


**Economic Stabilization, Electoral 
Democratization, and the (Virtual)
Disappearance of Labor Strikes in Mexico¹
La estabilización económica, la
democratización electoral y la (virtual)
desaparición de las huelgas laborales en México
Maintenant tu ne les vois plus: économique
stabilisation, démocratisation électorale et la
(quasi) disparition des grèves au Mexique**

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Abstract

Although an analysis of labor strikes can illuminate well the intersection between economic and political change, this mode of worker participation has rarely been the subject of systematic examination in the Latin American context. This article evaluates alternative explanations for variations in the frequency of strikes in Mexico between 1941 and 2012, focusing particularly on whether the virtual disappearance of strikes in federal-jurisdiction economic activities since the mid-1990s can be attributed to economic

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stabilization, electoral democratization, or other factors. Multivariate regression results and qualitative research findings together show that effective control over inflation and accompanying shifts in labor bargaining strategies best explain the notable decline in strikes. By highlighting the broad range of factors shaping labor mobilization, the article contributes to the comparative study of labor strikes and illustrates the value of strike analysis as a research strategy.

Key words: strikes, strikes in Mexico, economic stabilization, electoral democratization

Resumen

Aunque un análisis de las huelgas puede iluminar bien la interacción entre los procesos de cambio económico y político, esta forma de acción obrera pocas veces ha sido un enfoque de estudio sistemático en el contexto latinoamericano. Este artículo examina posibles explicaciones alternativas para la variación en el número de huelgas estalladas en México entre 1941 y 2012, con un enfoque especial sobre las posibles razones (estabilización económica, democratización electoral u otros factores) por la caída notable en la frecuencia de las huelgas en actividades económicas de jurisdicción federal que se observa a partir de mediados de los años 1990. Los resultados combinados de un análisis multivariado y de una investigación cualitativa muestran que fue el control de la inflación y, como consecuencia, los cambios que se dieron en las estrategias de negociación laboral los que ofrecen la mejor explicación por la notable caída en el número de huelgas. Con base en la evaluación de los múltiples factores que influyen en la movilización laboral, este artículo contribuye al análisis comparativo de las huelgas y muestra el valor del análisis de las huelgas como estrategia de investigación.

Palabras clave: huelgas, huelgas en México, estabilización económica, democratización electoral

Résumé

Alors que l'analyse des mouvements de grève permet de mettre en lumière les relations entre changement économique et politique, ce mode d'action des travailleurs a rarement fait l'objet d'une étude systématique dans le

contexte latino-américain. Cet article évalue différentes explications quant aux variations dans la fréquence des grèves au Mexique entre 1941 et 2012. Une attention toute particulière sera portée à la quasi-disparition des grèves, dans les activités économiques fédérales, depuis le milieu des années 1990 afin de voir si celle-ci peut être attribuée à une stabilisation économique, une démocratisation électorale, ou à d'autres facteurs. Les résultats de la régression multivariée, couplés aux résultats de la recherche qualitative, indiquent que le contrôle efficace de l'inflation, et les changements dans les stratégies de négociation dans le monde du travail qui l'accompagnèrent, sont les plus à même d'expliquer le déclin notable des grèves. En mettant en évidence le large éventail de facteurs influençant la mobilisation des travailleurs, cet article contribue à l'étude comparative des grèves du travail et illustre l'importance de l'analyse des grèves comme stratégie de recherche.

Mots-clés: mouvements de grève, mouvements de grève au Mexique, stabilisation économique, démocratisation électorale

Introduction

The strike is a key instrument that labor organizations can employ to defend workers' immediate interests and, in some instances, to promote broader political and economic change.² Winning the legal right to strike was a signal aspect of organized labor's emergence as a sociopolitical force from the late nineteenth century onwards; its suppression or restoration has consistently been a core issue in the labor policies adopted by, respectively, authoritarian and democratic regimes. In Latin America, for example, the military dictatorships that seized power in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay between 1964 and 1976 systematically repressed worker mobilization; regaining the right to strike was a central element in the restoration of democracy in these countries (Drake, 1996: 29-56). Waves of strikes occurred throughout Latin America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as workers organized themselves and fought for basic rights, but in subsequent decades there were great variations across the region in terms of their recourse to this form of collective action. For

² On the role of labor movements in democratic transitions, see Drake, 1996: 50-52, 104, 107-8, 135, 170-71, 185-86; Bermeo, 1997: 310-12; Collier and Mahoney, 1997; Levitsky and Mainwaring, 2006.

instance, between 1983 and 1986 there were forty-seven general strikes in Brazil in response to deteriorating economic conditions (Ibid.: table 3.8), yet there has been no general strike in Mexico since 1916.

Despite the importance of strikes, this mode of worker participation has rarely been the subject of systematic analysis in the Latin American context. There have, of course, been many studies of particular periods of labor militancy and especially important strike actions. Yet in notable contrast to recent scholarship on labor politics in Western European nations and some other countries (Robertson, 2007; Alemán, 2008; Lindvall, 2013; Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly, 2013a, 2013b), an extensive bibliographic search identified only two national-level, cross-sectional logistic regression analyses of strikes in Latin America since the mid-1990s (Middlebrook, 1995: 166-71; Picchetti, 2002). This lacuna may be partly due to problems of data availability or reliability. It might also reflect a shift over time in the main focus of Latin American labor studies, away from such “traditional” topics as the causes of worker militancy and toward such subjects as gender issues in the workplace, the operation of informal employment markets, and the impact of economic globalization on labor standards.

A focus on strikes does, however, illuminate well the intersection between political and economic change in Latin America (Kurtz, 2004: 289; Etchemendy and Collier, 2007). Since the 1980s, a number of countries have experienced dual transitions—away from different forms of authoritarian rule toward electoral democracy, and away from state-centered development models toward market-led economic strategies. These shifts have often had somewhat contradictory consequences for labor movements. Democratization has usually favored worker organizations by reducing government repression, opening new opportunities to forge broad political and social alliances, sometimes permitting the progressive reform of labor legislation, and allowing unions to exercise the right to strike. Yet economic changes such as the closure of heavily unionized state-owned enterprises, industrial restructuring in private companies, substantial growth in the informal sector, and the proliferation of subcontracting arrangements have reduced the relative size of the unionized labor force and often undercut the bargaining leverage of worker organizations.

The Mexican case embodies several of these contradictory developments. Economic transformations since the 1980s have halved the unionized share of the economically active population (EAP) and weakened many labor organizations. Government policymakers’ successful control of consumer

price inflation since 2000 may have reduced unions' incentive to strike, but inflation-adjusted minimum wages remain far below their peak in the late 1970s. On the political front, government repression of worker protests generally declined as regime liberalization advanced from the early 1990s onward. However, the partisan change denoting regime transition involved the electoral defeat of the labor-allied Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) and the rise to national power of the center-right National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN). Despite persistent business lobbying, the PAN's control over the presidency (2000-12) did not produce any significant change in strike legislation.³ Nevertheless, the PAN's victory over the PRI in 2000 did raise the prospect that major labor organizations might actively mobilize against it.

One of the ways in which Mexico departs from the regional pattern is the sharp decline in the number of labor strikes since the mid-1990s, a development that contrasts markedly with the experiences of other major Latin American countries.⁴ This article seeks to explain why labor strikes virtually disappeared in Mexico over this period. The analysis covers the seven-decade span between 1941 and 2012 in order to identify long-term trends and thereby establish an appropriate contextual basis on which to determine whether government success in controlling inflation, electoral democratization (including a change in partisan control over the presidency), or other factors had a significant impact on the frequency of strikes. The conclusions are based on both multivariate regression analyses of strike notices and strikes and a qualitative assessment of such factors as changes in labor movement leadership, organizational unity, and bargaining strategy.

³ The labor law reform adopted in November 2012 did not alter provisions regarding strikes (Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: 121).

⁴ Data on labor strikes in Latin America over the 1996-2013 period are available from the International Labor Organization (www.ilo.org/ilostat, "Strikes and Lockouts by Economic Activity," consulted on September 2 and December 17, 2014), but they are quite incomplete for countries such as Argentina (where strikes generally increased over the 2006-13 period) and Colombia (where there was minimal strike activity between 2002 and 2008). The number of strikes was comparatively high in Brazil between 1996 (1,258) and 2000 (525), then declined, and slowly rose again after 2008 (reaching 873 strikes in 2012). There was no consistent pattern in Chile, where the number of strikes over the 1996-2013 period peaked in 2013 (201). Nor was there a consistent pattern in Peru, where strike numbers were generally low (although the incidence of strikes over the 2004-13 period was somewhat higher than in previous years).

