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In October 1825, London’s *New Monthly Magazine* commented that Guatemala, like America’s other newly independent countries, “fixed the attention of the sixteenth century, [and] deserves no less to occupy the undivided consideration of the nineteenth” with “a distinct place in the geography of modern America, and [to] claim forcibly the attention of the commercial world.”¹ But the article described not today’s country, but all of Central America, a newly declared republic that claimed the territory stretching from Chiapas to Costa Rica, which had been part of the Spanish Kingdom of Guatemala. Thus the magazine fixed its attention on colonial “Guatemala,” not the single federal state that bore the name in 1825. The confusion had many causes, not least a tradition of conflating the history of Guatemala City with that of the kingdom, familiar to English audiences from the 1823 translation of Domingo Juarros’s
history (1808–1821), but dating back at least to the seventeenth-century *Recor-
dación Florida* of Francisco Antonio Fuentes y Guzmán.2

While the state of Guatemala struggled to teach foreigners to associate its
name with its territory, internally the challenge was to stitch many and di-
verse local identities and ambitions into a single “Guatemalan” framework.
The principle of *uti possedetis* allowed independent Spanish American states
to establish countries based on colonial territories,3 but didn’t guide new gov-
ernments’ internal redistricting. Between separatist movements in the western
highlands and rebellions in the eastern lowlands from the 1820s into the 1840s,
gettin the seven departments of the new state to identify as “Guatemalan” was
as large a challenge to the new country as getting foreign powers to distinguish
Guatemala from the other states of the Central American federation.

Encouraging foreigners to scale down their understanding and citizens to
scale up their identity to include the newly assembled state meant teaching
both groups to put aside political, economic, and demographic understandings
inherited from the eighteenth-century Bourbon monarchy’s reformist policies
and the early nineteenth-century constitutional monarchy’s revolutionary in-
novations, neither of which had created a polity that looked like independent
Guatemala. Considering Guatemala as an innovation or invention of inde-
pendence goes against the grain of much Guatemalan historiography; other-
wise nuanced scholarship anachronistically takes “Guatemala” as an entity back
into the colonial period or as an unquestioned result of independence and pes-
simistically follows the union’s failure, not the state’s complex endurance.4 The
distinctive shape of the twentieth-century country frequently accompanies
studies of the nineteenth century, although contemporary maps show a more
amorphous and less determined territory more closely related to its contingent
and emergent reality.5

Yet the story of the birth and consolidation of this country is not unique.
As Alfredo Ávila, John Tutino, and Roberto Breña argue in this volume, Gua-
temala’s divided origins, built partly on Mesoamerican and partly on Spanish
structures, compare with that of New Spain (Mexico). The crisis of the Spanish
monarch (1808–1814) offered opportunity as well as disruption. Chambers’s
study of how postindependence Peru and Bolivia “traced and retraced” former
Inca territories offers another parallel. The dissolution of Gran Columbia into
Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia produced states that also acquired full sov-
ereignty after emerging from a larger polity.

In essence, fledgling Guatemala experienced similar challenges to Spanish
American countries that remained united: cycles of reform and resistance;
dissension among elites divided by region, family, and ideas about the rhythm and depth of innovation needed; the actions and interests of popular classes inclined to resist changes perceived as economically destructive or politically alien and unwelcome; the implanting of republican and constitutional systems of government interspersed with periods of less representative rule; and the influence of European and North American commercial interests. Considering the origins, birth, and eventual stabilization of Guatemala as a polity, this essay describes two processes: first, how districts without central ties and individuals with initial loyalties to only a locality, class, or ethnic community learned to accept a place within a Guatemalan republic; second, the emergence by 1851 of a viable country that still faced tensions between government and society. The story of Guatemala is thus a story of the emergence of an independent country out of a larger federation that merits comparison with similar “survivor” states from the former Gran Colombia and across Spanish America.

_Isthmian Origins (1542–1821)_

The territories and peoples that formed the state of Guatemala in 1825 owed much to pre-European Maya civilizations, the initial organization of the Spanish empire, and the reorganization of the state-society relationship during the eighteenth-century Bourbon monarchy. Spanish Central America, known as the Kingdom, Audiencia (territorial court), or Captaincy General of Guatemala, was established by the Hapsburg monarchy in 1542, administratively uniting communities and territories conquered by half a dozen Spanish adelantados and their diverse native allies between today’s Chiapas (Mexico) and Costa Rica. Hernán Cortés’s deputy Pedro de Alvarado defeated the Quiché and Kaqchiquel kingdoms of highland Guatemala as well as the Pipil regions of what is now El Salvador; the Montejo family similarly conquered the peoples of today’s Honduras and Yucatán Peninsula, while Pedrarias Dávila’s forces took much of today’s Nicaragua and Costa Rica. So the broad strokes of Guatemala’s core territory and Central America’s regional organization and capitals, including approximate ethnic and political divides, date to the early sixteenth century. So, too, does the emergence of Alvarado’s capital, the multiply relocated Guatemala City—in its present location since 1773—as the political, commercial, religious, fiscal, educational, and judicial capital.

Independent Guatemala’s demography also owes much to the colonial period. What would later be “Guatemalan” highland districts were originally settled by Mayan peoples who retained their culture and languages while granted lands and limited self-rule as indigenous republics during centuries of Span-
ish rule. On the cusp of independence, Juarros catalogued languages including Kiche, Kakchiquel, Mam, Pocomam, Nahuatl, and Zutuhil, still spoken today.\(^7\) Late eighteenth-century censuses suggested the provinces in today’s Guatemala were about half Maya, 10 percent European, and 40 percent “mixed race” (ladino, mulatto, mestizo) with European, American, and/or African ancestry. Geographically, the Maya lived predominantly in the western highlands, in mountains, the most densely populated part of the isthmus. What would become the coffee piedmont, the southern (Pacific) coast, and the Oriente highlands were both more “ladino” and less densely populated.\(^8\) In addition to the estimated half a million people living under Spanish rule, independent indigenous communities like the Lacandones or Itzá lived in the Petén area bordering New Spain (Mexico).\(^9\)

Guatemala’s colonial communities did not form a single political entity but half a dozen territorial jurisdictions that operated as three distinct economic regions. The central valley and highlands (altiplano) combined agriculture and artisan textile and other productions, supplying urban centers.\(^10\) In 1819, Antigua and Amatitlán in the central valley received Crown authorization to produce grana, a red dye extracted from crushing an insect that fed on the nopal cactus; it became the country’s principal export in the 1840s.\(^11\) Significant highland produce went north to trade in southern Mexico. The more sparsely settled Oriente (its principal populations: Santa Rosa, Quauquiniquilapa, and Mataquesquintla), was connected by the Royal Road that led to Salvadoran indigo zones and Honduran and Nicaraguan cattle ranches. Along the road, the mostly mulatto people of the Oriente provided pasturage for cattle heading to Guatemala City and worked as mule-drivers.\(^12\) The eighteenth-century military district of Petén, now frequented by tourists visiting Mayan ruins, was a sparsely inhabited zone where the first archaeological finds—“perfectly spherical” stones—were just coming to government attention.\(^13\)

Economically, each district was tied to Guatemala City, the principal commercial center and the region’s link to Europe through Atlantic ports, via legal trade with Spain and illicit trade with Great Britain. But producers and consumers also bypassed the capital for regional trade in Central America’s largely self-sufficient internal market that cushioned residents from the worst blows of the declining world market for indigo. Internal trade fueled efforts made to retain Central American political as well as economic unity.\(^14\) Guatemala City businessmen developed financial investments (and often family ties) to San Salvador, which produced indigo, the region’s principal export crop;\(^15\) to Chiapas, Honduras, and Costa Rica (which raised tobacco); to Tegucigalpa and Chiquimula (where limited silver was mined); and to Comayagua and
Nicaragua (where cattle grazed and mules were raised). Internal trade and business ties, though important, did not prove strong enough to draw distinct economies into a single state system after independence.

