Gema Kloppe-Santamaría*

Cristero Memory Reloaded: History, Social Media, and the New Christian Right in Mexico

https://doi.org/10.1515/iph-2025-0022
Received July 19, 2025; accepted October 15, 2025;
published online November 20, 2025

Abstract: The aim of this article is to examine the reverberations of the Cristero War in the discourses, symbols, and practices of Mexico's new Christian right as expressed in the social media communications produced and consumed by right-wing leaders and their supporters. Via social media, new Christian right leaders have purposefully used Cristero symbols of piety, martyrdom, sacrificial violence, and religious militancy to appeal to a sector of Mexican society that sees the Cristero War as an unresolved conflict and an ongoing struggle between a Catholic nation and an impious state. While the new Christian right has been unable to advance its agenda via formal or electoral politics, its growing presence on social media and localized grassroot movements, next to its transnational reach (via connections with MAGA leaders in the United States), point to its rising significance in a country that has thus far remain exempt from the ascent of the far right in the Latin American region.

Keywords: Cristero War; religion; violence; Mexico; new Christian right

"We will not stand by and watch while our country suffers; we will not stand idly by, we will not remain silent. Like Agustín de Iturbide and other brave men like Miguel Miramón, Tomás Mejía and the Cristeros: Father Pro, Joselito Sánchez del Río and Anacleto González Flores, we will give our lives if necessary. We will never surrender! Mexico is our reason and our strength! Until the last breath for our nation, until the last breath for freedom! Long live Mexico!"[1]

Eduardo Verástegui
(September 12, 2024)

"Today as yesterday, in defense of what is most sacred: God, his love and his word. The body dies, but never the soul. It is worth living and dying for Our Lord. Active Peaceful Cristero Resistance. United in Christ. Father Pro, a courageous example for eternity. Thank you! Prayer and Action: Counterrevolution!"[2]

Raúl Tortolero
(November 24, 2024)

These statements, published on social media by Raúl Tortolero, founder of the so-called International Cristero Army and promoter of the "cultural counterrevolution,"[3] and Eduardo Verástegui, actor, film producer, Donald Trump supporter, and two-times organizer of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Mexico,[4] shed light on the centrality of the Cristero War on the discourses and ideologies of the new Christian right in contemporary Mexico.[5] While there

1 Verástegui, Eduardo (@EVerastegui), "No nos quedaremos mirando mientras nuestro país sufre; no nos quedaremos de brazos cruzados, no nos quedaremos callados. Como Agustín de Iturbide y otros valientes como Miguel Miramón, Tomás Mejía y los cristeros: el Padre Pro, Joselito Sánchez del Río y Anacleto González Flores, daremos nuestra vida si es necesario. ¡No nos rendimos jamás! ¡México es nuestra razón y nuestra fuerza! ¡Hasta el último aliento por nuestra nación, hasta el último aliento por la libertad! ¡Viva México!", X, September 12, 2024, https://x.com/EVerastegui/status/1834281105488331253. [Translation by author]

2 Tortolero, Raúl (@raultortolero1), "Hoy como ayer, en defensa de lo más sagrado: Dios, su amor y su palabra. El cuerpo muere, pero nunca el alma. Vale la pena vivir y morir por Nuestro Señor. Resistencia Cristera Activa Pacífica. Unidos en Cristo. El Padre Pro, valiente ejemplo para la eternidad. ¡Gracias! ¡Oración y Acción: Contrarrevolución!" X, November 24, 2024, https://x.com/raultortolero1/status/1860551102770610621. [Translation by author]

3 Tortolero is also the author of three books in Spanish, including *La Contrarrevolución Cultural* (The Cultural Counterrevolution), *Nueva Derecha: el retorno de Dios a la cultura* (New Right:Tthe Return of God to Culture), and *Pensamiento Cristero* (Cristero Thought).

4 Eduardo Verástegui was unable to run as an independent candidate in Mexico's 2024 elections and has since then founded a new political party, Movimiento Viva México, around the themes of "life, family, and liberty."