Labor Strikes in Mexico: Principle versus Practice

Winning the right to strike in the 1917 Constitution (Article 123) was the emergent Mexican labor movement's single most potent achievement. The liberal Constitution of 1857 had recognized workers' right to withhold their labor as part of the free exercise of property rights. Nonetheless, the personalist authoritarian regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-80, 1884-1911) suppressed most industrial conflict and repressed major strikes by mine, railroad, and textile workers in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of revolution in 1910. Even after the overthrow of the Díaz regime, strikers often faced harsh penalties. For example, although the sentence was not carried out, the leaders of a general strike initiated by electrical-power workers in Mexico City in July-August 1916 were sentenced to death under the terms of an executive decree prohibiting strikes in public services (Suarez-Potts, 2012: 13, 31-35, 40, 67-69, 124-25). The constitutional right to strike represented, then, a landmark departure.

In practice, however, in the years after the 1910-20 revolution both political leaders and private employers sought to limit strikes. The postrevolutionary political elite relied heavily on its alliance with the Mexican Regional Labor Confederation (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*, CROM) to control labor mobilization. The CROM, founded in 1918, quickly came to dominate the organized labor movement and control key administrative institutions—including most tripartite conciliation and arbitration boards (comprised of employer, government, and worker representatives) and, between 1924 and 1928, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor itself. In exchange for limiting strikes in the economic activities over which it held sway and ensuring stability in worker-employer relations (a policy that CROM leaders described as “an amnesty in the class struggle”), the government backed the CROM's efforts to expand its membership and defeat its rivals in the labor movement (Bensusán, 2000: 107, 115-23, 128, 132, 135, 139, 195). The CROM lost its dominant position in the political crisis surrounding the assassination of former president Álvaro Obregón in 1928. Yet from the late 1940s onward the Confederation of Mexican Workers (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, founded in 1936) played a parallel role as the principal government labor ally regulating worker mobilization.⁵

⁵ Since 1938 the CTM has been the PRI's formal sector organization representing labor.

The goal of mediating strikes was also a major stimulus for the early development of state regulatory capacity over labor affairs. Moderating worker-employer conflicts was a key rationale for the development of state-level conciliation and arbitration boards (*juntas de conciliación y arbitraje*) both during and after the Mexican Revolution, and even though President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) lacked clear constitutional authority to do so, in 1927 he established the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board (Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje, JFCA) by decree in order to end a highly disruptive strike by railroad workers. A 1929 constitutional amendment subsequently established federal-government jurisdiction over labor affairs in strategically important industries and in economic activities with a particularly large labor force distributed across several states, a development that eased passage of a long-delayed Federal Labor Law (Ley Federal del Trabajo) in 1931 and led to the creation of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, STPS) in 1940 (Middlebrook, 1995: 49-52, 56-59).⁶

This same duality—a recognition of the right to strike, accompanied by legal and administrative restrictions on the exercise of this right—characterizes the provisions of federal law. Clause 18 of Article 123 defined the purposes for which workers could strike (“to achieve equilibrium among the diverse factors of production, harmonizing the rights of labor with those of capital”), and since 1931 federal labor law has further limited strikes to the suspension of work to achieve specific objectives (signing, revising, or enforcing a collective contract or an industry-wide labor agreement, and renegotiating contractually specified wages).⁷ The union holding title

⁶ The number of economic activities falling under the federal government’s legal jurisdiction grew steadily between 1929 and 1990 (Middlebrook, 1995: table 2.1). It came to include (in chronological order) railroads, federal-concession transportation activities, mining, hydrocarbons, marine and maritime-zone activities, the textile industry, electrical power generation, the cinematographic industry, the rubber industry, the sugar industry, companies operating under federal concession or contract or controlled directly by the federal government, petrochemicals, steel and metalworking, the cement industry, automobile manufacturing, the pharmaceutical industry, the pulp and paper industry, the food processing and bottling industries, the glass industry, tobacco processing, lime production, wood processing, and banking. All other economic activities fall under the jurisdiction of individual states’ labor authorities, although they are bound by the terms of the Federal Labor Law.

⁷ An officially recognized union (but not an informal coalition of workers) can also suspend work in support of another legally sanctioned (*existente*) strike.

to an existing contract or industry-wide agreement must present both the employer(s) and the appropriate federal- or local-jurisdiction (state-level) conciliation and arbitration board with a formal notice specifying the goals and time of the proposed strike action six days (ten days in the case of public-service employees) before suspending work. This notice or filing (*emplazamiento*) must satisfy a number of substantive and procedural requirements. Parties to the conflict must also accept conciliation efforts by the board with which the notice was filed. At any time within seventy-two hours after the suspension of work, the employer or an interested third party may request that the conciliation and arbitration board declare the strike non-existent (*inexistente*), in which case the union may be required to demonstrate that the action has the support of the majority of workers employed in a given enterprise or workplace. If the board does declare the strike non-existent, then employees must return to work within twenty-four hours or the employer can legally dismiss them and hire replacement workers. Requirements such as these provide state labor officials with administrative opportunities to delay or block strikes, if they choose to do so and are prepared to invest the political capital that such an action might require.⁸

Nevertheless, the existence of legal authority and effective state capacity to regulate strikes does not necessarily preclude them from occurring. There has in fact been substantial variation over time in the number of strikes, in part because different presidential administrations have sometimes depended heavily on the support of labor allies during periods of economic or political crisis and at such times have hesitated to declare strike actions against private employers illegal or non-existent.⁹ It is significant in this regard that, because of the highly presidentialist character of Mexico's postrevolutionary regime, most previous scholarship has stressed the importance of presidential policy in determining the frequency of strikes. Indeed, the pioneering work by

The requirements summarized in this paragraph were specified in articles 440-51, 459, 469, 920-38 of the 1970 federal labor law, which was in effect during the majority of years covered in the analysis below (*Nueva Ley Federal del Trabajo*, [1970] 1995). However, these provisions did not differ in substance from those in the 1931 labor law.

⁸ The absence of compulsory-arbitration provisions in Mexican labor law means that legally sanctioned strikes can last for a considerable time and have a highly negative impact on employers.

⁹ Author's interview with a former senior JFCA and STPS official, Mexico City, June 26, 2015.

Pablo González Casanova concluded that “Presidential policy—in its broad tendencies—determines whether there is a larger or smaller number of strikes and strikers” (González Casanova, 1965: 27-28). Yet studies by González Casanova and later researchers sometimes included unreliable data, and they generally did not differentiate between federal- and local-jurisdiction strikes. With the exception of the author’s earlier examination of strikes between 1938 and 1993 (Middlebrook, 1995: 162-72), no previous study has included a multivariate regression analysis of the impact of presidential labor policy and selected economic variables on strike activity.¹⁰

An Analysis of Strike Activity in Mexico, 1941-2012

Because government-reported data on the frequency of strike notices and strikes are the most reliable measures of labor mobilization, the aggregate number of notices and strikes has long been the principal focus of both political debate and academic analysis in Mexico. This analysis centers on these same measures.¹¹ Information regarding federal- and local-jurisdiction strikes is generally available over the entire period between 1938 and 2012. However, the availability of data concerning strike notifications is more limited; for federal-jurisdiction industries, it is missing for the 1946-62 period and for 1966, and for local-jurisdiction economic activities it is only

¹⁰ Both González Casanova (table 3) and Wilkie (1973: table 8.2) included in their analyses strike data beginning in 1920. However, before 1938 government statistics omitted some strikes for political reasons (Carr, 1976: vol. 2, 41; Bensusán, 2000: 147 n93), and they did not always differentiate between strike notices and actual strikes (Middlebrook, 1995: 163). Although Zapata Schaffeld (2007: 122-24) reported only six-year averages of strikes and strikers between 1934 and 2003 and did not distinguish between strike activity in federal- and local-jurisdiction economic activities, he did seek to correlate variations in strike activity with changes in inflation, real minimum-wage trends, and shifts in the size of the socially insured and economically active populations. Kurtz (2004: fig. 1[a]) graphed the number of strikes against shifts in an economic liberalization index over the 1971-1994 period. The discussion below notes where the specific findings presented here differ from those of previous studies.