In the eighteenth century, a wave of Spanish immigration (especially Basques, including the Aycinena family) and Enlightenment-oriented royal officials did not appreciably change the area’s overall demography; it did help revitalize elite commercial ties to the metropolis and revive intellectual inquiry and the foundation of important institutions, including a merchants’ chamber and a lawyers’ guild. Along with university professors and alumni (Guatemala’s San Carlos graduated over thirteen hundred from 1775 to 1821), they were deeply involved with Bourbon officials in creating a short-lived Sociedad Económica de Amantes del País devoted to improving the kingdom’s political economy, and the Gazeta de Guatemala (1797–1816), a newspaper that was based in Guatemala City but imagined a Central American public that it would inform and instruct. Indigenous peoples—one of whose great ancient centers at Palenque (Chiapas) was just being explored—were encouraged to join modern society by adopting Spanish clothes and language; all “learned” men were invited to be useful, regardless of “birth or class.”

Guatemala City retained its centrality as an intellectual hub. However, Carlos III’s (r. 1759–1788) reforms encouraging increased accountability to Spain diluted the capital’s authority within the kingdom and future state. Fiscal reforms (1760s) established royal coffers in the provinces and increased sales taxes, while territorial reforms (1784 and 1786) consolidated over a dozen districts into four intendancies—Comayagua (Honduras), León (Nicaragua), Ciudad Real (Chiapas), and San Salvador (El Salvador). Notably, the area that became the state of Guatemala remained fragmented as a patchwork of small districts reporting directly to the kingdom’s capital rather than a consolidated administration. In efforts to reduce the extension, both literal and indirect, of Guatemala City and its cabildo over “its” valley, the Crown essentially halved the original jurisdiction when relocating the capital to the Valle de la Ermita in 1773 after a devastating earthquake. Thus, on the cusp of imperial crisis, priest and chronicler Domingo Juarros’s 1808 history identified ten “provinces” in the future state of Guatemala, grouped into southern (Pacific), “central” (landbound), and northern (Atlantic) regions. The formal political consolidation experienced in the rest of the isthmus did not occur in “Guatemala.”

Ironically, fragmentation deepened even as government authority strengthened. Bourbon policy promoted reviving or establishing city councils to improve imperial communication and control, creating political representation and institutions that supported creole, indigenous, and ladino communities.
MAP 8.1. Districts of the Kingdom of Guatemala that became part of the state of Guatemala
in distinct locales. Creole—American Spanish—“provincianos” in the western highlands organized politically around two different towns that became a counterweight to Guatemala City: Antigua (Sacatepéquez), the earthquake-destroyed capital that reestablished its municipal government and political voice in 1799, and Quezaltenango, an important center of agricultural products where creole and peninsular migrants established their own cabildo and power center in addition to the existing native cabildo in 1805. These two cabildos immediately protected the interests of powerful families from the influence of those based in Guatemala City, helping royal agents to govern the region. Others, too, had a say in the new system. The new jurisdictions created to reduce Guatemala City’s reach incorporated Petapa, Amatitan, and Escuintla as villas “with a separate government” for their Spanish and mulatto residents. Indigenous communities, too, felt the heavier hand of government through new settlements including Chamiquín (Verapaz).

Arguably, the Bourbon emphasis on expanded municipal government did the most to create a region and identity in the Oriente. There, primarily ladino or mestizo communities lacked a cabildo de españoles or pueblo de indios until Bourbon royal officials set up municipal governments to increase tax revenue and promote militia recruitment while bringing “political and social (civil) life for their inhabitants to live in peace and justice” in Christian society and rule. New urban centers were established in Iztapa, a Pacific Coast port, and Santa Rosa, in the Oriente’s Valle de Jumay in the military district of Verapaz. The new communities, which in the short term increased secular authority, often played important roles in postindependence revolts and negotiations with state capitals as, not coincidentally, the town institutions founded to serve imperial interests often rallied residents for their own purposes.

On the Cusp of Independence

Despite its intellectual vibrancy, by the turn of the nineteenth century the core area of Guatemala struggled economically, in large part due to external constraints. The aggressive Bourbon drive to raise revenue eventually prevailed: declines in Indian tribute were offset by increased sales tax and state monopoly revenues, but those, in turn, were offset by the costs of defending Spanish interests. Between the tax policy, the consolidación of Church debt in 1804 and later donativos sent to support Spain’s war against Bonaparte, Central America expatriated much of its specie and reached independence running a government deficit that was regularly filled by subsidies from New Spain’s booming silver economy. Britain’s blockades in the late eighteenth century kept
indigo waiting in ports, prompting trading families to make connections with Anglo-Americans. Some even engaged in the illicit trade in silks and velvets that they hypocritically decried as harmful to government and their own interests, sponsoring trading trips to Philadelphia, Belize, Kingston, and Havana. Post-independence claims of Guatemala’s being “unknown” in the Atlantic world were implausible.

Nor did the period described as the “Cádiz experiment” (1810–1814; 1820–1823) set the stage for a future Guatemalan state. Although they were economically promiscuous, politically Guatemala City’s elite strongly supported Spain’s war against Bonaparte and the Cádiz constitutional monarchy, preferring autonomy in the empire over full independence. Guatemala City alcalde Antonio Juarros organized an elaborate series of public events in late 1808 to support Fernando VII, legitimizing the government through claims of Kiche and Kaqchiquel monarchies as predecessors to the Hapsburg and Spanish monarchies. Yet, like earlier “Guatemala City” histories, the report of the ceremony emphasized city and isthmus, not city and valley. This wider identity was matched in the cabildo’s actions: Juarros and other city councilors helped Captain General José de Bustamante negotiate a peaceful end to a radical movement in El Salvador in 1811 and offered only moral support to rebels from Granada (Nicaragua) who reached the capital in chains after Bustamante squelched their movement for autonomy later that year.

Peninsular decisions that sought to foster loyalty by providing a role for overseas provinces in imperial interim governments also discouraged Central American and future Guatemalan unity by authorizing election of representatives to many kinds of “province” between 1809 and 1821. These ranged from one delegate to an early Junta Central to fifteen deputies to a later Cortes. Yet the moment also hinted at connections that would underpin the later state consolidation: Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango consulted together in 1809 and 1810 to select representatives to interim Spanish government posts. Both cities accepted the possibility of a “Guatemalan” territorial unit larger than each jurisdiction alone, although without recognition of a proto-Guatemalan state they operated as members of a community of cities within a Spanish imperial framework. Quetzaltenango’s subsequent instructions to its deputy in 1814 showed the limits of alliance, proposing a separate bishopric and intendancy as well as seeking to lower royal monopolies (estancos) and increase judicial autonomy.

The Cortes’s adoption and promulgation of the Constitución de la Monarquía Española in 1812, implemented in the Kingdom of Guatemala, introduced modern representative government to residents. Through indirect elections
of members of the constitutionally mandated ayuntamientos constitucionales, two diputaciones provinciales (Provincial Deputations), and Cortes deputies, Central America’s residents learned the mechanisms of democratic governance; they began to experience the rights and duties of citizenship that would continue after independence.\(^{35}\) Still, political innovation did not consolidate a “Guatemalan” territory or identity within the captaincy general. The Cortes created two deputations for the kingdom, one each for Guatemala and Nicaragua, in an effort to mitigate regional tensions.\(^{36}\) The Cortes’s Guatemalan diputación included seven districts in what are now Chiapas (Mexico), Honduras, and El Salvador as well as Guatemala.

Where the shape or outline of future Guatemala did become evident was in the districts sending the kingdom’s deputies to ordinary Cortes sessions after

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**Figure 8.1.** Pledging loyalty to Fernando VII: The Kingdom of Guatemala, 1809. José Casildo España, “Las provincias del reino de Guatemala ofreciendo sus corazones al holocaust.” In [Domingo Juarros], Guatemala por Fernando VII (Guatemala, 1809). Private collection. This engraving, one of several illustrations in a pamphlet celebrating the Kingdom of Guatemala’s loyalty to Spain during the imperial crisis unleashed by Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1808, represents the territories many provinces, each with a distinct identity, professing loyalty to Spain.
1812. The constitutional system introduced proportional representation by population. As a result, five of the kingdom’s twelve deputies (one per seventy thousand inhabitants) represented districts that later joined the state of Guatemala.\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps not surprisingly, the preponderance of “Guatemalan” deputies did not contribute to greater internal connections. Rather, elections fostered localist creole and ladino “dreams” for more autonomy within the system; the instructions issued to parish priest José Cleto Montiel, the \textit{diputado} of Totonicapán and Quetzaltenango, repeated in 1821 recommendations for the separate institutions that the Quezaltenango ayuntamiento had proposed in 1814.\textsuperscript{38} In short, we can see a strong “Guatemalan” representation at the same time as a notable regionalism that would later influence independence from Spain, both mixed with “liberal” demands for better education and “conservative” interest in a stronger ecclesiastic presence.

