

Political Issues Underlying the Revolution

So, what is this revolution all about then? Well for a vast proportion of the peasantry and so of the population it is about one thing, Land Reform. This issue is so clearly important that everyone officially thinks it is a good idea* and so for our purposes the issue is technically Radical Land Reform.

Aside from military action & real politiking the game assume that the players are fighting for a political agenda that will form the basis for a revised Mexican constitution. After all what is the point of replacing the rich old men if they are going to behave the same as the old rich old men? Unless of course you can become one of these rich old men.

This game uses a simple system for representing the political agenda with several issues being salient to the population & everyone having an opinion for or against each of the issues. This system has recently been used in other games – Crisis in Elysium & Red Dawn so you may be familiar with it.

The issues here are: -
(Radical) Land Reform,
(Effective) Democracy,
The (Catholic) Church,
Centralism,
Nationalisation,
The Separation of the
Military from Politics (which
is a mouthful, or Separation
which is a tad obscure).



The first 3 are major being of significant concern to the populace of the day, or in the case of the Church, within a few years. The other 3 are more minor being very important to fewer people, which is reflected in the game. You may even think they are added to split up people on the major issues.

Any constitution must state its position on at least a couple of the issues but is likely to get more favour if it is more assertive. Of course, it will also alienate more people.

There is no or very little inbuilt consequence of the positions in the game – the timescale is a bit too short & there is a war on! However, the players act as proxies for the populace at large, & so they want to get their agenda represented. They are briefed to prioritise the agendas to different extents from “the only thing that matters” to “it would be nice if it was how I like it”. They also have abilities that only work if they belong to a party pushing their agendas, representing a power base in that sector of the population.

*A bit like the NHS everyone is in favour of it even as they seek to undermine it.

Here is what the issues mean.

Radical Land Reform

This is the defining issue of the Revolution. It is so important that everyone is (overtly) in favour of some degree of land reform – it is a matter of how radical you propose to be. The last 40 years have seen a gradual consolidation of land out of the hands of small peasants and into the possession of the owners of huge Haciendas. This has *mostly* been done legally but the Hacendados certainly have a position of strength to abuse.

Ironically it is partly a consequence attempts by the liberal governments of the mid 19th century to create a rural middle class. They gave individual peons ownership of land that had been held communally and so the peons were able to sell this land to the land Barons. Debt peonage, which is virtually feudalism or slavery has increased as there are fewer “free” peasants and more and more have been obliged to work on haciendas. Large land holders have also used denial of water rights & other illegal means to obtain land.

Strongly For: Land held by Haciendas and other large land owners should be seized and redistributed to the peasants immediately and without reparations

For: Land held by Haciendas should be seized & redistributed to the peasants, subject to suitable compensation which will be assessed.

Against: Claims of the peons will be investigated and land where undue or illegal influence has been used will be bought off the haciendas and redistributed to the peasantry (seized in the case of illegality). A programme of redistribution for the other land will be worked out.

Strongly Against: Claims of the peasants will be investigated, and any illegally owned land will be returned to them. Claims for redistribution will be considered on a case by case basis.

For Land Reform paraphrases Emiliano Zapata’s *Plan De Ayala* & **Against** paraphrases Felix Diaz’ *Plan de Tierra Colorada*.



Effective Democracy (“Democracy”)

This was the demand of Madero’s liberal revolution in 1910. Mexico has always had a strong urban liberal tradition add odds with conservative rural elements. The aims of the liberals are to ensure Mexico is a modern democracy. It has always been notionally this with policies of no re-election – president may only serve one term - & universal male suffrage. However, every time someone obtained power they have

started to subvert this by preventing free & fair elections & by repeatedly standing, see Diaz 40 year reign. This is why “*effective democracy*” is the crying call – not just lip service to voting.

Conservatives tend to believe that Mexicans need a strong leader as they “are not ready for democracy”, both Santa Ana and Diaz expressed this sentiment. If there were some element of truth in this the elites do not address it by education & wealth redistribution they just reinforce the status quo, ensuring Mexico is never ready for democracy.

Strongly for: The president must be chosen by free & fair elections by the whole populace as soon as possible. There must be no re-election allowed

For: The president must be elected by free elections, though this may not be possible until hostilities cease. There can be no re-election but in emergencies terms might be extended by a vote. There should be universal suffrage for adults

Against: Mexico needs strong leadership and so the right man should be encouraged to run the country for as long as possible. Elections will be held when the situation is more stable

Strongly against: Mexico has never had much luck with democracy. The presidential candidate should be chosen from amongst the leading lights of the country. He or at least these leading lights should retain power so long as he can do good for the country.

The Separation of Politics & the Military (“Separation”)

This is a tension between the view that there should be independence of the Army from politics and the view that the spoils of the revolution should be shared by those that fought for it.

Mexican has a history of supporting “the man on horseback” into political office and there is a lot of respect in the country for revolutionary generals



Strongly For: There must be absolute separation of politics from the Military. No-one who has been in command of troops should be allowed into political office

For: Anyone in any political office must give up all military rank and all command of troops

Against: The revolution will be won by the blood of soldiers. These men should be allowed to reap the rewards of political office. They are heroes of the people who will demand their place in government

Strongly against: Only people who have fought for liberty should be allowed to take part in running the new regime

Coming with a 21st century mindset there can be some difficulties with these positions. Partly this is because they are a little artificial as created by me rather than expert analysts. Partly it is because our perspective & culture is different. The way we typically bundle viewpoints is different from how they were grouped at the start of the 20th Century especially in foreign parts like Mexico. The combinations of these two specific issues cause most conflict.

