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Will Fowler. *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 396 pp. $40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8032-2539-8.

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Will Fowlerâs *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821â1858* is the culmination of sixteen years of research and the latest monograph in Fowlerâs edited series about *pronunciamientos* in mid-nineteenth-century Mexico. The pronunciamiento, a written protest, petition, or proclamation of support involving an implicit threat of revolt, was a ubiquitous feature of Mexican political cultureâFowlerâs team of researchers has uncovered and transcribed more than 1,500 in the years 1821â76 alone. Pronunciamientos emerged from the violent tumultuous politics of independence and in a period of profound political uncertainty and contested legitimacy. In the wake of immense violence, Fowler argues that *pronunciados* rarely aimed to overthrow the government. Rather, they hoped to forcefully negotiate political change. According to Fowler, pronunciamientos were inherently a way of practicing representative politics. Pronunciados, after issuing an initial proclamation and âgesture of rebellion,â hoped to garner a broad base of support from âcopycatâ *actas de adhesiÃ³n.* These actas were meant to âreflect the legitimate voice of an ignored, general, national, and/or popular willâ (p. 8). Pronunciamientos, Fowler argues, were therefore paradoxically linked both to the formation of the Mexican state and to its endemic instability.

In an insightful first chapter, Fowler examines the historiography of pronunciamientos and provides a typological and analytical framework for studying them. The rest of the book unfolds chronologically and thematically, charting the evolution of the pronunciamiento from its roots as an elite and predominantly military practice in 1820 to a widely accepted part of everyday political negotiation and representative politics during the 1830s, and finally to its demise as a form of âforceful negotiationâ and degeneration into a violent and polarizing practice by the 1850s.

Chapter 2 focuses on the years 1820â21 and analyzes the origins of the Mexican pronunciamiento and attempts to explain why the practice, a forceful form of consensus building and negotiation rather than violent revolution, became the most widespread form of political contestation following the wars of independence. Fowler argues that the pronunciamientos issued by Rafael de Riego in Cabezas de San Juan Spain in 1820 and AgustÃn de Iturbideâs Plan de Iguala in 1821 served as foundational models for future political action and influenced the subsequent and widespread adoption of the pronunciamiento. Importantly, both proclamations achieved significant political change through the threat of violence but without bloodshed and relied heavily on the subsequent support

of âcopycatâ actas de adhesiÃ³n to garner political legitimacy. News of Riegoâs success spread in New Spain and inspired pronunciamientos through âmimetic insurrectionism,â what Fowler describes as âa natural tendency on the part of people ... to replicateâmimicâinsurrectionary tactics from elsewhere if these are seen to have workedâ (p. 40). Iturbide was successful, according to Folwer, not only because the Plan de Iguala blended consensus (âproviding something for everybodyâ) with the threat of violence but also because the pronunciados presented their demands âas though they were actual lawsâ (pp. 65, 71).

Chapter 3 focuses on the years 1822â31, a period when, not surprisingly, elites and military officers issued the majority of the pronunciamientos. Fowler, however, shows that the military and *caudillos*, such as Santa Anna, did not act alone. Instead, the military often worked in cooperation with civic institutions to defend, create, or restore constitutional rule. Fowler supports the notion that caudillos were not antithetical to representative government but central to its creation. Though scholars have long recognized the relationship between regional politics and caudillos, Fowlerâs focused attention on the pronunciamiento within Mexicoâs volatile political climate and amid fragile and inchoate legitimacies is quite useful. He argues that pronunciamientos played an important, pseudo-legislative, role in constituting the law, political legitimacy, and in defining relations between regional and central powers. While other scholars have concentrated more explicitly on the significance of constitutions or the law, Fowler deftly shows âthe extent to which the line between what was lawful and unlawful or legitimate and illegitimate was significantly blurred at the timeâ (p. 125). Here the book does a good job of showing how endemic pronunciamientos helped to institutionalize the authoritarian and extralegal violence that later characterized the political process.

Chapter 4 charts the years 1832â42, when, according to Fowler, the pronunciamiento went âviral,â was âdemocratized,â and was embraced by a wide range of political actors. Fowler builds on the now well-established scholarship about popular politics and state formation. Similar to Benjamin T. Smith, Fowler moves beyond a predominate concern with liberalism or federalism and argues instead for what he terms âpopular centralismâ (p. 186). According to Fowler, pronunciamientos during this period became more âtraditionalistâ and âconcerned with centralism, church-state relations (and by inference religion), and the need to protect core values and customsâ (p. 253). Though this chapter often loses sight of the popular actors it aims to describe (nearly a third of the chapter is really about elite politics), it does a good job explaining why tensions between centralism and federalism or conservatives and liberals would eventually erupt into civil war during the following decade.

In the bookâs final chapter, covering the years 1843-58, pronunciamientos took place more often and became more violent than in previous years. They were no longer âsoft coupsâ that relied on broad consensus; instead they were polarizing efforts to overthrow the government. Pronunciamientos were widespread, violent, and a constant threat to the stability of the state. Consequently, governments increasingly punished pronunciados through violent reprisal. Fowler laments, âThe days of forcefully negotiating were gone. Pronunciados now got shotâ (p. 240).

Fowler crafts an exceptionally cogent narrative of Mexicoâs tumultuous first fifty years and provides a pithy synthesis of recent advances in the historiography of Mexican independence, both of which will be useful to advanced undergraduates and graduate students unfamiliar with the topic. Though the book is not pathbreaking, as it treads ground well covered in Fowlerâs previous works on the topic, as a whole the book effectively explains why Mexico experienced such profound instability during the early republican period and how violence eventually became an accepted and institutionalized part of the political process.