One constitutional change with important postindependence ramifications for Guatemala and the other federal states had to do with incorporating new communities as partners and citizens in the body politic. The constitutional period offered the indigenous pueblos and castas the opportunity to participate in the government and to elect representatives with the full support of local and imperial officials—although some, like Quezaltenango’s Spanish city council, argued that since the indigenous were equal under the law, they should also be gently stimulated to be more productive.\textsuperscript{39} José Mariano Méndez in 1821 was only repeating points made by Central American delegates since 1810 when he defended the region’s mulattos’ right to vote, arguing that it was difficult to verify whether they were in fact African in origin.\textsuperscript{40} Beyond taking an active role in the region’s indirect elections, the K’iche communities of Totonicapán rose up in 1820 to insist on implementation of constitutional provisions, successfully getting decrees abolishing tribute payments enforced.\textsuperscript{41}

Since the new system also abolished protective institutions like separate cabildos for Spaniards and indigenous residents, the changes also revealed fissures. The corregidor at Quetzaltenango unsuccessfully sought to reserve a third of the seats in a now combined city council for indigenous residents—a majority of the jurisdiction’s people. Was the refusal a lack compassion or flexibility among local Creoles or an attempt to facilitate indigenous exclusion in the representative system?\textsuperscript{42} In 1820, the Quezaltenango cabildo sent the ladino militia to help put down an indigenous uprising at Totonicapán, outside its official jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{43} This example puts the spotlight on the highland capital’s ambition to be a provincial and not just district capital, and on the militarization of disputes between ladino Quetzaltenango leadership and indigenous Totonicapán, a tendency that would resonate and amplify after independence.
from Spain, when Totonicapán sometimes sought support from Guatemala City against its neighbor.

Essentially, in the decade leading to independence, ideas of political community and popular sovereignty offered optimism of a new contract between government and society, one based on participation and negotiation rather than imperial rule. Guatemala’s leaders adapted the inclusionary and individual political and individual citizenship of Cádiz and extended it in practice to all residents of European, indigenous, and African ancestry—ending separate rights for indigenous republics, rights liberals often saw as privileges. The period saw expanded municipal governments and provincial organization, which increased an institutional base for local and regional agendas. However, the Cádiz experiment, which aimed to bind the Americas to Spain, did not forge provincial structures that could help mold identities at a Guatemalan “state” level.

In the jurisdictions closest to Guatemala City, the highlands and Oriente drifted further apart, both in demography and economic interest, with no political structure in place to bind them to each other or to Guatemala City. Los Altos continued to look north to Mexican trade; the Oriente looked south to the cattle business with Honduras and Nicaragua, while shuttling indigo to Atlantic ports. Guatemala City’s role as arbiter and central tax authority was insufficient to build community or consensus in a system that had a limited economic integration and no institutional base. So in August–December 1821, that is, at the moment of independence, there was no unitary “Guatemalan” polity, ethnic, economic, or geographic. Any new state would be formed out of many and diverse districts, a composite organization with much to accomplish.

The Fissures of Independence

The formation of a single Guatemalan state incorporating the three distinct regions did not happen in the period of Central America’s initial independence from 1821 to 1823. As they chose separation from Spain in the fall of 1821, Central America’s territories opted (not without difficulties) to unite first with the nascent and short-lived Mexican empire of Agustín Iturbide, a process called “conditional” independence by historian Mario Rodríguez. Guatemala City leaders tried and failed to control a process that began with the decision of the town of Comitán, in the intendancy of Chiapas, to join Mexico. Despite an act of provisional independence issued in Guatemala City on September 15, 1821, offering full citizenship to those of African origin and inviting a meeting of district representatives elected under Cádiz rules to a Central American Congress to determine the isthmus’ political future, constitutional city councils and
provincial deputations issued their own acts, and many sought separate integration with Mexico.

Among the districts choosing independence from Spain and also Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango stood out, since it would later join the Guatemalan state. In late 1821, the town’s cabildo, aided by other officials in Los Altos, as historian Arturo Taracena writes, “succeeded little by little in centralizing discontent of Sololá, Suchitepéquez, and Huehuetenango toward the city of Guatemala.”45 A similar divisive dynamic emerged in the territories that would soon form Honduras and Nicaragua. Sparring cities sought either to control or split provinces. Totonicapán again opposed Quetzaltenango’s ambition “to make itself capital and elevate itself to the Rank of intendancy,”46 skeptical that Quetzaltenango’s creoles and ladinos would respect Totonicapán’s K’iche majority.47 Thus, two cities, Quezaltenango and Guatemala, offered themselves to Iturbide as separate provincial or regional powers in the area that is now Guatemala. In the end, the Mexican government supported neither and, in 1822, divided the districts of the former captaincy general into three military commands with capitals in Chiapas, Guatemala, and León (Nicaragua). Keeping Guatemala City as a regional capital, Iturbide essentially repeated the north/south divide established in Cádiz while carving off Chiapas, the only Central American province that republican Mexico kept when Iturbide’s empire dissolved in 1823.

Concerned with advancing political fragmentation, Central America’s provinces (minus Chiapas) separated from Mexico in 1823, elected representatives to a National Constituent Assembly (ANC) and put animosity aside to form the federal Republic of Central America. Although the federation’s fifteen-year life was plagued by conflict, decisions taken at the ANC had long-term effects not only on the forms of government in the isthmus, but on the shape and size of the states that emerged as republics by the 1840s.

Not surprisingly, one contentious topic addressed by the ANC’s almost three dozen representatives was how many and which states would or should comprise the new union.48 Guatemala City leaders wanted to continue as capital city of a powerful and large Guatemalan state including nearby valleys as well as cacao-producing Soconusco, the sugar and indigo region of Sonsonate, and intensively cultivated and textile-producing Quezaltenango. By contrast, deputies from several districts expressed reservations about the consequences of forming a strong Guatemalan state that included around a third of the isthmian population. Guatemalans won out when several delegates from the highlands (Altenses) with strong ties to the capital city supported their goal, rather than formation of a separate Los Altos with its capital in Quetzaltenango.49 In April 1824, the ANC refused Quetzaltenango deputy Cirilo Flores’s request.
to postpone Guatemala’s election of a state assembly pending a constitutional committee meeting, putting Altense dreams on hold. On May 11, 1824, the ANC decreed state congresses for Guatemala, San Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, its hand forced by assemblies already convened in El Salvador and Costa Rica, paving the way for a federation composed of these five states.

Guatemala became the federation’s largest state, incorporating Quezaltenango, the Central Valley, the Oriente, the Petén, and Verapaz, with a population of about six hundred thousand, around 60 percent of Central America’s overall population. This configuration assured the young state’s access to both Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and markets. Why did federal delegates agree to a Guatemalan state with more than half the isthmian population? The indigenous majority of the highlands likely influenced the decision. If Central American deputies did not agree with the New Monthly Magazine’s correspondent that the “Indians in the vicinity of Guatemala are as yet in a wild state; they speak the indigenous language, and clothe themselves like savages,” they were perhaps aware that Los Altos might be less appealing to the international community as a viable state when other Central American states’ Indians largely spoke Spanish and dressed “after the European fashion” and thus seemed “more civilized.”

The ANC’s federal state making thus bundled three regions into a single state, leaving the Creole powers concentrated in Guatemala City and the ladinos of the Oriente to engage the Maya majority of the highlands. They would spend the next quarter century seeking a new political order and negotiating to make that union work.

**Forming the State from Within**

Forging enduring Guatemalan unity out of multiple colonial districts became the work of several generations. In its first year, however, the state of Guatemala seemed to get off to a relatively strong political and economic start. In October 1825, the Guatemalan constituent assembly adopted a state constitution. It enacted decrees identifying territorial divisions and raising the status of several towns throughout the territory. Taken together, the founding documents showed aspirations to create a modern state and build trust among the districts that combined to form it.