5 Some of the most visible figures of the new Christian right in Mexico include Eduardo Verástegui, Gilberto Lozano, and Raúl Tortolero, while movements and organizations linked to this ideology include FRENAA (National Front anti AMLO) and Abogados Cristianos. As has been argued by historians Tania Hernández, Luis Herrán-Ávila, and others, there is not one but multiple "rights" (*derechas*) in Mexico as groups and individuals that identify as right-wing might hold dissimilar and even contradictory views about the Mexican state, the role of religion and the Catholic Church, or the country's relation to other nations, including the

***Corresponding author: Gema Kloppe-Santamaría**, University College Cork, Department of Sociology and Criminology, Cork, Ireland,
E-mail: GKloppe-Santamaria@ucc.ie

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is no single definition of the "new Christian right" in Latin America, for the purposes of this article and in reference to the Mexican context, I will use the term to refer to contemporary movements and leaders that embrace a right-wing, Catholic, conservative, integralist, and nationalist agenda, and identify themselves in opposition to the "old right" that dominated Mexican politics during the twentieth century, particularly the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) founded in 1939. In contrast to the "old right," individuals and collectives that identify with the new Christian right in Mexico reject what are seen as traditional or mainstream political parties, oppose the model of secularism promoted by liberalism, and identify a new set of so-called enemies next to socialism and communism, including "gender ideology," the "globalist agenda" and "woke ideas."

The Cristero War (1926–1929) was a widespread armed conflict that involved thousands of Catholic peasants and urban militant groups who took up arms against the anticlerical, secularist, and iconoclast policies promoted by the Mexican post-revolutionary state (c. 1920–1940).[6] As a result of this conflict, dozens of priests and young Catholic militants were tortured, mutilated, and killed at the hands of revolutionary forces, giving rise to a narrative of Catholic martyrdom, suffering, and sacrifice that portrayed the Mexican state as a tyrannical and godless government.[7]

Despite the asymmetrical violence endured by Catholics at the hands of the Mexican state forces, Catholics were not passive victims. Instead, during the Cristero War and after the end of the conflict, Catholics organized violent attacks against peasants, teachers, political leaders, and civilians who supported the revolution.[8]

With the centennial of the Cristero War approaching, the history and memory of this conflict has emerged as a central trope of the new Christian right.[9] Using symbols, discourses, and figures of the past, Christian right leaders and their sympathizers have invoked the memory of the Cristero War to frame their struggle against what they argue is a communist and tyrannical government. While the country's current political context is drastically different from that of the 1920s, I argue that mobilizing the history and memory of the Cristero War provides new Christian right leaders and their sympathizers with a familiar political language, a shared sense of identity, and an effective emotional register.[10] This memory, in turn, allows them to convey a sense of urgency or crisis, predicated on the notion that they are, as in the past, under siege by an authoritarian and godless regime that they must resist and challenge.

The aim of this article is to examine the reverberations of the Cristero War in the discourses, symbols, and practices of Mexico's new Christian right, as expressed in the social media communications produced and consumed by right-wing leaders and their supporters.[11] Through social media, leaders like Eduardo Verástegui, Raúl Tortolero, Gilberto Lozano and others, have purposefully used

United States. See Tania Hernández Vicencio, "Las derechas mexicanas en la segunda mitad del siglo XX y el inicio del XXI, *Con-temporánea* 11 (2019): 31–47, https://revistas.inah.gob.mx/index.php/contemporanea/article/view/1503; Tania Hernández Vicencio et al., eds., *Las derechas mexicanas frente a la Constitución, siglos XX y XXI* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2021); Luis Herrán Ávila, "Las Falsas Derechas: Conflict and Convergence in Mexico's Post-Cristero Right after the Second Vatican Council," *The Americas* 79, no. 2 (2022): 321–50. https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2021.148.

