the competing groups and institutionalize their own rule.

The establishment of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) in 1929 was the first step. This constituted a two-part method of dealing with the two tigers, regionalism and the popular classes, which Díaz had correctly predicted would torment Mexico. The PNR, under Calles's prompting, initially attempted to bring the regional bosses and factions into the national context. The effort succeeded to the extent that the party was able to reach accord on the nomination of Lázaro Cárdenas for the presidency in 1934, to weather the rupture between Calles and Cárdenas that led to the

latter's exile in 1936, and to crush the rebellion of Saturnino Cedillo in 1938.

The second part of the strategy involved the popular classes. They had been the pillar of the Sonoran regime in that they had rallied to defend it during each of the major rebellions. They had also formed the bases of regional bosses like Cedillo, Adalberto Tejeda of Veracruz, and Emilio Portes Gil of Tamaulipas. In times of dire threat, the regime had repaid their loyalty with land and better wages. But as long as the popular classes were allied to the regime through regional bosses, they were always a potential danger. Thus, if the national party could obtain their direct loyalty it would capture, or at least defang, the two tigers. Cárdenas's agrarian and labor reforms were the price paid by the regime; the peasants and workers paid with the restriction of their independence, losing their organizations to the PNR and its successors. The regional elites, which had no popular base because they could no longer provide patronage and services, could not maintain their autonomy.

The Mexican one-party state, as it existed from 1940 to 1984, resulted from the strategy begun by the Sonorans in 1920 and perfected by Cárdenas. The revolutionary regime constructed a strong centralized state by employing the popular classes, first to defeat rebellious factions within, and then by using popular class organizations to counter regional elites. It was an arduous process, however. Elites in the regions, both old and new, fiercely resisted centralization. Their opposition moderated the course of the Revolution.

The ascendancy of three consecutive conservative governments after 1940—those of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–46), Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946–52), and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952–58)—clearly indicates that the entrepreneurial middle class, by now a political elite and an industrial bourgeoisie, often in alliance with the surviving remnants of the old oligarchy, had emerged irreversibly triumphant.

Postrevolutionary Politics

Mexican and Chihuahuan politics consisted of a series of intertwined conflicts and accommodations. The oldest was the struggle among elites at different levels, national, regional (in this case, the

state of Chihuahua), and local (municipal). The first two sought to extend their control over the level below. The latter two sought to maintain their autonomy from the level immediately above. Just as important was the struggle of the lower classes for economic justice. Elites could not confine their disagreements and accommodations to themselves, for in order to further their own interests they needed the support of the workers and agriculturalists. Another important factor was the desperate need for economic recovery from the ruin of a decade of war. Maintaining a workable balance among the demands of these elements—elite conflict, clamor for reform, and necessity for economic reconstruction—comprised Chihuahua's political economy from 1920 to 1940.

The Revolution stymied and to some extent reversed two of the major trends of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1877–1911): political centralization and economic development through foreign investment and export of raw materials. The civil wars between 1911 and 1917 destroyed the national regime so painstakingly built during the Porfiriato. They also devastated the Mexican economy. The toll in human and physical destruction was enormous. A generation of leaders perished. Farms, factories, mines, and railroads were ruined. It took the better part of the next twenty years to regain the levels of 1910.

The clock was not turned all the way back, however. Chihuahua was not isolated to the extent it had been during the Apache wars of the mid-nineteenth century. What went on in Mexico City was and would be of incontrovertible importance to its politics and economy. Moreover, the state's economy could never separate itself from the workings of the world market.

During the 1920s the national government was relatively weak. The Sonorans, who had wrested control of the revolutionary regime from Venustiano Carranza in 1920, were unsteadily in power. President Alvaro Obregón faced not only the problem of consolidating his control over recalcitrant generals and regional bosses, but the daunting tasks of fostering recovery from economic ruin and of winning diplomatic recognition of his government from the United States. He established his rule and gained U.S. recognition through compromise. Obregón walked a tightrope between the demands of reconstruction and reform. His record of land reform, for example,

directly reflected the armed challenges to his government.² Plutarco Elías Calles, who followed him as president, employed the same overall strategy of not interfering with the generals and bosses and of employing land reform as a political instrument. More secure after the defeat of the rebellion of Adolfo de la Huerta in early 1924, Calles took advantage of opportunities to extend his regime's influence into state politics.³ The assassination of Obregón in 1928, and the brief ascension of Emilio Portes Gil, set back the outreach of national control. The turn of the decade brought a retrogression to political instability, with yet another armed rebellion (José Gonzalo Escobar in 1929) and a quick succession of three presidents. All of this affected Chihuahuan politics. Not surprisingly, not one of the major figures in state politics in the 1920s maintained his influence into the new decade.