Politically, the constitution established a “republican, popular, and representative” government. Guatemala retained Catholicism as the official religion, but permitted private worship for other sects. A system of indirect elections (with popular, district, and departmental juntas electorales) adapted from the
Cádiz constitution offered a familiar system and increased representation to one congressman for every 30,000 (rather than 70,000) inhabitants. It provided town governments for settlements with as few as 200 residents (rather than Cádiz’s 1,000). This emphasis on population as a basis for political representation gave the highland districts with over 200,000 mostly indigenous people considerable weight; the more ladino Oriente had 130,000. The magna carta explicitly maintained the possibility of creating a new state from part of Guatemala’s territory, perhaps to ensure that Los Altos’s aspirations would not delay adoption. It also welcomed Sonsonate, should the federal government determine that the district should join Guatemala instead of El Salvador. In seeking unity, the founding texts of the new Guatemala left much unresolved.

Internally, consolidation also proved a challenge. The 1825 state constitution identified sixteen districts, which it combined into seven departments. Over the next fifty years, that consolidation would be undone in pursuits of local rights: by 1877 Guatemala had twenty-two separate departments. The initial instinct to create departments equal in size, population, and economic importance reflected the three major geographic regions: the Oriente included Verapaz and Chiquimula, bordering Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador; the Central Valleys provided the districts of Guatemala/Escuintla and Sacatepéquez/Chimaltenango; the populous, indigenous western highlands gained Quetzaltenango/Soconusco, Totonicapán/Huehuetenango, and Suchitepéquez/Sololá.

The division sought economic coherence. Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango were the breadbaskets of Guatemala City. By uniting Guatemala and Escuintla, Guatemala City achieved control of indigo-producing coastal regions as that colonial economic motor entered its last days. It also sought political peace, or at least balance: Totonicapán and Quetzaltenango both became capitals, recognized in promotions to villa and city status, respectively. Verapaz took in Petén—a region subsequent governments considered largely underdeveloped, underpopulated, and ripe for colonization. Relocation of the new state’s capital from Antigua, midway between Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City, to the latter in July 1825, however, worried highlands leaders. The highland elite’s ambitions remained alive. In 1838 and again in 1848, the chiefs of this area would lead separatist movements seeking their own state.

The founding documents aimed to create a unitary population in a society of distinct pueblos. On paper, independent Guatemala was optimistic, almost utopian. The egalitarian propositions of Cádiz and the act of independence were embedded in both federal and state constitutions, by which, as the New Monthly Magazine observed, “the Indians have acquired the right of citizenship,
and are placed completely on an equality with the descendants of the Spaniards.” Where later historians saw hypocrisy or error, many contemporaries shared Guatemala’s enthusiasm for the social experiment, reporting that “they [the Indians] cannot, therefore, be otherwise than attached to the new system, and many of their entire towns are open partizans of the republican government.”60 The author believed that Guatemala could create a modern country by including rather than by separating and subjugating its indigenous inhabitants. He observed that, “in the first Constituent Assembly of Guatemala, in 1823, three Indian deputies took their seats, of whom two were ecclesiastics. Besides which, an Indian was elected Senator, and sat in the assembly of the republic; . . . nor is it improbable that in the first sittings of the Congress, several Indians will appear as deputies.” Further, while acknowledging that the Indians “lead a life of great hardship,” he noted that “in the province of Guatemala and those of Quetzaltenango, there are many who possess sheep in abundance. These persons avail themselves of the wool to weave stuffs of various kinds. . . . The Indians also manufacture cotton cloth higher in price than the stuffs we have just mentioned, and of which the Indian women make use for dress, as well as the poor classes of people in the cities.”61 The happy incorporation failed to materialize.

The combination of three distinct economies and geographic regions into a single state opened diverse economic possibilities. In its first year, Guatemala appeared poised to establish its importance to the international dye trade; in 1824 the optimistic official newspaper reported an extension of commerce and the spread of production of grana (cochineal) in Sacatepéquez, Sololá, and Verapaz.62 In 1825, traveler Dr. Lavagnino reported on both indigo and cochineal as “most known to commerce and most esteemed” in the New Monthly Magazine and also referred to “many mines of silver in the provinces,” principally the Chiquimula area in Guatemala as well as Tegucigalpa in Honduras.63 Pursuit of export economies, however, sowed the seeds of later conflict. The agrarian reform promulgated in Decree 27 (1825) promoted the expropriation of underutilized private property, giving the government power not only to sell to individual owners, but also to reserve one-third of both coasts and some of the interior for colonization. Discontent rose among small landowners, many of whom were mulatto or ladino.64

A composite Guatemala, with its capital in Guatemala City but with political and geographic units recognizing existing divisions, seemed poised for growth. An expanding economy that might draw Creole, foreign, and indigenous elites to work with the new government might lead the way. At least temporarily, the altense leadership was committed to participating in the composite state; Cirilo Flores of Quetzaltenango served as vice president to President Juan
Barrundia Zepeda, both committed to a “liberal” program of economic development and political republicanism. Had this state been a fully independent country, perhaps this initial collaboration would have had time to mature. The challenge of being the largest and most diverse state in a federation kept old conflicts alive—and created new ones.

The Challenges of Federation and Foreigners
Guatemala’s first years as a single entity were complicated by antagonistic relations between the state and the federal governments. Federal president Manuel José Arce was politically more moderate (and centralist) than the first Guatemalan elected chief of state, the federalist Juan Barrundia. With both governments based in Guatemala City, political disputes escalated into military conflict between 1826 and 1830. In 1826, Arce deposed Barrundia, and Guatemala’s vice chief, medical doctor Cirilo Flores, tried to govern from Quetzaltenango. His radical liberal legislation—which abolished the merchants’ chamber, reduced the Church tithe by 50 percent, and permitted the children of clergymen to inherit Church property—was not welcomed in highland communities. Although Flores was a local son and had represented the region in the Mexican Congress of 1822–1823, his political career and life ended simultaneously in October 1826 when a crowd referred to variously as a “mob of fanatical Indians,” rabble, and the populacho, and led by women, followed him into the sanctuary of a church, dragged him from the pulpit, and killed him. Without executive authority, Guatemala’s first government collapsed.

A dynamic that would repeat itself until the end of federation ensued. Stability would be established when federal and state governments were in sympathy, but fall apart either due to federal interference, as in 1825, or because of internal divisions—either between Guatemala City and the regions, or within the ranks of Guatemala City’s leadership. From 1826 to 1829, Guatemala’s instability came from within. Federal president Arce convened a new Guatemalan Congress, and the more conservative Mariano Aycinena was elected as chief of state. His government is largely described as dictatorial and inflexible, although this son of Guatemala’s Basque “aristocracy” succeeded in strengthening the state against federal pressures. Still, a civil war in which liberal governments in Honduras and El Salvador fought Guatemala’s leaders and federation forces continued from 1827 to early 1829, when the liberals, led by future federal president Francisco Morazán, achieved victory, sending Aycinena into exile in the United States—leaving a divided elite to face economic ruin.
In 1829, a “liberal” government took office in Guatemala after returning the capital to Antigua. It was led by vice chief of state José Gregorio Márquez, who had represented the central district of Chimaltenango in the 1825 constituent assembly. War had reduced the economic bases of the new state, particularly in the Oriente whose towns and pastures were on a road now transited more by soldiers than by cattle. José Cecilio del Valle, in a pessimistic article for the Sociedad Económica in 1830, reported abundant natural resources and potential, but failure in “artisanal” development; the country lacked exports due to the abandonment of grana and indigo; it had failed to follow Havana’s lead and invest in coffee; and it lacked industry and roads for either interior or exterior commerce. Aware of competition from textile production from Europe and
Asia, he did note that independence brought free trade policies that increased the number of ships trading in local ports.\textsuperscript{72}

Despite (or perhaps because of) these difficulties, Guatemala’s principal families disdained compromise. Conservatives refused an invitation to participate in a triumvirate executive that might have offered some balance to the government. Without them, a more radical legislative assembly abolished all the decrees of 1826–1829 and exiled many Spanish-born residents, including the archbishop and members of the former government; it assigned “forced loans” to those they called traitors, abolished religious orders and confiscated their properties.\textsuperscript{73}

A few years of self-government achieved what independence could not: a hard break between Spaniard and Creole; several Spanish families were sent into exile.