On the new right or far-right in Latin America, including some of its connections to Christianity, see Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, "La ultraderecha en América Latina: particularidades locales y conexiones globales," *Nueva Sociedad* 312/July-August 2024; Kristen Weld, "Holy War: Latin America's Far Right," *Dissent* (Spring 2020); Luis Herrán-Ávila, "The Reinvention of the Latin American Right," *NACLA* Report on the Americas April 11, 2023; Ricardo Alvarez-Pimentel, "Unspoken Whiteness: #Whitexicans And Religious Conservativism in Mexico.," Journal of Hispanic and Lusophone Whiteness Studies 1 (2020), Article four.

6 Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between State and Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert Weis, *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

7 Marisol López Menéndez, *Miguel Pro: Martyrdom, Politics, and Society in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016); Fernando M. González, *Matar y morir por Cristo Rey: aspectos de la Cristiada* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, 2001).

8 Enrique Guerra Manzo. *Del fuego sagrado a la acción cívica. Los católicos frente al Estado en Michoacán (1920–1940)* (Mexico City: Colegio de Michoacán, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, ITACA, 2015); Salvador Salinas, "Untangling Mexico's Noodle: El Tallarín and the Revival of Zapatismo in Morelos, 1934–1938," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2014): 471–99; Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, "Martyrs, Fanatics, and Pious Militants: Religious Violence and the Secular State in 1930s Mexico," *The Americas* 79, no. 2 (2022): 197–227, https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2021.149.

9 As argued by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, memory cannot be reduced to individual recollections of the past but refers to the shared (collective) recollection and understanding of the past amongst members of a given social group. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

10 On how emotions serve to mobilize social discontent, particularly among right-wing movements, see Sarah Ahmed, "The Organisation of Hate," in Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

11 I examined dozens of social media communications by Eduardo Verástegui, Raúl Tortolero, Gilberto Lozano, the organization Abogados Cristianos and the group YQueVivaCristoRey on YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter).

Cristero symbols of piety, martyrdom, sacrificial violence, and religious militancy to appeal to a sector of Mexican society that sees the Cristero War as an unresolved conflict and an ongoing struggle between a Catholic nation and an impious state. While the new Christian right has been unable to advance its agenda via formal or electoral politics, its growing presence on social media and localized grassroot movements, next to its transnational reach (via connections with MAGA leaders in the United States), point to its rising significance in a country that has thus far remained exempt from the ascent of the far right in the Latin American region.[12]

1 The Cristero War: Between Historical Memory and Politics

The Cristero War is by far the most significant and recurring historical episode to surface whenever new Christian right actors – particularly people that identify as conservative, right-wing, anti-communist, and Catholic – refer to their tense and at times conflictive relationship with the Mexican secular state. This should come as no surprise as the Cristero War was, after the 1910 Mexican Revolution, Mexico's most important armed conflict during the twentieth century.[13] It was also the greatest threat to the legitimacy of the political and cultural hegemonic project that came out of the revolution.[14]

Although the war formally came to an end in 1929, its reverberations were felt throughout the twentieth century. In addition to the so-called Second Cristiada, which took place in the late 1930s as a reaction to the government's implementation of a socialist model of education, Catholics organized direct attacks against Protestant minorities in the 1940s and 1950s.[15] Several of these anti-Protestant attacks were perpetrated by members of the Union Nacional Sinarquista (UNS), a right-wing, conservative, and ultra nationalist organization whose members saw themselves as inheritors of the Cristero tradition.[16] During the 1960 and 1970s, anti-communist, nationalist, and right-wing groups that identified as descendants of the Cristeros gained presence across the country, particularly in urban centers and universities, with the explicit aim of fighting the presence of communism in the country.[17] When present-day Christian right leaders appeal to the Cristero War, they are thus tapping into this long-term genealogy of right-wing movements in Mexico that have identified in this conflict the origins of their struggle as well as a blueprint of the type of ideology and praxis that faithful, devoted, and courageous Catholics should follow in the public sphere.[18]

2 Cristero Memory Reloaded

What is the memory of the Cristero war that these new Christian right leaders and movements invoke, and with what purposes? An analysis based on historical evidence and social

12 To read more about Eduardo Verástegui's trajectory and his failure to conjure enough support, see: Carin Zissis, "Right-Wing Populism Hasn't Thrived in Mexico. Why?," *Americas Quarterly*, February 21, 2024, https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/right-wing-populism-hasnt-thrived-in-mexico-why/(retrieved June 1, 2025); Mary Beth Sheridan, "The lonely road of MAGA's man in Mexico," *Washington Post*, October 30, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/10/30/eduardo-verastegui-maga-trump-mexico/.