The founding of the national revolutionary party, the PNR, by Calles in 1929 accelerated the process of centralization. The 1930s produced the change from personalism to party politics. Nationally it took a great, charismatic leader, Lázaro Cárdenas, to accomplish the transformation. He melded the conflict among elites to the demands of the lower classes for economic justice by harnessing labor unions and peasant leagues to the national party.⁴ The alliance of PNR and popular class organizations was strong enough to rein in most (though not all) of the regional satrapies.

The Elites

The literature on elites is enormous and I present only a cursory summary of it here. It derives primarily from the classical elite theorists Pareto and Mosca, and from Marx. The classical theorists divide society into two classes, the rulers, or elite, and the ruled. For Marx the ruling class consisted of those who controlled the means of production.⁵ Neither approach is particularly satisfactory in the Mexican case, because politics and economics (for much of the period under study) were so closely linked and because class identification was so fluid. For my previous book, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution*, the problem of definition was simpler, for the elite consisted of the Terrazas-Creel extended family and a small number of

allies, who together dominated both politics and economy. In *Persistent Oligarchs* this family again plays an important role in the analysis; for it, for the most part, defines the sector of the elite I label the old, or Porfirian, elite. But the Revolution in Chihuahua permitted considerable upward mobility and expansion of the elite. Over time (though I will argue that it did to a lesser degree than has been thought), the development of the revolutionary party separated political and economic elites. The new elite consisted of the generals, governors, and other political officeholders who ruled Chihuahua and the most important landholders, bankers, merchants, and industrialists.

The emergence of a new elite and the fate of the elite of the ancien régime after the violent stages of revolution are relatively unexplored, especially given the enormous literature on the causes and courses of revolutions. Comparatively little is known about the processes through which new elites construct themselves and old elites survive. This gap is especially evident for Mexico. This is the first study to focus on pre- and postrevolutionary elites in Mexico.

Perhaps no better illustration of the convergence of old elite, new elite, regional politics, and popular pressures exists than the gala wedding of Jesús Antonio Almeida, governor of Chihuahua, and Susanna Nesbitt Becerra, on October 6, 1925, and the subsequent history of the Almeida family. The marriage shows us how a new elite emerged from the Revolution, how the old elite survived it and made a place in the new order, and how the two elites reached accommodation. The subsequent fate of the Almeidas, moreover, demonstrates both the political pressures exerted by the popular classes and the political conflict between regional elites and the national regime. The Almeida brothers—politicians, ranchers, lumbermen, and merchants—represented the middle class that emerged from the years of chaos to reach for economic opportunity and political power. The Becerras had ruled Urique, a mining center in western Chihuahua, for a century and had been pillars of the old regime. Strikingly, the guest list for the wedding included the most prominent families of the old order: Terrazas, Creel, Luján, Falomir, and Prieto.⁶ Thus, less than a decade after the bloodiest battles of the Revolution and only five years after Pancho Villa had laid down his arms, revolutionary generals ate, drank, and danced with the scions

of the dictatorship they had overthrown. But the Revolution was not a sham. While the newlyweds were on their honeymoon, the acting governor, Jorge M. Cárdenas, expropriated 3,168 hectares from the bride's family as part of the state's program of land reform.⁷ Two years later, a coup backed by Calles ousted Governor Almeida. The family nevertheless prospered and formed one of Mexico's leading entrepreneurial groups.

The new postrevolutionary elite had a diverse class base that narrowed increasingly over time and varied considerably according to region. The civil wars that lasted from 1911 until 1917 offered the greatest opportunities for upward mobility. From 1913 to 1916, soldiers of modest and lower-class origins dominated the Revolution. Over time, certainly by the mid-1930s, the more educated middle class, often possessing technical skills, assumed a more important role, pushing aside the rougher soldiers. The revolutionaries in states like Sonora and Coahuila—the two most notable examples—arose from so-called dissident elites or those notables excluded from political power by Porfirio Díaz and his henchmen, while they enjoyed substantial economic favor. (The Maytorena and Madero families were the most prominent examples.) In Chihuahua and Morelos, these dissident elites were either not present or scarce. By the 1930s, however, even the extreme examples had come together in the experience of elite formation.