Six years after its constitution and foundational legislation, the state of Guatemala received a respite from internal and external pressures. With the election of Mariano Gálvez as president, a new liberal government pursued Guatemala’s economic and political promise through transforming legislation. Under Gálvez the Guatemalan and federation governments cohabitated in Guatemala City, until the latter moved to San Salvador in 1834; for a time they collaborated, and experienced the necessary peace to experiment with state building. A sign that the new Guatemalan state was getting ready to claim the world’s attention was Gálvez’s commission of the country’s first history and map, influenced by José Cecilio del Valle’s recommendations. A former imperial bureaucrat and a long-term thinker, del Valle understood a point later historians would underline: maps and the knowledge they represented were tools for the government to use internally to exert control and externally to make political and economic connections abroad.\textsuperscript{74}

Guatemala’s first atlas, published in 1832 by Miguel Rivera Maestre, with one map of the whole country and a map of each department,\textsuperscript{75} complemented a history of the contemporary period commissioned by Alejandro Marure. The legislature, for its part, commissioned a compilation of state laws in 1836.\textsuperscript{76} Gálvez also sent Juan Galindo, Marure, and others to inspect and document pre-Hispanic ruins to help claim and recover Guatemala’s ancient past.\textsuperscript{77} Map, history, and legal record—all three texts spoke to a consolidating Guatemala with a land, a past, and a legal code focused on its current territory, not the entire isthmus. When Marure’s second edition of \textit{Bosquejo histórico de las revoluciones de Centroamérica} was published in 1877, historian Lorenzo Montúfar emphasized that Gálvez had commissioned it so “his patria could be known in both worlds.”\textsuperscript{78} At the level of state government, Guatemala was taking shape. Still, the frontiers with Mexico and Belize remain vague.
Part of becoming known was applying what many considered foreign principles in the new state. The Gálvez government embraced the idea of legislating progress and building a new nation as well as a new state. In his 1836 message to the Guatemalan Congress, Gálvez emphasized “innovation.” He insisted on making “everything new, everything republican: nothing of the colonial, monarchical system” because, otherwise, “for Independence, we would have done nothing more than change the name of things.”

To deliver this program, his government undertook to change legal and social culture, and to impose a new liberal political system that emphasized equality under the law as the way to end distinctions among persons of different race or class, and to provide equal opportunities. Many laws passed between 1832 and 1836 sought to reduce Church influence in society: in 1833 the formerly Jesuit University of San Carlos was converted into a secular Academy of Studies; in 1837, the legislature enacted civil matrimony, allowing not only nullification but divorce; it abolished payment of Church tithes, ended religious holidays, declared freedom of conscience (religion), and more. To broaden political participation, the
Gálvez government extended more autonomy to the municipalities, enabling the “pueblos [to] administer their business” and use that independence to join in “the practical applications of the representative and federal system.”

The most innovative effort was to “modernize” the judicial system by translating and adapting the Livingston Codes. Gálvez considered a system that mixed old Spanish laws and orders with Cádiz-era and federation documents a disordered mess that contributed to criminal behavior. A committee adapted the Livingston system (created and then rejected by the Louisiana legislature) to the Guatemalan context. The assembly approved five codes and a definitional law between 1834 and 1836 and published “lessons” in the Seminario Guatemalteco and other newspapers in 1837. The new jury system proposed a turn away from long-standing traditions of separate justice for different social and ethnic groups—and differing bodies such as the Church and the military. The goal was to create a liberal and modern nation-state by ending the role of single salaried judges and having people on juries take on judicial responsibilities. Implementation proved difficult and in practice the results were negligible. With the exception of habeas corpus provisions, in March 1838 the new codes were suspended due to “the sad results of this premature intent and great discontent in the pueblos.”

Gálvez’s interest in innovation was sometimes offset by practical considerations. When a national law did not exist, legislation indicated that the government should rely on Spanish precedent. The executive branch relied on jefes de departamento who played almost the same role as the governors and jefes políticos of the ancient regime and Cádiz experiment. Nor did Gálvez try to change the role of municipalities, created under Cádiz, which collected the new taxes, built and maintained prisons, administered primary schools, and recruited for the military. The Church did not stop registering births, marriage, and death, even if the law had removed this responsibility. Further, traditional alcaldes (magistrates) continued to serve as local judges, either under the new legal system or, after elected judges (jueces de primera instancia) were established, de facto when there were not enough legally trained individuals to hold these offices; a jury system, again adopted, was rejected by many citizens as well.

At the socioeconomic level, Gálvez promoted cochineal and indigo production; imported the first coffee seeds from Havana; planned roads, ports, and other public works; designed a new public education system; and dreamed of prosperity for the new country, which he achieved to a limited extent. With amicable relations between state and federation, there were economic advances. In his address to Congress in 1837, the chief of state boasted that commerce had doubled from 1834 to 1836. In this economic climate, it is perhaps not surprising...
that there was a measure of reconciliation between those who lost the civil war of 1826–1829 and the liberal government. Notably, in 1834 “the aristocracy” attended the Independence Day celebration (September 15), followed by Gálvez’s reelection in 1835, symbolically sealing the rapprochement.88

Unfortunately, elite consensus in the capital prompted conflict with large segments of society in both the Oriente and the highlands. The Gálvez administration’s promotion of commercial development, in the form of individual and private company acquisition of what the government defined as public land, frequently infringed on lands owned by Maya communities and ladino peasants in central and eastern Guatemala—despite a stated respect for communal lands. Such policies provoked increasing challenges, not only by the poor but also by men like mulatto landowner Teodoro Mexía of Santa Rosa.89

While an April 17, 1835, legislative order established a commission to hear and respond to land disputes, little changed before rebellions broke out throughout the Southeast in 1837.90

In addition, despite aspirations to create more equitable socioeconomic relations based on equality before the law, the state government sometimes abandoned theory for repressive practice. In 1835, President Gálvez responded to news of insecurity and an assault on the road to El Salvador by abolishing municipal governments in the Oriente, “substituting in their place local justices.”91 In the pueblos of Santa Rosa Department, including Jalpatagua and Moyuta, a general discontent centered on what seemed an arbitrary state interest in reducing local governmental autonomy to “organize the social, religious, cultural and economic life of the communities.”92

In the Oriente, or Montaña, discontent grew in response to policies that promoted foreign investment and “colonization” (or expropriation of land for foreigners) in about half the state’s territory—through contracts Gálvez signed with Belgian and British companies with support from the federal government.95 While cochineal production assured Guatemala a “dominant position among the Central American states in its trade with England,” former Bonapartist officers from France, unscrupulous bankers from England, Protestant missionaries and educators from the United States, and Belgian colonists who found their way into Guatemalan society created tensions within the new country. Although they were only a handful, and some established joint companies with local merchants, foreign residents resisted paying war taxes. Their tendency to support their own, rather than local, interests and call on their consuls to bring in warships to defend them made them flashpoints for local dissatisfaction.94
A cholera morbus epidemic in Verapáz and Chiquimula compounded the challenges. Recent Protestant settlers were imagined responsible; doctors and officials trying to contain the outbreak were accused on being “poisoners,” sparking a revolt in June 1837 that transformed into the “war of the Mountain.” An uprising begun by rural residents shouting “Long live religion and death to foreigners!” spread with the support of those whose power had diminished under liberal influence—namely, merchants and powerful families in Guatemala City, some members of the Church hierarchy, as well as landed people in the Montaña increasingly beleaguered by state policies. Gálvez, who had repeatedly resisted accepting election to a second term, was forced from office in February 1838. As Ralph Lee Woodward concluded, the force necessary to implement the liberal programs seemed to contradict the rhetoric of liberty.

As the state was embattled in the Oriente, Quetzaltenango’s ambitions to form its own country resurfaced. On February 2, 1838, deputies met in Quetzaltenango and declared the state of Los Altos. The federal Congress, meeting in El Salvador, authorized the secession, despite its own waning authority. Guatemala’s Congress accepted the decision. Guatemala City’s interest in the highlands proved insufficient to give leaders an appetite for civil war, or a war that might pit it against even a weakened federation government.