¹¹ Government sources do not report wildcat strikes (*paros*).

available for the 1980-2011 period.¹² Information concerning other measures of strike activity is even more limited.¹³

For practical reasons, this analysis focuses exclusively on federal-jurisdiction strike notices and strikes. Federal authorities have a far more consistent record of reliably recording these data than do state-level labor offices. Moreover, even though local-jurisdiction authorities are bound by federal labor law, there is variation in state governments' labor policies and little experience (except in specific, high-level labor conflicts) of federal authorities seeking to coordinate them.¹⁴ These factors make it difficult to formulate meaningful hypotheses concerning possible political explanations

¹² Since 1983 the STPS has published detailed information concerning the stated reasons for both federal-jurisdiction strike notices and strikes, including demands to sign or revise a collective contract or an industry-wide contract law, correct alleged violations of contract terms, or achieve "equilibrium" between capital and labor (the legal phrase employed to describe economic demands), as well as which major labor organizations filed them.

¹³ For federal-jurisdiction industries, data concerning the number of workers on strike and estimated financial losses attributable to strikes are available for the 1938-62 period; data regarding the number of workers on strike and workdays lost to strikes are available for the 1989-2012 period. For the earlier period, see Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, *Memoria de labores*, various years; for the later period, see www.stps.gob.mx ("Emplazamientos y huelgas," table V.1). For local-jurisdiction economic activities, data concerning the number of workers on strike and estimated financial losses attributable to strikes are only available for the 1938-58 period; see Secretaría de Industria y Comercio, *Anuario estadístico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, various years.

In his seminal analysis of labor strikes in Western Europe, Hibbs (1978: 156) advocated employing strike "volume" (the product of the size, duration, and frequency of strikes) as the dependent variable. However, the dependent variable chosen for this analysis is the number of strikes because data equivalent to those employed by Hibbs are only available for the 1989-2012 period. Even for this relatively short period, the available data regarding workdays lost to strikes each year may be unreliable because they are based on voluntary reporting by unions and employers—which have incentives to, respectively, overstate or underreport the number of workers on strike. Moreover, restricting the analysis to the 1989-2012 period would greatly limit variability in an important independent variable (presidential labor policy) and, because of the much shorter time span, reduce the statistical significance of the results. Similar data problems may explain why statistical analyses of strikes elsewhere in Latin America (and in developing countries more generally) have also focused on strike frequency, rather than strike volume. See, for example, Picchetti, 2002:181-82 and Segalla, 1995. Huber Stephens (1983: 75) compiled Peruvian strike data along lines advocated by Hibbs for the 1965-75 period, but she did not perform a regression analysis.

¹⁴ Author's interview with a former senior JFCA and STPS official, Mexico City, June 26, 2015.

for variations in the incidence of strike notices or strikes across Mexico's thirty-one states and the Federal District during the 1941-2012 period.

Because presidential labor policy is such an important potential influence on the incidence of strikes, the regression analysis presented in this section examines trends over twelve full six-year presidential terms (the 1941-2012 period). The administrations holding office during these years varied in terms of their overall labor policies, which can be characterized as conservative, moderate, or liberal based on their social welfare programs for workers, their openness toward politically independent labor organizations, and the political representation of labor in the federal Chamber of Deputies.¹⁵ Only President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-76) pursued what may be broadly characterized as liberal policies toward labor. The administrations of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-46), Miguel Alemán (1946-52), Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-70), Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88), Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94), Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000), and Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-12) basically took a conservative line on labor policy. Four administrations adopted more moderate labor policies: Adolfo

¹⁵ During the period in which the successors to the "official" Revolutionary National Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionario, founded in 1929)—the Party of the Mexican Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, PRM, 1938) and the PRI (1946)—exercised strong electoral dominance, the proportion of labor representatives in the PRM/PRI's delegation in the lower chamber of Congress constituted one measure of organized labor's political standing. Decisions regarding the composition of the PRM/PRI delegation were a presidential prerogative (Middlebrook, 1995: 101-2; Zapata Schaffeld, 2007: 114).

The three policy areas selected as a basis on which to characterize different administrations' overall labor policies were all coded 0-2: social welfare policies (no change in existing social-welfare legislation or privatization of public-welfare programs; slight expansion; substantial expansion); government openness toward politically independent labor organizations (hostile, neutral, tolerant or supportive); and the labor delegation's share of total seats in the federal Chamber of Deputies (decrease, stable, increase). Cumulative scores of 0-2, 3, and 4-6 were categorized, respectively, as conservative, moderate, and liberal. Because labor's congressional representation ceased to be a relevant criterion following the PRI's loss of the presidency in 2000, it was dropped for the 2000-12 period and the three classifications were assigned, respectively, to cumulative scores of 0-1, 2, and 3-4. The sources consulted were: for social welfare policies, Dion, 2010: 68-72, 93-94, 98-99, 102, 107-8, 119, 121-22, 133-37, 182-83, 188, 205, 207-9, and *fig. 6.1*; for policies toward independent labor organizations, Middlebrook, 1995: 160-61; Samstad, 2002: 13-16, Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: 93-95; for labor's congressional representation, Middlebrook, 1995: table 3.1 (data for 1976-79 are missing) and Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: table 5.

Ruiz Cortines (1952-58), Adolfo López Mateos (1958-64), José López Portillo (1976-82), and Vicente Fox Quesada (2000-06).

Long-term Economic and Political Determinants of Strike Activity

What economic and/or political factors have determined the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strike notices and strikes in Mexico over the long term?

The number of strike notices that labor organizations filed annually varied greatly over the 1941-2012 period, ranging from a low of 117 in 1941 to a high of 16,141 in 1987 (see the Statistical Appendix, which presents the original data set compiled for this article). However, the volume of filings did not vary proportionally with shifts in the size of either the unionized labor force or the EAP as a whole; indeed, the total number was substantially higher in 1982 than it was in 1992, 2002, or 2012. The total number of unionized workers stagnated over the 1992-2002 period, but a significant decrease in the number of strike notices preceded this change.¹⁶ The EAP continued to expand over the entire 1941-2012 period.¹⁷ Considerable variation over time in the annual incidence of notices, as well as the fact that the number of filings peaked during years of impending economic crisis (1982 and 1987),¹⁸ suggest that other economic and/or political considerations shaped labor organizations' decisions to file strike notices.

The results of a Prais-Winsten iterative least-squares regression show that change in the rate of inflation was the strongest determinant of variation in the annual number of strike notices in federal-jurisdiction

¹⁶ The size of the unionized labor force may have fluctuated during the 1980s as a consequence of job losses in the heavily unionized public sector and in private firms. However, the available data indicate that the number of unionized workers grew from 3,429,813 in 1978 to 4,116,920 in 1992. See, respectively, Zazueta and de la Peña, 1984: table 2.4, and Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: table 2.

¹⁷ INEGI, 2010: tables 5.3, 5.4, 5.5.

¹⁸ The CTM co-ordinated mass strike filings as the rate of inflation spiked in 1954, 1983, and 1984 (Middlebrook, 1995: 218, 260, 262).

economic activities between 1941 and 2012 (Table 1).¹⁹ The model tested the significance of the economic variables most likely to influence labor organizations' decisions to file notices of their intention to strike (the annual rate of consumer price inflation, the inflation-adjusted value of the legal minimum wage, and the inflation-adjusted growth rate of gross domestic product) and a key political variable, presidential labor policy (whether a particular administration's overall policy toward labor was conservative, liberal, or moderate).²⁰ Of these possible determinants of variations in the incidence of strike notices, only inflation had a statistically significant (at the $p < 0.001$ level) effect. The estimated coefficient of this variable indicates that an increase of one percentage point in the rate of inflation was associated with a 0.46 percent increase in the number of federal-jurisdiction strike notices.

¹⁹ The statistical analyses discussed in this article all employed the Prais-Winsten iterative least-squares technique to correct for autocorrelation of the time-series data. All strike data are grouped by full calendar years because a new presidential administration officially begins late in a given year (December 1) and information concerning the month in which notices were filed and strikes occurred is not readily available for the years before 1989. Thus, the data attributed to the Echeverría administration, for example, are those pertaining to 1971 through 1976.