13 There were around 90,000 people killed during the Cristero War and thousands of people were displaced or forced into exile because of the armed conflict. See Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion;* Julia Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

14 It is important to highlight that nearly all Mexicans at the time identified as Catholic and that, therefore, a political project characterized not only by anti-clericalism but also by anti-Catholicism was meant to encounter a great deal of resistance. According to data from the Mexican census, over 97 % of people identified as Catholic in 1920 and 1930. Catholicism continues to be Mexico's dominant religion even if it has declined (in 2020, 77.7 % of people identified as Catholic). On census data, see Alejandro Díaz Dominguez, "¿Qué nos dice el Censo 2020 sobre religión en México?," *Revista Nexos*, February 1, 2021. For an interesting recent work about revolutionaries' attempts to curb the power and influence of the Catholic Church and of Catholicism more broadly, see Jürgen Buchenau and David S. Dalton. *Anti-Catholicism in the Mexican Revolution, 1913–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2024).

15 Deissy Jael de la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación, y participación cívico-política de los evangélicos mexicanos," *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, 24–25 (2006): 9–36; Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935–1985* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. 2006); Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, *In the Vortex of Violence: Lynching, Extralegal Justice, and the State in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, vol. 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020). https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1503grz.

16 Nathan Ellstrand, "Combatting the Mexican State from Afar: The Spread of Sinarquismo in the United States," *Diplomatic History* 49, no. 1 (January 2025): 33–51, https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhae078.

17 These groups included El Yunque, MURO (University Movement for Renewed Orientation) and the Anticommunist University Front (FUA). See Herrán Ávila, "Las Falsas Derechas."

18 The genealogy of belligerent forms of Catholic activism and their agonistic relations to the state can be traced back to the 19th century in the context of Mexico's liberal reforms. Nevertheless, due to its temporal proximity and its geographical significance, the Cristero War has emerged as the dominant reference point of contemporary leaders and movements. On earlier episodes of Catholic armed resistance, see Brian A. Stuffer, *Victory on Earth or in Heaven: Mexico's Religionero Rebellion* (Alburquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019).

media suggests these groups invoke a memory of the Cristero War centered on three main themes or tropes: the existence of a tyrannical and socialist government; the imminence of a moment of crisis that demands urgent action; and the reimagining of the figure of the martyr as someone that is not only willing to die in the name of Christ but also to actively engage in belligerent forms of political activism. Taken together, these elements infuse these groups' ideologies and calls for action with a sense of urgency and with an affective dimension that translates into greater levels of support. This collective memory resonates with a sector of Mexican society that sees the Cristero War as an unresolved conflict that ended up with faithful Catholics being betrayed by the government and by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

3 A Tyrannical and Socialist Government

New Christian right leaders have referred to Mexico's current government as tyrannical, abusive, and communistic. Through social media, Verástegui has openly compared former President Andres Manuel López Obrador (2018–2024) with Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928), the president considered responsible for igniting Catholics' call for arms in 1926.[19] Just like Calles, Verástegui has declared, López Obrador is "a dictator and an enemy of the church."[20] The description of the current government as tyrannical should not be taken lightly, as militant Catholics have and continue to theologize "tyrannicide" as a legitimate response to defend religious freedom.[21]

This was not the first time Verástegui referred publicly to López Obrador's government as socialist and tyrannical. In November of 2022, Verástegui organized the first Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Mexico. During his remarks, he criticized then president López Obrador for undermining democracy and promoting socialism. He next called upon the audience and said: "You as Mexicans have to be proud of your Cristero legacy, your ancestors fought against a totalitarian and communist government."[22] In a similar vein, the association Abogados Cristianos posted a message on social media that, accompanied with a photograph of Calles, read: "our Mexican state is not secular, it is anticlerical and the best example [of this] is the Cristero War."[23] In an article written in the context of the forthcoming centennial of the Cristero War, Raúl Tortolero equally referred to López Obrador's government as socialist and called current president Claudia Sheinbaum (2024-) "atheist, communist, and Jewish."[24] In the article he also demands the government to recognize the "cristero genocide."