Quetzaltenango’s ambitions were also, as Arturo Taracena argues, an indigenous nightmare. If Los Altos’s ladinos protested liberal reforms, the indigenous in some communities preferred the central Guatemalan government. The Los Altos leadership enticed three towns of Suchitepéquez to join their sixth state in 1838 by offering department status to their unified districts. Other Indian villages met and opposed the Altenese project to create a sixth Central American state. Throughout February and March, Zutuhil municipalities—San Pedro, San Juan La Laguna, San Marcos la Laguna, and Santiago Atitlán—wrote to the Guatemalan government opposing a state they claimed would harm established commerce between the lake zone and Guatemala City and lead to double taxation. Kuiché municipality Joyabaj also mistrusted Quetzaltenango’s reassurances. When Quetzaltenango sought to collect taxes in Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán (Sololá) and San Sebastián (Retahuleu), the villages held cabildos abiertos and refused. In short, some highland communities turned to Guatemala’s government for support against Quetzaltanango’s ladinos, only to find that the state quickly warned Los Altos of complaints from “subjects of an independent state.” The indigenous municipalities first sought to resolve their conflict directly with Los Altos authorities, and then with Guatemala’s aid. Only when both state governments appeared deaf to their complaints did they
join Rafael Carrera and the Oriente’s forces to compel change at the top. Once both the highlands and Oriente opposed the central government, the Gálvez administration fell.

From State to Republic

By late 1838 Guatemala’s survival, whether as a federal state or independent country, was in doubt. In 1839, president Mariano Rivera Paz called on the patriotism of Guatemala’s constituent assembly to help restore a country whose “society seemed dissolved,” led to the brink of “misery and disorganization” by inexperience, “revolutionary furor,” and a fetish for “all that is new and the desire to destroy all that existed.” Yet conservative policies proved equally divisive. Guatemala required a decade to transition from weak federal state to viable republic, twice forcibly putting down revolt in the Oriente and reincorporating Los Altos (1839). It declared provisional separation from the federation (1839), defeated federal president Francisco Morazán and his largely Honduran and Salvadoran forces (1840), and suppressed a new rebellion in the Oriente (1847). Still, Guatemala’s general outlines became clear soon after Gálvez’s government collapsed. Under a government established by an Oriente rebel, the mestizo or ladino Rafael Carrera, a veneer of normalcy returned, albeit with more emphasis on economic than on universal rights. Guatemalan legislators repealed many “innovations” of the first period—abandoning the experiment in universal and individual rights, as well as Gálvez’s anticlerical policy—in search of formulas that contributed to stability. Carrera was an implacable enemy of the federation after its army had tried to vanquish him. The leadership of Mariano Rivera Paz (1839–1844), and Carrera (1844–1848; 1851–1865) led to Guatemala’s emergence as an independent republic in 1847 and prevented Central America’s other states from reestablishing the union.

Carrera’s humble origins as an illiterate pig-herder from the Oriente and his mixed-race ancestry led many nineteenth-century critics to label him a “celebrated Indian despot” (1857) and “dark colored and ill-looking mestizo.” His support, according to many contemporaries, came from the priesthood and “his subordinate instruments, generally Indian or half breeds” or merely from the Indians, while all other “classes . . . have never ceased to hate and fear him, and watch for an opportunity to overturn his power.” Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., René Reeves, Douglass Sullivan-González, and others have championed a more nuanced approach to his career, which put the first acknowledged non-European in control of the country and, for some, initiated the rise of the ladino state. Sullivan-González in particular shows that the Church, under
Antonio Larrazábal and later Antonio García Peláez, was a tentative ally, willing to call for patriotism and unity although not always to put its wealth or clergy into rebellious communities.\textsuperscript{108}

During what many call the conservative regime (1839–1871), Guatemala’s leaders failed to pass a new constitution. They governed with “Constitutive Laws” approved in 1839 by a Constituent Assembly: one each for executive (Decree 65) and judicial (Decree 75) power, and (Decree 76): Declaration of the Rights of the State and its Inhabitants.\textsuperscript{109} Decree 65 heralded an increasingly powerful executive, adopting the title of “president” for the supreme executive
Decree 76 declared the state “sovereign, free and Independent,” while still insisting on the sovereignty of the internal pueblos; it reestablished Catholicism as the official religion and created a separate status for the indigenous, who supposedly lacked “the ilustración (understanding/education) sufficient to know and defend their own rights.” The code protected the property of any “population, corporation or person” and insisted on individual rights, including those of making wills and expressing opinions, while it prohibited torture and illegal detention.\textsuperscript{111}

Other legislation overtly recalled the colonial system. In 1838, the assembly reestablished the mint and the merchant’s chamber with their separate rights, or \textit{fueros}. It then replaced \textit{jefes departamentales} with corregidores, reestablished ecclesiastic supervision of education and adopted a system of residencies (end of term reviews) for state officials; it reestablished the Church’s \textit{fuero}.\textsuperscript{112} Voting for city councilors was restricted to sitting members, who were required to choose among former councilors.\textsuperscript{113} The legislative assembly also revoked the exile of Archbishop Ramón Casáus y Torres, appointed by King Ferdinand VII, reopened monastic orders, and resumed collecting Church tithes. Courts, too, returned to using the Recopilación de Indias in cases that seemed appropriate.\textsuperscript{114}

For those who saw the liberal-republican system as a menace to local autonomy and the culture of indigenous republics, this policy represented not a retreat from modernity, but an attempt to overcome the government’s clear weakness and inability to control the country.\textsuperscript{115} The reversion to political processes grounded in ways that had ruled for centuries before 1808 resolved problems inherent in a country with a large rural, illiterate population—long adapted to earlier Spanish ways. A deputy in Guatemala’s 1839 legislature reported that the town of Comalapa (Chimaltenango) lived “major disorder” in all aspects of governance from the administration of justice to tax collection, maintenance of town buildings, including the jail, which “is a lake inside.” According to one Indian alcalde, the disasters stemmed in part from the move from perpetual to elected alcaldes, who were replaced before they began to undertake projects.\textsuperscript{116} In other towns, lack of literate residents to serve municipal posts undermined new ways of government. The governor of Verapaz reported to Congress that only one ladino in the Indian villages of Cahabón and Lanquin could read and speak Spanish. Over the ladino’s protests, the governor named him alcalde and ordered him to communicate government decrees and orders. The unwilling official reported back that the towns’ \textit{municipales} (councilors) were inebriated and spent locally the funds collected for the national war tax.\textsuperscript{117} Such reports suggest that many indigenous communities preferred to live by their own cultures—and keep revenues at home. No wonder earlier
administrations’ attempts to press structural changes had proved both ineffective and unpopular. Gálvez’s anticlerical policies had led to reductions in the number of clergy in rural parishes; with the return of stronger Church-state relations, priests resumed their function as official and unofficial state agents in communities long accustomed to their presence, helping to inculcate a Guatemalan identity as well as religious values in their sermons.\textsuperscript{118}

While socially conservative steps aimed to stabilize the Guatemalan state, much new law passed between 1838 and 1848 promoted exports and commercial life, as in the foundation of a national bank.\textsuperscript{119} The new government continued to welcome European immigrants, with a little more caution than Gálvez had shown. Under Carrera and his supporters, German colonists established farms on what would emerge as the Costa Cuca coffee regions in the western highlands.\textsuperscript{120} Under conservative government, legal compilations—the first by Alejandro Marure, covering to 1841, and the second by Andrés Fuentes Franco, reaching to 1856—were published.\textsuperscript{121} Also, if Guatemala under Carrera reestablished religious education and the colonial Universidad de San Carlos, the latter retained “liberal” professors like Friar José Mariano Herrarte (theology and law) to promote what historian Blake Pattridge calls “catholic liberalism”—the parts of liberalism that remained in effect until the Reforma of 1871 reestablished a government that called itself liberal. Pattridge found a dynamic curriculum, with students embarking on professional studies in French and English languages, surveyors’ training, and programs in medicine and law. The conservative government attempted to balance a still precarious political situation with programs promoting commercial development.

\textit{A Conservative Republic}

At the end of the period considered here, as Guatemala finally called the world’s attention to itself as a fully independent republic, a liberal “revolution” in 1848 came followed by the establishment in 1851 of a conservative republic that institutionalized presidential government and militarized the state. Both remained axes of national authority into the twentieth century. It took a personalist dictatorship that recognized regional and local differences rather than a democracy that attempted to legislate homogenizing laws and common rights to link three regions and distinct interest groups—economic, ethnic, political—together in a single country.