²⁰ The sources for the economic data employed here are detailed in the Statistical Appendix. The analysis includes a real minimum wage index because no other wage data are consistently available over the entire 1941-2012 period. For evidence concerning the generally positive relationship between official minimum wages and overall wage trends in Mexico, see Fairris, Popli, and Zepeda, 2008.

The selection of the economic and political independent variables employed in these regressions parallels other scholars' statistical analyses of labor strikes, but it does not include the unemployment rate in Mexico. There are serious problems with the overall reliability of these data before the early 1970s. Moreover, the absence of unemployment insurance in a country with a high incidence of poverty means that, rather than face open unemployment, workers are generally prepared to accept lower quality jobs, seek employment in the informal sector, or even work without remuneration, making the rate of open unemployment a poor indicator of macroeconomic conditions. The government's broad definition of employment (those individuals who worked—even without remuneration—at least one hour during the week they were surveyed) also contributes to reported unemployment rates that are often arbitrarily low. See Gregory, 1986: 66-69, 97, and Lustig, 1998: 71, 75, 78.

Data limitations also precluded including in this analysis a variable representing shifts over time in the size of the unionized labor force. Similarly, data regarding the number of registered federal-jurisdiction unions are not consistently available prior to 2008. However, annual variations in the number of registered unions between 2008 (1,296) and 2012 (1,556) did not correspond to shifts in the volume of strike notices. STPS internal document, July 2015.

Table 1: Analysis of Covariance in the Incidence of Federal-Jurisdiction Strike Notices, 1941-2012

Variable	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	T-value
Inflation rate (logged)	0.46	0.14	3.35 ^a
Presidential labor policy Conservative	-0.30	0.32	-0.93
Liberal	-0.23	0.50	-0.46
Minimum wage	-0.01	0.01	-0.17
Gross domestic product	-0.02	0.02	-1.03
Constant	7.41	0.85	8.68 ^a
$R^2 = 0.42$			
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$			
$N = 54$			
Degrees of freedom = 48			

Durbin-Watson statistic = 1.86

Note: The analysis employed the Prais-Winsten iterative least-squares technique to correct for serial autocorrelation among independent variables. ^aSignificant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

The variance in strike notices explained by the model depicted in Table 1 is modest but respectable (an adjusted R -squared of 0.36) given the relatively small number of observations available ($N = 54$).²¹ This may reflect the fact that a union's decision to file a strike notice is sometimes motivated by factors unrelated to economic conditions (for instance, a demand that an employer sign a collective contract or correct alleged contract violations). One notable such instance occurred in 1973-74 when the PRI-allied Confederation of Mexican Workers urged its affiliates to file notices en masse to protest the Echeverría administration's support for politically independent unions and its (temporary) hostility toward the CTM (Middlebrook, 1995: 171).²² Nevertheless, the

²¹ The absence of data on federal-jurisdiction strike notices between 1946 and 1962 reduced the size of N .

²² Dion (2010: 158, 161-64) argues that labor organizations also employed strike notices as part of their mobilization strategy to win government concessions on social insurance

regression results strongly suggest that, over the entire 1941-2012 period, labor organizations in federal-jurisdiction industries filed larger numbers of strike notices when rising inflation threatened workers' economic welfare. A provision in the Federal Labor Law (article 924) that protects workers by freezing an employer's assets as soon as a strike notice is filed (thus preventing the company from liquidating financial reserves that it may owe its employees for back wages or other considerations) constitutes an important institutional incentive for unions to do so during periods of economic crisis.²³

Because filing a strike notice is a relatively simple procedure, one would not expect government labor officials to have much control over union actions in this area. The regression results reported in Table 1 show that, indeed, variations in presidential labor policy had no statistically significant impact on the incidence of strike notices in federal-jurisdiction economic activities over the 1941-2012 period. The strong relationship between the rate of inflation and the incidence of notices indicates that unions have historically exercised considerable autonomy in their decisions to file strike notices as part of their demand-making.

There is, however, evidence of government control over actual labor strikes. Table 2 presents the results of Prais-Winsten regressions (employing the same economic and political independent variables as in the regression analyses of strike notices) analyzing variations in the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strikes over the 1941-2012 period. Differences in presidential labor policy had no statistically significant impact on variations in the frequency of strikes during these years.²⁴ However, this does *not* necessarily mean that presidential labor policy was irrelevant in this regard. To the contrary, this finding indicates consistency across different presidential administrations in state officials' efforts to control labor mobilization in these strategically important economic activities, whether by direct (through intensive conciliation

coverage. However, no other analyst of Mexican labor politics makes this claim.

²³ Author's interview with a senior JFCA official, Mexico City, June 23, 2015.

²⁴ A Prais-Winsten regression analysis also found that differences in presidential labor policy had no statistically significant impact on variations in the proportion of all federal-jurisdiction strike notices that eventuated in strikes over the 1941-2012 period.

A separate regression analysis of the incidence of total strikes (that is, federal- and local-jurisdiction strikes combined) also found that presidential labor policy had no statistically significant impact. Of the three independent economic variables (the annual rate of consumer price inflation, the inflation-adjusted value of the legal minimum wage, and the inflation-adjusted growth rate of gross domestic product) tested, only inflation had a significant impact.

of worker-employer disputes or the manipulation of administrative restrictions on the right to strike) or indirect (through the restraint of labor organizations aligned politically with the government) means.²⁵ The signs of the presidential-policy variables reported in Table 2 do suggest that liberal and conservative administrations may have differed somewhat from each other, but during the period under examination neither liberal nor conservative presidencies had an impact on strikes that differed significantly in statistical terms from that of moderate administrations (represented by the constant).

Table 2: Analysis of Covariance in the Incidence of Federal-Jurisdiction Strikes, 1941-2012

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Inflation rate (logged)	--	0.44 (0.12) ^a	0.29 (0.14) ^b
Strike notices (logged)	0.40 (0.13) ^a	--	0.22 (0.13)
Presidential labor policy			
Conservative	-0.50 (0.31)	-0.55 (0.30)	-0.55 (0.31)
Liberal	0.26 (0.58)	0.24 (0.51)	0.18 (0.55)
Minimum wage	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Gross domestic product	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Constant	1.59 (1.32)	3.72 (0.74) ^a	2.31 (1.29)
R^2	0.39	0.35	0.39
Adjusted R^2	0.32	0.28	0.31
N	53	53	53
Degrees of freedom	47	47	46
Durbin-Watson statistic	1.77	1.81	1.83

Note: The analysis employed the Prais-Winsten iterative least-squares technique to correct for serial autocorrelation among independent variables. The table presents estimated coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

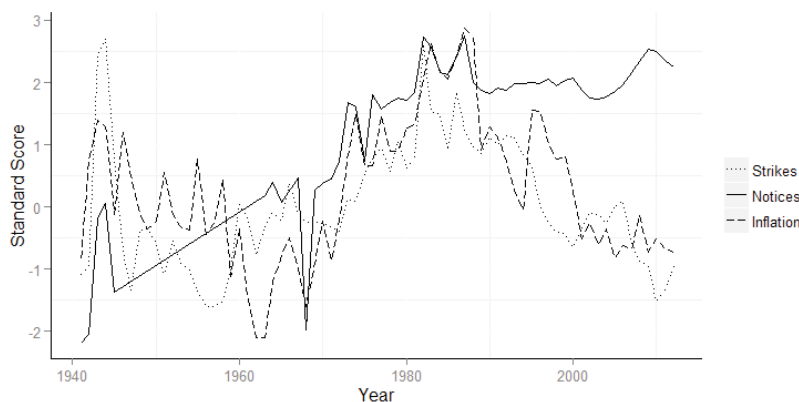
^aSignificant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

^bSignificant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

²⁵ This finding supports the conclusions reached by Middlebrook (1995:171) and, implicitly, Zapata Schaffeld (2007: 122, 127).

There was a reasonably close relationship between changes in the number of federal-jurisdiction strike notices and the incidence of strikes over most of the 1941-2012 period (Figure 1), yet what underpinned this link was the strong relationship between variations in the rate of inflation and the incidence of strikes—a relationship not identified in any previous analysis of labor strikes in Mexico.²⁶

Figure 1: Federal-jurisdiction Strike Notices, Strikes, and Inflation Rate (standardized), 1941-2012



Source: Statistical Appendix.