The victorious Constitutionalists and the Sonorans who succeeded them, many of whom arose from middle- and lower-middle-class ranks and from disaffected sectors of the old elite, set about to acquire the spoils of victory and to establish themselves as the new ruling elite. Ideologically they were more compatible with the old elite than with the agrarians or workers. For the most part, they were capitalists with a firm belief in private property. They had participated in the Revolution in order to obtain their fair share of the spoils of economic development and politics. New and old elite would prove useful allies in preserving and protecting their respective property and privilege.

The cooperation between old and new elites occurred primarily at the regional level, which during this period was synonymous with the state level. (It may have been strongest at the municipal level.) The alliance of old and new elites that emerged during the 1920s in

the regions, by the mid-1930s threatened the hegemony of the national revolutionary regime. The national revolutionary government, most effectively under Lázaro Cárdenas, then used popular support, channeled through agrarian and labor organizations into the official party, to consolidate power. Cárdenas used this support against the alliances of old and new elites at the state level. Thus, from 1934 to 1938, agrarian reform took an enormous toll on the landowning class. New (and some old) regional elites learned their lesson and quickly incorporated themselves into the party. Agrarian reform then ended. In the struggles between center and region the prerevolutionary elite played a crucial role, for without its support the new revolutionary regional groups would not have resisted the central government as long and won as great concessions.

Chihuahua and the Revolution

Chihuahua was extraordinarily important in the history of the Mexican Revolution: the Revolution began in Chihuahua and its first victories, which led to the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz, were won there. Moreover, the prerevolutionary elite of the state was one of the strongest in Mexico. The 1910 revolution in Chihuahua had a broad popular base, the main aim of which was to oust precisely this powerful oligarchy. Pancho Villa, the most important revolutionary leader in Chihuahua, led the most broadly based popular movement in the north and carried out the most radical actions against the old guard. Chihuahua can be a benchmark against which we measure the Revolution.

This book is not meant to be a chronicle of the war years between 1910 and 1920. Nonetheless, it begins with a brief overview of the political and economic history of the state during the years of the violent revolution to lay the groundwork for what followed in the succeeding two decades. Endemic violence and disorder prevented the emergence of a new elite at the state level during this period. The Revolution, moreover, did not destroy the old elite, though it was badly damaged.

The next focus is on the political economy of Chihuahua during the 1920s and 1930s. The 1920s were an era of transition, when the

central government did not exercise effective control over Chihuahua. It could and did “veto” the ascension of groups or leaders, but could not impose its will. The following decade brought the evolution from personalist to party rule in Chihuahua. The national government finally established control over the state, but only at the cost of compromise with entrenched local elites, old and new.

A careful delineation and analysis (some of the latter of which is somewhat speculative) of Chihuahua’s political and economic (though not business) history from 1920 to 1940 is much needed: first, because existing works furnish only erratic description and no discussion of the hows and whys of state politics and economics; and, second, because such a study can provide the critical context for the evolution of the Chihuahuan elite. The discussion of the interplay of the three levels of politics—national, state, and local—is crucial in laying the groundwork to explain how and why a new elite emerged and how it operated; how the old elite survived and flourished; and how the two elites cooperated and conflicted. The fractionalization of state politics and the weakness of the national regime, described in chapters 3 and 4, created the political space for the old elite to emerge as a valuable ally for the new elite and to assure its own survival. The chronology divides by decades because the years 1929 to 1931 demarcated the stages of the struggle for Chihuahuan autonomy.

The Chihuahuan elite is the subject of the next two chapters, which examine the survival of the old elite and the emergence of a new elite at the state level, respectively. Another chapter analyzes the development of political power at the local level. The emphasis is, first, on determining which elite groups survived the revolution and transition, why they survived, and to what effect. The central example is the most powerful prerevolutionary elite family, the Terrazas. The investigation then records the rise of the new political and economic elites, like the Almeidas (1920s), Quevedos (1930s), Bermúdez (1930s), and Vallinas (from the 1920s on), and examines the relation between political and economic power. The last chapter of this section looks at old and new elites at the local level. Ciudad Juárez is the primary example.

The final chapter is an essay on comparative history, encompassing the different regions in Mexico in the revolutionary and post

revolutionary era in order to construct a framework for the study of elites in Mexico. It includes a comparison of the fates of the elite in the Mexican and French revolutions.