On March 21, 1847, Rafael Carrera declared Guatemala a republic. He rejected the right of the western highlands, Los Altos, to form a separate state. For the first time, he declared Guatemala “indivisible.”\textsuperscript{122} In addition, he signaled
his hope that Central America’s other federal states would follow his example. According to Carrera, the states “despite the reduction suffered in their wealth and population . . . comprise sufficient elements to constitute themselves into independent Republics, and in the full capacity of political bodies. Thus they have existed, in fact, since the Federation dissolved, or better said, since they shook off the yoke of Spain.” Carrera astutely and accurately presented his decision as consonant with liberal policy, citing a law approved by two legislatures in 1833 that permitted the state of Guatemala “if the federal pact were to falter” to consider itself as “organized prior to that pact” to form a new social compact or “constitute itself for itself alone.” At the request of José Francisco Barrundia, a former radical, the Guatemalan constituent assembly ratified Carrera’s decision for independence and absolute sovereignty. On the same date, Carrera called on Guatemalans to watch over “the Republic that I leave founded . . . with great elements of power.”

If Guatemala’s entry into the world as an independent republic began auspiciously, over the next four years the country suffered regional conflicts similar to those that divided it after the hasty marriage of Los Altos, Oriente, and Guatemala City in 1825. Ralph Lee Woodward describes 1848 as a decisive year and a failed revolution. More comprehensively, Douglass Sullivan-González sees 1847–1851 as marked by a civil war brought on by Carrera’s inability to address the needs of struggling sharecroppers in the Oriente—while dealing with overtures to British colonization projects, liberal opportunism, and western highland indigenous communities’ resistance to land challenges pressed by ladinos. A generation into statehood, Guatemala still lacked a unitary trajectory. Both conservative constitutional rule and liberal governance had proved ineffective at creating political unity—and no new economy had risen to integrate the imagined nation within or to forge strong ties to an emerging industrial world.

In early 1847, a new rebellion broke out in the Montaña on Carrera’s Palencia estate. The president dedicated the next year to pacifying the Oriente’s peoples. He cited laws Gálvez passed against his own revolt to justify application of military justice to the rebels. He agreed to call elections for a new legislative assembly, a demand by liberals who then won, installed their legislative assembly, and established a government in August 1848, surprising many. Carrera withdrew to Mexico for the next year. Instead of bringing peace, the new liberal government exacerbated problems.

Its forces proved as incapable as Carrera’s in pacifying the Oriente. In the western highlands Quetzaltenango leveraged the crisis to again demand sepa-
ration and an independent state. Neither rebellion’s leaders accepted amnesty and invitations to become departmental governors, despite an offer to establish new ejidos for Oriente communities that had lost their lands. On August 26, 1848, the Quetzaltenango city council pronounced its separation from Guatemala. It saw the June 15, 1838, federal decree and reintegration in 1840 as the “effect of force and terror,” thus Los Altos’s reincorporation into Guatemala was illegal. With Carrera’s temporary fall in 1848, they insisted on having been “placed anew in the exercise of their Sovereignty and Independence.” With support from leaders from the Montaña, Quetzaltenango formed a governing junta representing four of six Los Altos districts (Sololá and Suchitepéquez sent no delegates); an interim government pronounced in favor of the Los Altos constitution. El Salvador recognized the new state. In Guatemala, a committee of the legislative assembly studying the case vacillated; it would make no decision until every Altense municipality expressed its opinion. Guatemala’s interim president, Juan Antonio Martínez, then declared war against the Los Altos junta, capturing Quetzaltenango on October 25. The separatist movement withered, and the region was permanently integrated into the Guatemalan republic.

By late 1848, with the Oriente rebellion led by brothers Serapio and Vicente Cruz still strong and after two changes of executive power, Guatemala’s liberal assembly named Colonel Mariano Paredes interim president. An apolitical military man, Paredes reestablished order, working with moderates while increasing military influence. His ascendancy signaled the end of liberal government in Guatemala for a quarter century. Carrera returned from exile in Mexico and little by little reinserted himself into public life, helping put down Altense and Oriente rebellions, and recovering the presidency in 1851. Although Decree 76 continued “in force as fundamental law” until 1871, Carrera’s return brought important modifications. An October 19 constitutive act created a presidentialist state run by a president who was both “first magistrate” and “governing authority of the nation.” Elected not by the people, but by a “general assembly” composed of members of the legislative chamber, the archbishop, supreme court, and members of the Council of State, the president was eligible for four-year renewable terms in office. The fifty-five representatives were not considered “legislators” because they shared the work of legislating with the president. This charter was revised on January 29, 1855, to name Rafael Carrera president for life (presidente vitalicio), a position he retained until his death in 1865. The experiment of a national state built on popular sovereignty was suspended.
Country of Continuities and Ruptures

The history of Guatemala from 1759 to 1851 is one of rupture and reconciliation. Under Bourbon reforms and Cádiz government, the districts around Guatemala City participated in the modernization of the relationship between government and society, accepting greater government authority and experimenting with direct and indirect elections and equality before the law. They did not, however, form a single polity or society. The challenge of independence was to join territories with distinct populations, economies, and leaderships into a whole. Nation formation did not build on enduring political relationships, but re-created them in thirty years of trial and error from 1821 to 1851. The Republic of Guatemala was very much a new country.

From the establishment of the Guatemalan state in 1825, with its constitution and representative government, until the fall of Mariano Gálvez’s government in 1838, the Hispanic revolution that was part of the Atlantic revolutions was implemented first to break with ancien régime practices and then to continue the “Cádiz revolution” in an independent country. With the revolution or rebellion “of the Montaña” in 1838, the pendulum swung back and conservatives found in caudillo Rafael Carrera the possibility to break with Gálvez-era “innovation.” A third revolution in 1848 briefly returned more moderate “innovators” to promote their system of liberties, individual rights, and representative institutions until Carrera initiated autocratic government (under constitutional laws) until 1871. If they began with different ideas about how to build a state, Guatemalan leaders came to accept the need to establish enduring institutions that covered the three major geographic regions brought together together in 1825.

They participated under Barrundia, Gálvez, and Carrera’s leadership by seeking to develop agricultural products for export, to improve state infrastructure, and to offer national and international investors a population that would work hard and respect the rules. Gálvez and the liberals tried (at least on paper) to create a nation of equals before the law—a national pueblo. By midcentury, Carrera and his allies and successors paused that experiment to focus on binding together regional, ethnic, and economic interests that remained disparate, despite liberal efforts to legislate unity.

By 1851, Guatemala was a sovereign republic. Although its international limits required formal recognition by its neighbors, the country’s territory and existence were largely accepted at home and abroad. Los Altos and Oriente accepted Guatemala’s authority. The government deployed military, ecclesiastic, and civil authorities to promote the state agenda in the countryside. The population remained largely rural, but cities started to attract new residents. The first coffee producers were finding an export market. Privatization of
indigenous lands had started, pushed in part by the arrival of entrepreneurial European immigrants, even though grandiose projects for foreign colonization fizzled. Some indigenous “became” ladinos, a process of cultural assimilation common in Central America, but substantial Mayan populations retained their languages, customs, and tendency to cooperate with or defy the state to suit local interests. The rise of “ladino” power was not yet fully part of the political, economic, or cultural landscape.

By 1841, national laws were codified—without a constitutional implantation of national sovereignty and legislative rights to serve as bulwark against executive power. The mid-nineteenth-century Guatemalan state was personalist, the price of a fragile unity. Future governments would seek to solve problems by legislating for “Guatemalan” conditions that remained marked by deep internal disparities, often forgetting their origins in the three separate political, economic, and cultural entities stitched together to make a nation.

Notes

1 “Guatemala,” *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 10 (1825), 578.
The rest of Central America had lower percentages of indigenous languages. See Jordana Dym and Christophe Belaubre, introduction to *Politics, Economy and Society in Bourbon Central America, 1759–1821*, ed. Dym and Belaubre (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007), and Juarros, *Compendio*.


For a seventeenth-century list of products, see Fuentes y Guzmán, *Recordación florida*.