Table 2 compares the results of three Prais-Winsten regression models analyzing federal strike activity during these years. All three models include as independent variables presidential labor policy, the inflation-adjusted value of the legal minimum wage, and the inflation-adjusted growth rate of gross domestic product. However, Model 1 includes a variable for the number of strike notices filed in a given year (logged), Model 2 drops notices and includes the rate of inflation (logged), and Model 3 includes both strike-notice and inflation independent variables. Models 1 and 2 confirm

²⁶ This finding differs from the conclusions reached by Basurto, 1962: 56, 58, 60, 101, 103; González Casanova, 1965: 27 n6; Wilkie, 1973:187; Middlebrook, 1995: 166, 169; Zapata Schaffeld, 2007: 123-24; and Bensúsán and Middlebrook, 2013: 33, none of whom identified any consistent relationship between economic variables and strike frequency.

the preceding discussion by demonstrating that both the volume of strike notices and the rate of inflation are positively associated with the frequency of strikes. Yet when both of these predictors are included in Model 3, the significance of strike notices is sharply reduced. Strong collinearity between inflation and strike notices ($r = 0.40$) reduces the significance of strike notices, but despite the effects of multicollinearity on the significance of the predictors, Model 3 represents unbiased point estimates for both variables. In this model, it is inflation, not strike notices, that exerts the significant and substantively larger effect on the incidence of strikes. Substantively, one can say that a one-standard-deviation increase in the rate of inflation results in an increase of around one-third of a standard deviation in the incidence of strikes, all else equal. In contrast, a one-standard-deviation increase in logged strike notices results in an increase of about one-quarter of a standard deviation in the incidence of strikes, all else equal—and the effect is statistically nonsignificant in the model. Directly comparing the magnitude of these effects indicates, then, that the inflation rate has a stronger overall effect than strike notices on the incidence of strikes.

These results shed further light on (and partially qualify the established scholarly consensus regarding) the question of political control over labor mobilization in Mexico. As noted above, there is evidence that successive presidential administrations—regardless of the overall character of their labor policies—sought to limit strikes in strategically important federal-jurisdiction economic activities. The decline in the number of strikes in 1987-88, even as Mexico recorded the highest rates of inflation since the 1910-20 revolution, illustrates this point particularly well (Statistical Appendix). However, the fact that inflation remained a statistically significant determinant of variations in strike frequency across the entire 1941-2012 period qualifies this conclusion in one way: despite their efforts to limit strikes, different administrations were either compelled to make concessions to labor organizations or were unable to prevent some strikes from taking place when inflationary pressures intensified.

Assessing the Impact of Electoral Democratization and Economic Stabilization on Labor Mobilization

The preceding discussion has focused on the 1941-2012 period as a whole. However, as the introduction indicated, the Mexican case is notable within

a comparative Latin American context because of the sharp fall in—and the continued low number of—strikes since the mid-1990s. What political and/or economic factors might have accounted for this development?

There is no evidence that either electoral democratization per se or partisan change in control over the presidency had any substantial impact on the incidence of strikes in federal-jurisdiction industries. Mexico's lengthy process of political liberalization accelerated after the late 1980s, and in 1996 the Zedillo administration adopted a major political reform that facilitated electoral gains by opposition parties. However, in a telling example of the disjuncture that has generally existed between electoral democratization and the character of state-labor relations in Mexico, the labor policies that Zedillo adopted in the wake of the devastating 1994-95 financial crisis were largely conservative. In fact, fewer strikes took place under Zedillo (277) than during the preceding Salinas de Gortari administration (831) (Statistical Appendix). Following partisan change at the national level in 2000, there was initially considerable speculation that PRI-affiliated unions might employ strikes to challenge the new PAN government, but the Fox administration quickly reached an accommodation with major labor organizations (Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: 51). Its overall labor policies were moderate. Nevertheless, the total number of strikes taking place during Fox's six-year term remained low (267).²⁷

Might there have been an economic cause for the decline in the frequency of strikes after the mid-1990s? Because of the historically strong relationship between the rate of inflation and the incidence of both strike notices and strikes, one might hypothesize that the government's success in controlling

²⁷ Statistical Appendix. The regression analyses reported here of the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strike notices and strikes do not include a dummy variable distinguishing between the PRI (1941-2000) and PAN (2001-12) eras because an examination of the 1941-2012 period had already determined that the variable representing presidential labor policy was not statistically significant. Although the models included a dummy variable for inflation-control during the 2000-12 period, a dummy variable representing the PAN era (2001-12) was omitted because of almost perfect collinearity.

Professor Todd Landman (University of Essex) conducted a separate regression analysis of the author's strike data employing the Polity IV index of political regime characteristics ("Authority Trends, 1946-2013: Mexico," at www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm) as an independent variable. He found no statistically significant relationship between political liberalization/democratization over the 1946-2012 period and the frequency of federal-jurisdiction strikes. Author's communication with Landman, March 3, 2015.

inflation after 1999 (Statistical Appendix) would have a notable impact in these areas. Indeed, a Prais-Winsten regression employing a dummy variable representing the 2000-12 post-inflation control period found no statistically significant relationship between inflation and strike notices during these years, and a visual representation of the impact of changes in the inflation rate on the predicted incidence of federal-jurisdiction strike notices shows a considerable difference in this relationship between the 1941-1999 and 2000-12 periods (Figure 2).²⁸ In the left-hand graph (the 1941-1999 period), the number of notices (on a logged scale) increases substantially as the rate of inflation (on a logged scale) rises. In the right-hand graph depicting the relationship during the 2000-12 period, the confidence intervals are fairly large, indicating a higher degree of uncertainty than for the 1941-99 period. Nevertheless, increases in the rate of inflation appear to have had very little impact on the number of strike notices filed during these years. The evidence suggests, then, that inflation mattered less as a predictor of federal-jurisdiction strike notices once the annual rate fell to single digits.²⁹

²⁸ The predicted incidences of strike notices and strikes (and their 95 percent confidence intervals) in Figures 2-4 are based on computations of linear combinations of regression model estimated coefficients.

²⁹ The curbing of inflation also had some impact on the proportion of federal-jurisdiction strike notices making economic demands. That proportion was largest—ranging from 78.4 to 85.1 percent—during a period of high inflation between 1983 and 1987, and a comparison of cross-correlograms (portrayals of changes in the cross-correlation between the inflation rate and the economic-demand proportion of all strike notices) for the 1983-99 and 2000-12 periods showed a much closer relationship between the rate of inflation and the proportion of strike notices focused on economic demands during the former period than during the latter period. For the 1983-99 period, the proportion of economic-type strike notices was fairly strongly correlated with the contemporaneous rate of inflation; that is, there was a strong relationship between the variables ($r = 0.70$) at a time lag of 0. In the 2000-12 period, the correlation was much weaker both contemporaneously and across time lags. However, a marked, consistent decline in the proportion of notices making economic demands only came after 2004; over the 2007-12 period the proportion ranged from 27.8 to 34.9 percent. Author's calculations based on data presented in STPS, www.stps.gob.mx, "Emplazamientos y huelgas," table V.2.1, consulted on September 3, 2014; data regarding the stated causes of strike notices and strikes are only available for the 1983-2012 period.