The core of the book resides in the three chapters on the elite. In Chihuahua the old elite survived the Revolution and prospered in its aftermath. As a group it lost much of its land, but not all. Members of the Terrazas family, for example, emerged again as important cattle ranchers. The old elite retained crucial influence in industry and finance as well. Although its members never regained direct political power, they exerted strong, indirect influence through intermarriage with the new elite and through economic power. The old elite joined with an important sector of the new elite that had common interests in private property and economic development. It persisted and, in doing so, helped shape the course of Mexican history in the postrevolutionary era.

A final word about what this book is not is in order. As in the case of its preceding volume, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution*, it is a study from the top down. As such, it does not extensively discuss the popular classes and their organizations other than in the context of how they affected elite politics. Nowadays some consider elite studies to be outmoded. But it seems to me that it is important for us to know the oppressors at least as well as the oppressed. Moreover, *Persistent Oligarchs* is less of an economic history than its precursor study: first, because the role of elites was not as clear as it was during the Porfiriato and thus required a fuller exploration; and, second, because sources for economic history were not as readily available as they were for the earlier era.

2 The Age of the Centaur

The politics and economy of Chihuahua during the years 1910 to 1920 reflected the nature of its homegrown revolution and the impact of war. The most important political figures of the era, Abraham González, Francisco Villa, and Ignacio C. Enríquez, represented the major phases of the revolution in the state: the first tried to implement the moderate political reforms advocated by Francisco I. Madero; the second attempted to transform the region in order to meet the needs of the popular classes and the armed struggle; the third sought to restore peace and implement the moderate politics of the victorious Constitutionalists. Hidden beneath the combat of the civil wars lay three other important struggles: the Porfirian oligarchy battled to survive; municipalities strove to maintain their independence; and a new, revolutionary elite sought to form and establish itself. Subsumed in the war, too, was the century-long conflict between the national regime(s) and the state(s) for political hegemony. Each successive regime grappled with the contradictory demands of warfare, economic reconstruction, political conciliation, and reform.

The enormous destruction and disruptions of a decade of war severely dislocated Chihuahuan politics and economy. At the state level, no governor lasted longer than nineteen months. The state legislature did not meet from 1913 until 1920. There were no municipal elections from 1912 until 1916. Two Maderistas, Abraham González and Aureliano González, and two Huertistas, Antonio Rábago and Salvador R. Mercado, faced constant rebellion. The Villista regime, which included governors Pancho Villa, Manuel Chao, Fidel Avila, and Silvestre Terrazas, brought a measure of stability between December 1913 and May 1916, but on a constant wartime footing. Seven Constitucionalista governors, most notably

Ignacio C. Enríquez, Arnulfo González, and Andrés Ortiz, furnished continuity of policy but confronted the insistent menace of Pancho Villa.

Politics in Revolution

The month after Maderista rebels, under the command of Pascual Orozco, Jr., took Ciudad Juárez in May 1911, the Chihuahuan legislature named Abraham González the first revolutionary governor. A member of a prominent family from the western part of the state that had lost out to the Terrazas in a contest for power during the 1890s, the new chief executive had joined the antireelectionist opposition to Porfirio Díaz in 1908. He subsequently supported Madero and acted as his agent in procuring military supplies. Like Madero, González advocated moderate reform aimed at opening up politics and creating an environment of equal economic opportunity.¹ He confronted hostile opposition not only from each side of the political spectrum, but from among the ranks of the rebels themselves. On the right an entrenched, powerful Terracista old guard resisted. Until the fall 1911 elections, it controlled the state legislature. On the left, the Partido Liberal Mexicano, dissatisfied with the speed and scope of reforms, staged a number of unsuccessful uprisings. Most important, González encountered a disgruntled group of Chihuahuan revolutionaries led by Pascual Orozco, Jr. In 1912, financed by the Porfirian oligarchy, Orozco rebelled against the Madero-González regime.²

In keeping with his stated goals, González as governor took steps to open the political system and equalize economic opportunities. He replaced the old bureaucracy in state government and raised salaries for state offices to make them available to men of modest means.³ He realigned the state's tax system in order to shift its burden to the upper classes (big merchants and large landowners). The governor also abolished the hated office of the *jefe político* and reorganized municipal government.⁴

Shortly after winning election to a full term, González left Chihuahua to take the post of *secretario de gobernación* in Madero's cabinet. It proved to be a fatal mistake. He had to return in February