The obvious combinations to us are probably for both or against both.

For Democracy & For Separation is the modern liberal model. It places the army as a tool of state rather than as a tool of the rulers of the state.

Against both is a classic military dictatorship. Power is held by the guys with the guns and that is how it should be (It is hard to see much idealism here!)

Against Democracy and For Separation is a non-military oligarchy. It has echoes of Plato's Philosopher Kings or something like the Venetian Republic. Here the military is again the agent of the state, it's just that the state is run by a very small number of people. There was a clique in the inner circles of Diaz government that held these ideals. Called Cientificos as they, apparently, used scientific methods & reason to determine the best policies – that's an update to philosophy right there. They believed they were better qualified to rule than someone chosen by a plebiscite. They were politicians & businessmen not soldiers & never a very large group but a significant one. I leave it to the reader to decide how much of this position was for the benefit of the population as a whole and how much was enlightened self-interest.

For Democracy & Against Separation is essentially the Mexican standard. While it seems odd to us there was a cult of personality surrounding the leaders in throughout Mexican history. They always elected successful generals to the presidency. The feeling that those who struggle for a cause should be those who lead it was what a sizable proportion of Mexicans believed, though it is at odds with what we normally think nowadays.

Also if you look at the number of US presidents who were successful generals – it's almost as common there.

(There is obviously a bit of self-interest in a general being **Against Separation** & the generals who are **For Separation** are especially enlightened 😊)



The Catholic Church

Possibly the only point that unites the rural poor with the rural rich is that they are more devout than the urban liberals. The Catholic church has been abused at the hands of liberal government throughout Mexican history losing income from land it has lost and fees for

performing rites. It lost the monopoly on education and on civil enforcement of tithes. It also has had all of its land disentailed to prop up various faltering governments. However, the church is still reasonably strong – the country is overwhelmingly Catholic, and the church still educates more people than anyone else. During the Porfirista it has been allowed to own property again as Diaz had allies in the church & did not enforce the anticlerical laws on the statutes.

This friction became progressively more of a live issue in the following decade ending with a huge revolt in 1926-29.

Strongly For: Church rights must be protected by the law. Land disentailed from the church will be restored. The catholic faith must be taught in state schools as well as church ones.

For: The illegal seizure of church land must be reversed. Catholicism must be enshrined as the state religion and defended.

Against: Mexico must be a secular state. The undue influence of the church should be curtailed by banning church schools. Churchmen who have been shown to oppose the new regime should be watched and church assets that have been mobilised against the revolution seized.

Strongly Against: The remaining power of the catholic church must be broken. They are opposed to revolution and support reaction so seizing all of their remaining property and expelling (or shooting) disruptive priests is the only way to progress.

Centralism

Mexico is a federation of states like the USA. The states have never been as autonomous as even US states, but they have some independence. There is a hint of small government/local self-determination -> more democracy in this issue too.

Strongly For: States are subsumed in the central government. Governors are appointed by the president. States have no rights to raise troops and only tiny amounts of tax for purely local matters.

For: States are a useful layer in administering central policy. Governors are elected, though a candidate nominated by the president would have a good chance. All policy is determined centrally. The governor may have a small number of state militia but appointments to command these are made centrally, and they fall under the command of the Federales.

Against: States must retain certain autonomous functions. They can raise some local taxes and use these to fund state militia under the command of the Governor and his appointed generals. They may pass laws that differ from federal law, but they will be bound by the constitution and by foreign policy.

Strongly Against: All federal law must be ratified by the State or rejected. States reserve the right to adopt different foreign policy to the federal government.

Nationalisation

This combines two issues the ownership of mineral rights & labour rights. Both are bad for overseas businesses, at least those that exploit workers & got land too cheap. They benefit the state & the workers separately in reality but are aggregated here as they are both separately too niche to excite much of the population.

Massive amounts of the rights to exploit land have been sold to overseas interests at massive under-valuations in the past 40 years. This has weakened the Mexican state. The workers have no right to strike & when they have done so they have been put down violently such as at the Cananea Copper mines in 1906. Workers' rights are a new concept in Mexico & they only effect a small proportion of the population - far more are affected by peonage covered under Land Reform.



Strongly For: Workers must have fixed maximum hours, minimum rates of pay & a right to strike. Mexico will forever own the rights to its land. Any that have been passed over to foreign interests will be seized without compensation. Future exploitation will be by licence or by natives.

For: Working conditions for labour must be reviewed & dangerous or excessive curtailed. Unions to protect workers' rights should be encouraged. The right to exploit land cannot be given away. Where it is currently foreign owned it will be repurchased at a fair valuation

Against: Labour is paid fairly for the work it carries out & business owners must be protected from wilful strike action. Land can be owned by anyone fit to exploit it for the good of the country.

Strongly Against: Foreign investment should be encouraged as it is to the benefit of the country & selling investors mineral rights at very reasonable rates will help this. Striking should be a capital crime & unions made illegal.