The 2000-12 period was not the first time that the Mexican government succeeded in controlling the rate of consumer price inflation; it had also done so between 1959 and 1972 (Statistical Appendix). The author therefore conducted a further regression analysis of the possible impact of inflation control on the incidence of strike notices using a dummy variable representing an expanded inflation-control period (1959-72 and 2000-12). In this test, the

Figure 2: Predicted Incidence of Federal-jurisdiction Strike Notices as Inflation Rate Changes, Pre- and Post-Inflation Control

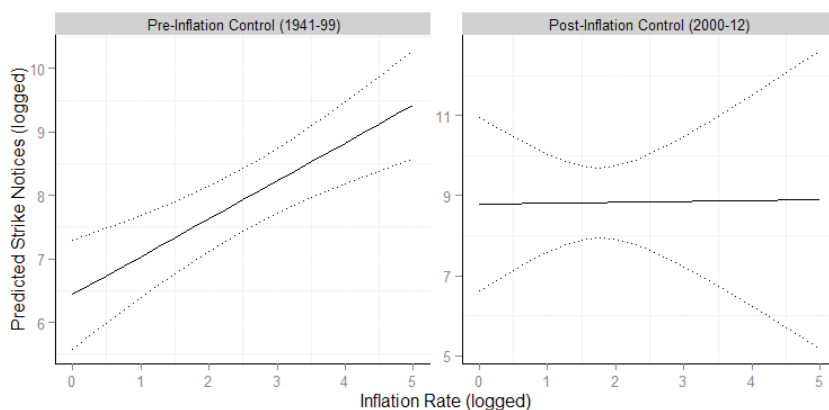
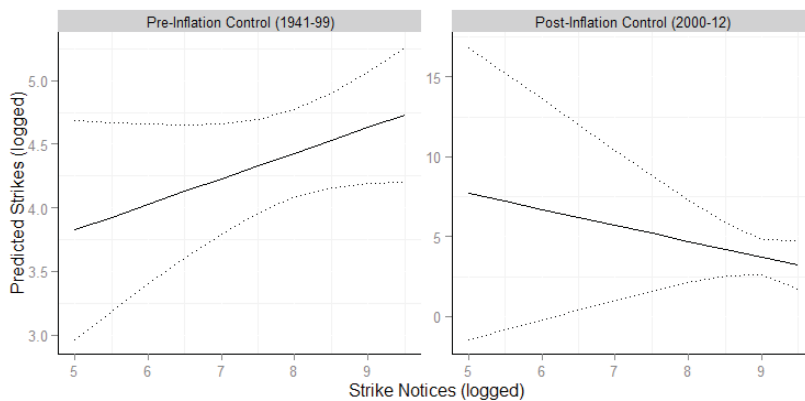
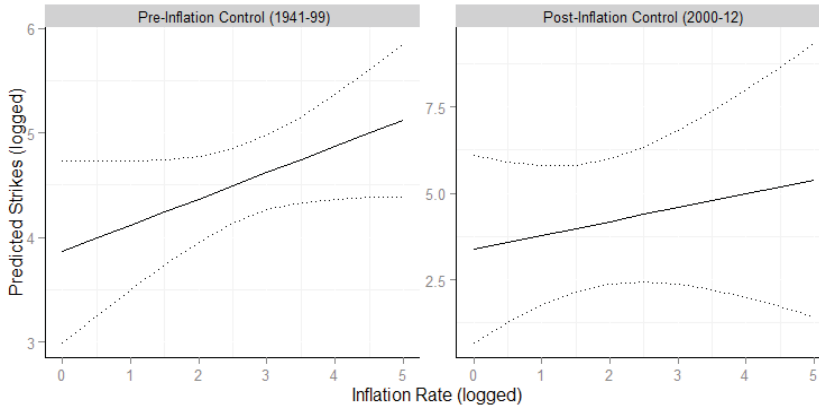


Figure 3: Predicted Incidence of Federal-jurisdiction Strikes as Strike Notices Change, Pre- and Post-Inflation Control



variable representing interaction between inflation and inflation control reversed sign (whereas as predicted, it had been negative when the interaction variable encompassed only the 2000-12 period, it became positive when the variable included both the 1959-72 and 2000-12 periods), suggesting that the 2000-12 period of inflation control had a substantially different impact on the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strike notices than the 1959-72 period. One possible explanation for this difference is that labor organizations perceived the government's commitment to inflation control to be more credible in the later period.

Figure 4: Predicted Incidence of Federal-jurisdiction Strikes as Inflation Changes, Pre- and Post-Inflation Control



Note: Dotted lines in Figures 2-4 indicate 95% confidence intervals.

The government's effective control over inflation also undermined the long-established linkage between strike notices and strikes in federal-jurisdiction economic activities. Indeed, the volume of notices remained quite constant from the mid-1990s through 2012, even after a substantial fall in the number of strikes. This change is apparent in Figure 1 and particularly in Figure 3, which depicts the predicted number of strikes resulting from changes in the number of notices. The upward slope of the line in the left-hand graph indicates a positive relationship between notices and strikes in the pre-inflation control period (1941-1999), whereas the downward slope of the line in the right-hand graph illustrates a negative relationship between these two variables during the 2000-12 period (although the very wide confidence intervals indicate a low degree of certainty regarding the slope of this line across much of the range).³⁰

³⁰ A comparison of cross-correlograms (graphic portrayals of changes in the cross-correlation between the incidence of federal-jurisdiction notices and strikes) for the pre- and post-inflation control periods confirmed this conclusion. The cross-correlogram for the 1941-99 period showed a strong positive correlation between notices and strikes ($r = 0.54$) at a time lag of 0, meaning that notices and strikes were interrelated at each point in time and that

In contrast, the relationship between inflation and strikes persisted during the inflation-control period, although it was weaker than during the 1941-1999 period. The upward slope of the lines in Figure 4 (depicting the predicted number of federal-jurisdiction strikes resulting from changes in the inflation rate) indicates that, both before and after government economic authorities succeeded in reducing the rate of inflation to single digits, the rate of inflation helped determine the incidence of strikes.³¹ However, the wide confidence levels in the graph for the 2000-12 period suggest that the relationship might have become weaker.³²

Supplemental Explanations for the (Virtual) Disappearance of Strikes in Mexico

Although regression analysis sheds invaluable light on key economic and political variables potentially influencing the incidence of labor strikes in Mexico, this methodology cannot readily illuminate all the possible factors that might account for the marked decline in strikes since the mid-

neither series influenced the other in future periods. In sharp contrast, the cross-correlogram for the 2000-12 period showed that notices and strikes were *inversely correlated* at a time lag of 0, meaning that notices and strikes became decoupled during the inflation-control period.

³¹ See also the author's interview with a former senior JFCA and STPS official, Mexico City, June 26, 2015.

³² A multivariate logistic regression employing a dummy variable representing the 2000-12 post-inflation control period confirmed that, even though there was a substantial decrease in the number of strikes during these years, the statistically significant relationship between the inflation rate and the incidence of strikes persisted. Cross-correlograms for the pre- and post-inflation control periods also showed positive correlations at conventional lag intervals, with some evidence that the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strikes was less strongly influenced by changes in the inflation rate after 2000.

Data concerning the proportion of all strikes taking place for economic reasons (that is, those strikes seeking the revision of a collective contract or industry-wide agreement, a salary increase, or an adjustment in "factor equilibrium") over the 1983-2012 period offer further support for these conclusions. As in the case of strike notices, this proportion was generally highest during the 1980s, ranging from 47.2 percent in 1985 to 67.6 percent in 1986. The proportion declined substantially during the 2000-12 inflation-control period (it was only 25.0 percent in 2007), but it jumped to 63.2 percent in 2009 and 53.9 percent in 2011. Author's calculations based on data presented in STPS (www.stps.gob.mx), "Emplazamientos y huelgas," table V.3.1 (consulted on September 3, 2014).

1990s. This subsection considers additional possible explanations for this phenomenon, focusing on shifts in the unionization rate and the organized labor movement's sectorial composition and on such qualitative factors as the labor movement's leadership, organizational unity, and bargaining strategy.³³ There were no revisions in the legal regime governing strikes that might account for their reduced frequency during this period.

The most conspicuous of these shifts was a substantial decline in the unionization rate, the proportion of the workforce that is unionized. The unionized share of the EAP aged 14 and older (the minimum legal working age in Mexico prior to 2015) fell from 16.3 percent in 1978 to 13.6 percent in 1992 and 10.4 percent in 1994; the proportion then remained quite constant through 2010 (9.0 percent) before declining further to 8.8 percent in 2012 (Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: tables 2, 3). This substantial drop was the consequence of far-reaching industrial restructuring in both the public and private sectors in the aftermath of Mexico's 1982 debt crisis (a process that included closing many unionized state-owned enterprises or sharply reducing their workforces prior to their sale to private investors) and significant growth over time in the size of the informal sector (Ibid.: 53 n25). It is probable that such a major decline in the unionization rate reduced labor's overall mobilizational capacity. However, because union membership in Mexico is more frequently a condition of employment than a voluntary commitment (Ibid.: 31 n31), the unionization rate per se is not necessarily a reliable predictor of unions' capacity to mobilize to defend their interests.