Dym, From Sovereign Villages, 42–46.


Julio César Pinto Soria, Lados e indígenas en la nación criolla guatemalteca; de la colonia al régimen conservador (Guatemala: USAC, CEUR, 1998).

Arturo Taracena Arriola, Invención criolla, sueño ladino, pesadilla indígena: Los Altos de Guatemala: De región a Estado, 1740–1850 (Antigua, Guatemala: CIRMA, 1999), 78–79; and Sarazúa Pérez, “Centralización política,” passim; there is need for an equally detailed study of the area around Antigua, Guatemala.

Dym, From Sovereign Villages, 42–46.

Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Seville, Guatemala 44:6, Pieza 4, Erección de Cabildo en el pueblo de ladinos de Jumay (1764), Guatemala; Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Consejos 20953, Pieza 74, Reducción a población de los mulatos de Ystapa (1764), ff. 5, 12.


See Gustavo Palma Murga, “Between Fidelity and Pragmatism: Guatemala’s Commercial Elite Responds to Bourbon Reforms on Trade and Contraband,” in Dym and Belaubre, Politics, Economy and Society in Bourbon Central America, 103–129, esp. 112, 120. See also Brown, “Profits, Prestige, and Persistence”; Palma

30 Dym, “‘Enseñanza en los jeroglíficos y emblemas’: Igualdad y lealtad en Guatemala por Fernando VII (1810),” *Secuencia, Numero Conmemorativo* (Mexico) (2008), 75–99.


33 José María Peynado, *Instrucciones para la constitución fundamental de la Monarquía Española y su Gobierno, . . . dadas por el M. I. Ayuntamiento de la M. N. . y L. Ciudad de Guatemala a su diputado el Sr. Dr. D. Antonio de Larrazábal . . .* (Guatemala: Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1953), articles 68–71; AGCA A Legajo 12189, Expediente 15737, July 15, 1811, José María Peynado al cabildo; AGCA B Legajo 496, Expediente 8454, Ayuntamiento de Quezaltenango al Ayto. de Guatemala, October 8, 1811.

34 AGI Guatemala 629, Instrucción del ayuntamiento de Quezaltenango, July 9, 1813; José Cleto Montiel letter, July 1, 1814; Taracena Arriola, *Invención criolla*, 78–81. The instructions also asked to improve the education of indigenous and ladino residents, and to ensure a clergyman in each village.


36 *Diario de las discusiones y actas de las Cortes*, January 13, 1812 (Cádiz: Imprenta Real, 1813), 260. The 1821 Cortes authorized a diputación for each intendancy.

37 Rodríguez, *Cádiz Experiment*, 108; Newberry Library, Ayer Ms 1131, Tabla para facilitar la elección de los diputados de Cortes suplentes y de la provincia de Guatemala [1812].

38 AGI Guatemala 629, Instrucción del ayuntamiento de Quezaltenango, July 9, 1813; carta de José Cleto Montiel, July 1, 1814; Taracena Arriola, *Invención criolla*, 78–81.

39 AGI, Guatemala 629, Instrucción, July 9, 1813.

40 AGI Indiferente General 1569, 146–1-16, José Mariano Méndez to Secretario del despacho de la Gobernación de Ultramar, Madrid, July 4, 1821.


43 Taracena Arriola, *Invención criolla*, 83.

44 See Rodríguez, *Cádiz Experiment*, chap. 6, and Jordana Dym, “Actas de independencia: De la Capitanía General de Guatemala a la República Federal de Cen-


50 AGCA B Legajo 91, Expediente 2462, Cirilo Flores, Proposal, April 1, 1824, ff. 1, 27.


52 “Guatemala,” *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 10 (1825), 590.

53 Guatemala (State), Constitución de Guatemala, 1825, Articles 39, 45, 50–75, 161–162; Decreto 60, October 12, 1825.

54 See José Cecilio del Valle’s statistics in the 1830 *Mensual de la Sociedad Económica*, 29–52 (see note 71) for the region and department breakdowns. The seventeen representatives in state and federal congresses from Guatemala reflected regional populations: seven (41.2 percent), Western Highlands; four (23.5 percent), Oriente; and six (35 percent), Center.

55 Constitución de Guatemala, 1825, Articles 36, 76.

56 Guatemala’s sister federal states also used the language of pueblos in early constitutions. For an early analysis, see “Republic of Central America,” *North American Review* (January 1828), 136–142; see also Constitution of Guatemala (1825), Preamble, Articles 2, 162–165.


58 Asamblea Constituyente del Estado de Guatemala, Decreto 63, October 29, 1825, Archivo Histórico del Arquidiocesis de Guatemala, C, T1/105. Escuintla was also promoted.

59 Asamblea Constituyente del Estado de Guatemala, Decreto 49, July 22, 1825.

60 “Guatemala,” 591.

61 “Guatemala,” 592.

62 *Gaceta del Gobierno Supremo de Guatemala* 9, May 7, 1824, 66.

63 “Guatemala,” 580.

Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Central America*, vol. 3 (1801–1887) (San Francisco: History Company, 1887), 113. Barrundia had a policy that “did him honor,” shaming Great Britain to give up claims to Roatán.


Fry, “Política agraria y reacción campesina, 37–38.


Sarazúa Pérez, “Centralización política.”


José Cecilio del Valle, “Carta Geográfica,” *Mensual de la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del Estado de Guatemala* 3 (June 1830), 59.


Alejandro Marure’s *Catálogo*, published in 1841 after Gálvez fell, was the first of its kind in the state and region.


86 Dym, *From Sovereign Villages*, chap. 7. For the impact of indigenous villages, see Alda Mejías, *La participación indígena*.


90 Woodward, *Rafael Carrera*, 51; Fry, “Política agraria y reacción campesina,” 40–42.

91 Pinto Soria, *Reformismo liberal*, 14129.


101 Mariano Rivera Paz, Memoria que presente a la Asamblea constituyente en su primera sesión, el Consejo Gefe del Estado de Guatemala . . . (Guatemala: Imprenta del Gobierno del Estado . . ., 1839), 1.

102 After reincorporation, the Guatemalan government split Los Altos’s territories into six departments (Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Sololá, Suchitepéquez, Huehuetenango, and San Marcos).


104 Dunlop cited in “Revolutions in Central America,” 326.

105 “Revolutions in Central America,” 326.


107 Woodward, Rafael Carrera; Reeves, Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians; Sullivan-González, Piety, Power, and Politics.


109 For original texts, see Jorge Mario García Laguardia, Constituciones Iberoamericanas: Guatemala (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM, 2006; Decreto 76 (1839), sec. 1, arts. 2, 3, 6.

110 AGCA B Legajo 214, Expediente 4941, f. 588, for the ms. copy of Decreto 65 (1839).

111 Decreto 76 (1839), sec. 2, arts. 3, 11, 12, 14, 19. See also Pinto Soria, Reformismo liberal, 19–22.


113 Manuel Pineda Mont, Recopilación de las leyes de Guatemala (Guatemala City: Imprenta de la Paz, 1869–1872), 510–511, Decreto, October 2, 1839, arts. 56–62; and Decreto, September 21, 1845, 572–574.

114 Luján Muñoz, Breve historia, 96–97.

115 Pinto Soria, Reformismo liberal, 16–18.

116 AGCA C1 Leg. 56, Exp. 1569, Organización territorial del estado, August–September 1839, ff. 30–31.

117 AGCA C1 Leg. 38, Exp. 942, J P Arriaga (Verapáz) to Guatemalan Congress, April 2 4, 1839, ff. 5–12.

118 Sullivan-González, Piety, Power, and Politics.


120 See Griffith, Empires in the Wilderness.


122 Taracena Arriola, Invención criolla, 331.

Guatemala, Decreto N. 15 (1847), 8–11, passim.

Guatemala, Decree, March 21, 1847, in Pineda Mont, Recopilación T, 1, 73–75.


Woodward, Rafael Carrera, 196.

Taracena Arriola, Invención criolla, 332.

Cited in Taracena Arriola, Invención criolla, 336.


Guatemala, Acta Constitutiva, October 19, 1851, arts. 3, 4, and 6.

Guatemala, Acta Constitutiva, 1851, arts. 5 and 11.

Woodward, Rafael Carrera, chap. 11.