Important shifts in the sectorial composition of the labor movement accompanied, and in some instances contributed to, a decline in the unionization rate. The proportion of the unionized workforce employed in manufacturing activities fell to 21.5 percent in 2012, while the share of the unionized labor force employed in the services sector rose to 70.7 percent that same year (Ibid.: table 3). Much of the employment growth in manufacturing that occurred after the 1980s was in the so-called *maquiladora* (in-bond processing) industry concentrated along the Mexico-U.S. border. Unionization rates in almost all of this industry have historically been low, and many of the maquiladora unions that do exist are company-controlled organizations formed specifically to

³³ The absence of adequate statistical measures made it impractical to include these different factors in the regression analyses discussed in preceding sections of this article.

prevent workers from forming representative unions willing to defend their interests (De la O, 2006).

There were also major changes in the labor movement's leadership and unity after the mid-1990s. The most important event in this regard was the death in 1997 of Fidel Velázquez Sánchez, the influential secretary-general (1941-47, 1950-97) of the powerful CTM. Velázquez's successors, Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine (1997-2005) and Joaquín Gamboa Pascoe (2006-16), lacked his charisma and negotiating skills,³⁴ and Rodríguez Alcaine could not block a serious schism within the Labor Congress (Congreso del Trabajo, CT, formed in 1966 to unify the labor movement) the year Velázquez died. A substantial bloc of CT affiliates seceded to form the National Union of Workers (Unión Nacional de Trabajadores, UNT) in 1997 (Samstad, 2002: 13-4, Bizberg, 2003: 31-3). They did so primarily because of growing differences of opinion regarding how to confront the challenges posed by industrial restructuring in the workplace and a substantial shift in government policies toward labor following the adoption of market-focused economic policies in the 1980s.

These changes in the composition, leadership, and organizational structure of the labor movement eroded its overall influence, but they do not account well for variations over time in the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strikes. There was, for example, no clear relationship between leadership change in the CTM—which, despite some decline in its total membership between 1997 and 2008 (Bensusán and Middlebrook, 2013: 64), remained Mexico's largest labor confederation—and its strike record. In fact, the annual number of CTM-initiated strikes declined quite consistently over the 1983-2012 period, from highs of 139 in 1984 and 219 in 1986 to just 2 in 2009. Its share of all federal-jurisdiction strikes (which averaged 57.5 percent over the 1983-2012 period, with a peak of 70.7 percent in 1987) began to decline several years before Velázquez's death and continued afterward. However, the CTM's share of all federal-jurisdiction strikes then recovered somewhat between 2005 and 2008 before declining again, reaching a period low of just 10.5 percent in 2009.³⁵

³⁴ Rodríguez Alcaine was the long-term leader of the General Union of Mexican Electrical Workers (Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana); Gamboa Pascoe, a lawyer by training, had long served as leader of the Federal District Workers' Federation (Federación de Trabajadores del Distrito Federal).

³⁵ Author's calculations based on data presented in STPS (www.stps.gob.mx), "Emplazamientos y huelgas," table V.3.6 (consulted on September 3, 2014).

The strike pattern for the Labor Congress generally paralleled that for the CTM, the CT's most influential member. CT affiliates accounted for an annual average of 77.5 percent of all strikes occurring over the entire 1983-2012 period, with a peak of 88.4 percent in 1993 and a low of 21.1 percent in 2009. That proportion fell to an average of only 48.6 percent per year between 2007 and 2012,³⁶ but there was no marked change following the UNT's secession in 1997.³⁷

The factors discussed above do not account well for the decline in strike frequency from the mid-1990s onward. However, a significant shift in major labor organizations' perceptions of the utility of strikes as part of their overall bargaining strategy may have been an important reason for this change. This shift was linked to the particular institutional mechanism that the federal government employed to control consumer price inflation in the late 1980s and early 1990s: "pacts" (*pactos*) that government officials negotiated with representatives of leading national labor, peasant, and business organizations. The De la Madrid administration negotiated the first of these agreements in December 1987 to forestall looming hyperinflation; succeeding administrations renewed them for most of the period through 1995. The pacts not only achieved their principal macroeconomic goal, but they also regularly brought labor and business leaders together at the bargaining table to set national policies regarding wages, prices, and other financial issues. Because the pacts centered negotiations at the national level and because their provisions included strict limits on wage increases (*topes salariales*), company- and industry-level unions had less scope (and less incentive) to strike, even though the formal terms of the pacts did not prohibit them from doing so.³⁸ However, this shift in bargaining approach did not necessarily reduce labor organizations' incentives to file strike notices as part of their efforts to secure other goals. For example, the sharp upturn in the volume of federal-jurisdiction strike notices during the Calderón administration resulted

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The declining relative proportions attributable to the CTM and the CT mirrored the dramatic rise in the share of strikes initiated by "independent" (non-CT) labor organizations (Ibid.). STPS data do not identify the individual labor organizations in the "independent" category. However, the shift began in 2003, well after the formation of the UNT.

³⁸ Author's interviews with a senior JFCA official, a leading Mexican labor attorney, and a former senior JFCA and STPS official, Mexico City, June 23, 24, and 26, 2015, respectively. See Middlebrook, 1995: 263-64 and Zapata Schaffeld, 2007: 120 regarding the policy provisions of the pacts.

in part from intense union competition to win construction contracts during a boom in public-sector infrastructure development.³⁹

It is likely that both structural changes weakening the labor movement's overall influence (especially changes in its sectorial composition and the declining unionization rate)⁴⁰ and government actions reinforced this shift in labor strategy. Arsenio Farrell Cubillas, who headed the STPS from 1982 through 1994, vigorously resisted strike actions while the De la Madrid and Salinas administrations fought inflation and implemented successive *pactos*. Then, at the very beginning of the Fox administration, the JFCA took the controversial decision to declare non-existent a national sugarworkers' strike that had already been underway for more than three weeks. The ruling itself cited various legal technicalities and was narrowly based: the fact that a CROM-affiliated sugarworkers' union refused to support the CTM-led action meant that slightly fewer than two-thirds of all employees backed the strike, as required by the contract-law governing worker-employer relations in the industry. However, labor officials' broader goal was to signal forcefully to the CTM and other PRI-allied labor groups that they should not consider mobilizing against the new PAN government.⁴¹ The impact of specific government actions may, then, help explain the (virtual) disappearance of strikes in federal-jurisdiction economic activities since the mid-1990s, including why the incidence of federal-jurisdiction strikes began to decline notably even before economic policymakers fully controlled inflation.

Conclusion

This long-term analysis of strikes in Mexico makes three principal contributions to the study of Mexican and Latin American labor affairs.

³⁹ Statistical Appendix; www.stps.gob.mx, "Emplazamientos y huelgas," tables V.2.1, V.2.2; author's interviews with a senior JFCA official and a senior STPS official, Mexico City, June 23 and 29, 2015, respectively.

⁴⁰ Author's interviews with a leading Mexican labor attorney and a senior STPS official, Mexico City, June 24 and 29, 2015, respectively.

⁴¹ Author's interviews with a leading Mexican labor attorney and a former senior JFCA and STPS official, Mexico City, June 24 and 26, 2015, respectively. On the Fox government's handling of the sugarworkers' strike, including its extensive restructuring of the industry contract-law in the aftermath of the strike, see also *La Jornada*, November 22, December 8, 10, 2000; January 8, 2001; February 25, 2002.

First, the findings presented here regarding the impact of presidential policy on labor mobilization are more conclusive than those reached by previous researchers. Despite variations in different presidential administrations' overall labor policies over the 1941-2012 period, state authorities quite consistently sought to limit strikes in economically important federal-jurisdiction industries. Control over mass political mobilization was, of course, a centerpiece of Mexico's durable postrevolutionary authoritarian regime, but it is noteworthy that neither electoral democratization per se nor partisan change in control over the presidency had any substantial impact on the incidence of strikes. It is conceivable that, had the country's political transition in 2000 brought to power a government committed to far-reaching reform of state-labor relations, regime change might have altered this pattern. However, despite the Fox administration's generally moderate labor policies, it did not depart from established patterns where strikes were concerned.⁴² This outcome underscores the importance of distinguishing among different dimensions of democratic regime change in Mexico and elsewhere.

Second, this study goes beyond previous examinations of labor strikes in Mexico by demonstrating a statistically significant long-term relationship between the rate of inflation and the frequency of federal-jurisdiction strikes. Multivariate regression analysis shows that successive administrations' control over consumer price inflation is a key reason why the number of strikes has remained low since the late 1990s. Neither structural elements such as a decline in the unionization rate and changes in the sectorial composition of the labor movement, nor important political developments in the movement's leadership and organization, can in themselves account for variations over time in the incidence of strikes. However, both structural factors that weakened labor movement influence and specific government actions reinforced the shift in major labor organizations' perceptions of the utility of strikes as a bargaining tool that occurred as a consequence of their participation in the pacts employed to achieve macroeconomic stabilization in Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Finally, these conclusions illustrate the value of strike analysis as a research strategy for examining the intersection between economic and

⁴² Fox administration officials often referred to the low incidence of strikes in their promotional appeals to potential foreign investors. Author's interviews with a leading Mexican labor attorney and a former senior JFCA and STPS official, Mexico City, June 24 and 26, 2015, respectively.

political change in Latin America. Whether the specific findings reported here regarding such issues as the impact of inflation control on Mexican organized labor's bargaining strategy have parallels in other Latin American countries is, of course, a subject for future study. However, one goal of this article has been to draw attention to an important but badly neglected area of enquiry and bring strikes back onto the labor research agenda for Latin America, thus creating a basis for meaningful comparisons between strike patterns in Latin America and those in Canada, the United States, Western European countries, and elsewhere. In particular, this article seeks to promote comparative analysis by assessing Mexican strikes over a seven-decade period, by employing (with appropriate allowances for the quality of the data available) economic and political variables like those used in other studies of strikes, and by highlighting the broad range of factors shaping changes in labor mobilization over time.

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Statistical Appendix: Labor Conflict and Economic Change in Mexico, 1941-2012

Year	Federal-jurisdiction Strike Notices	Federal-jurisdiction Strikes	Local-jurisdiction Strikes	Annual Rate of Inflation (percent)	Real Minimum Daily Wage Index	Annual Variation in Real GDP (percent)
1941	117	17	125	3.2	94.0	9.7
1942	133	19	79	15.6	81.2	5.9
1943	858	569	197	29.7	62.4	3.6
1944	1,103	734	153	27.1	70.8	8.0
1945	263	107	113	6.6	66.4	3.2
1946	NA	24	183	24.6	66.8	6.5
1947	NA	13	117	12.3	59.6	3.6
1948	NA	34	54	6.6	55.6	3.9
1949	NA	35	55	5.2	52.8	6.7
1950	NA	28	54	5.9	50.0	9.7
1951	NA	17	127	13.0	44.4	7.8
1952	NA	29	84	6.6	60.0	4.0
1953	NA	20	142	5.4	56.8	0.3
1954	NA	18	75	5.1	64.4	10.0
1955	NA	13	122	16.0	55.6	8.5
1956	NA	10	149	4.8	73.2	6.9
1957	NA	10	183	5.7	69.2	7.6
1958	NA	11	729	11.4	67.6	5.3
1959	NA	18	361	2.4	66.0	3.0
1960	NA	52	325	5.2	76.0	8.1
1961	NA	42	331	1.8	74.4	4.3
1962	NA	23	702	0.9	89.2	4.5
1963	1,244	36	468	0.9	88.4	7.6
1964	1,532	46	16	2.2	106.4	11.0
1965	1,127	40	27	3.4	102.8	6.2
1966	NA	73	18	4.5	114.4	6.1
1967	1,661	45	33	2.8	111.2	5.9
1968	145	39	117	1.5	124.0	9.4
1969	1,361	40	104	3.0	120.4	3.4
1970	1,512	NA	NA	5.9	128.4	6.5

Year	Federal-jurisdiction Strike Notices	Federal-jurisdiction Strikes	Local-jurisdiction Strikes	Annual Rate of Inflation (percent)	Real Minimum Daily Wage Index	Annual Variation in Real GDP (percent)
1971	1,632	36	168	3.1	124.8	3.8
1972	2,176	33	174	6.0	139.6	8.2
1973	5,557	57	NA	17.1	130.0	7.9
1974	5,182	55	337	32.7	136.4	5.8
1975	2,155	84	236	14.3	131.2	5.7
1976	6,299	107	547	14.3	158.8	4.4
1977	5,033	128	476	32.1	146.0	3.4
1978	5,572	87	758	18.1	139.2	9.0
1979	6,021	141	795	18.2	135.6	9.7
1980	5,757	93	1,339	26.3	126.8	9.2
1981	6,589	108	1,066	28.0	129.6	8.8
1982	16,095	675	1,971	58.9	123.2	-0.5
1983	13,536	230	978	101.9	92.4	-4.2
1984	9,052	221	548	65.4	85.6	3.6
1985	8,754	125	489	57.7	84.0	2.6
1986	11,579	312	903	86.2	80.4	-3.8
1987	16,141	174	949	131.8	78.4	1.9
1988	7,730	132	618	114.2	62.0	1.3
1989	6,806	118	757	18.6	61.6	3.4
1990	6,395	150	670	26.7	57.6	4.4
1991	7,006	136	438	22.7	53.6	3.6
1992	6,814	156	477	15.5	49.2	2.8
1993	7,531	155	474	9.8	48.0	0.6
1994	7,573	116	472	7.0	100.0	3.7
1995	7,676	96	481	35.0	86.5	-6.9
1996	7,621	51	410	34.4	77.9	5.1
1997	8,047	39	356	20.6	77.4	6.8
1998	7,352	33	245	15.9	78.0	4.9
1999	7,972	32	225	16.6	75.2	3.9
2000	8,282	26	147	9.6	75.8	6.6
2001	6,821	35	219	4.4	76.2	-0.2
2002	6,042	45	213	5.7	76.7	0.8

Year	Federal-jurisdiction Strike Notices	Federal-jurisdiction Strikes	Local-jurisdiction Strikes	Annual Rate of Inflation (percent)	Real Minimum Daily Wage Index	Annual Variation in Real GDP (percent)
2003	5,909	44	202	4.0	76.2	1.4
2004	6,122	38	205	5.2	75.1	4.0
2005	6,646	50	224	3.3	75.1	3.2
2006	7,390	55	186	4.0	75.0	5.1
2007	9,045	28	271	3.8	74.5	3.3
2008	10,814	21	150	6.5	73.0	1.3
2009	13,207	19	81	3.6	71.9	-6.8
2010	12,682	11	73	4.4	72.5	3.0
2011	10,905	13	49	3.8	72.8	4.0
2012	9,877	19	54	3.6	73.1	3.8

Sources: Federal-jurisdiction strike notices and strikes: For 1941-93, Middlebrook, 1995: table 5.1; for 1994-2012, www.stps.gob.mx. Information on notices may be incomplete for 1968. Local-jurisdiction strikes: For 1941-89, Middlebrook, 1995: table 5.1; for 1990-94, Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI), *Anuario estadístico, 1992*, table 21.14; for 1995-2012, *Anuario estadístico, 2014*, table 10.41. Data are missing for one or more states for 1982-83, 1988-89, and perhaps other years. Annual rate of inflation: For 1941-93, Middlebrook, 1995: table 6.1; for 1994-2000, Vicente Fox Quesada, *Primer informe de gobierno, 2001* (Mexico City: Presidencia de la República, 2001), p. 148; for 2001-12, Banco de México (www.banxico.org.mx/portal-inflacion/index.html). Real minimum daily wage index: The index for 1941-93 (1939 = 100) pertains to the minimum wage in Mexico City; the index for 1994-2012 (1994 = 100) is based on the average of the minimum wage in three national geographic zones. For both periods, the nominal minimum daily wage was deflated by the inflation rate reported in this table. The minimum wage data are drawn from: for 1941-93, Middlebrook, 1995: table 6.1; for 1994-2012, STPS and Comisión Nacional de los Salarios Mínimos (www.stps.gob.mx/bp/secciones/conoce/areas_atencion/web/menu_infector.html). For the period 1941-71, minimum wages were set only in even-numbered years. Minimum wages increased more than once each year during 1973-74, 1976, 1982-98, and 2012; annual values are the mean of all increases during a given year. Annual variation in real GDP (inflation-adjusted gross domestic product): For 1941-2010, Abraham Aparicio Cabrera, "Series estadísticas de la economía mexicana en el siglo XX," *Economía Informa*, no. 369 (July-August 2011), table 4; for 2011-12, INEGI (www.inegi.org.mx).

Note: NA = not available.

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