Certainly, Mexico's current political context differs greatly from that of the 1920s. During that decade, the country was characterized by a populist, military-led, and authoritarian regime that excluded democratic elections and promoted overt forms of religious persecution via stringent secularizing policies. Elias Calles energetically endorsed anti-Catholic policies aimed at excluding the Catholic Church and Catholics from politics and other social arenas, including public education.[25] By contrast, the decade of the 2020s has been characterized by civilian and democratically elected governments. While López Obrador was a populist and pro-military leader, his was a civilian and democratically elected government that did not engage in acts of religious persecution. More so, despite defending a leftist agenda in economic terms, López Obrador promoted a conservative agenda on social issues and openly embraced popular forms of religiosity, including popular expressions of Catholicism such as the Virgen of Guadalupe.[26] In spite of this,

19 Calles implemented some of the most intransigent anticlerical laws contained in the 1917 constitution. After the end of his presidency and up until the end of the 1930s, he continued to exercise great political control and to incentivize other political leaders to promote, at both the national and regional levels, anti-clerical and even iconoclastic policies. See the recent book: Jürgen Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty in Mexico: Revolution, Reform, and Repression* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2023.

20 "The president @lopezobrador_ is a PRI member and a socialist. He is full of resentment, arrogance, hatred and jealousy because he was never given anything. His motivation is not to serve but to seek revenge. He and Plutarco Elías Calles are the same: dictators and enemies of the Church. #4TPanyCirco," Eduardo Verástegui (@EVerastegui) https://x.com/EVerastegui/status/1595894742713245696, November 44, 2022.

21 González, *Matar y morir por Cristo Rey*.

22 Eduardo Verástegui, "Mensaje de cierre CPAC México 2022 – Crece una nueva fuerza unificada," https://youtu.be/C6T6wdu7xSo?feature=shared.

23 The post also read: "There is much talk about the Catholic Church's 'intervention' in the state, but little about anticlericalism and persecution in our history. As Mexicans and Catholics, it is our duty to remember history." Abogados Cristianos, January 8, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=340721795522893&set=pb.100087552246124.-2207520000.

24 Raúl Tortolero, "Esto haremos los cristeros de hoy a 100 años de nuestra guerra santa," *La Derecha Diario*, April 21, 2025, https://derechadiario.com.ar/mexico/opinion/esto-haremos-los-cristeros-hoy-100-anos-nuestra-guerra-santa. Antisemitism is not uncommon among right-wing and far-right movements, and Claudia Sheinbaum has several times been called non-Mexican because she is not Catholic. The fact that she is also a self-proclaimed feminist and a scientist has also antagonized conservative and right-wing groups.

25 Buchenau and Dalton. *Anti-Catholicism in the Mexican Revolution.*

26 Indeed, the name of his political party, MORENA (an acronym for National Regeneration Movement that also means dark-skinned or brown woman in Spanish), is seen as a direct reference to the "dark-skinned virgin," the Virgin of Guadalupe. David Agreen, "Mexico's president leverages Virgin of Guadalupe for political purposes," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 29, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/

and despite the fact that in present-day Mexico religious freedom is not endangered by legal limitations, leaders like Verástegui argue that religion is now under siege due to the imposition of globalism, gender ideology, and socialist ideas.[27]

4 A Moment of Crisis

The second trope that the new Christian right borrows from the Cristero conflict is the notion that Mexico is today, as in the past, experiencing a moment of crisis wherein basic elements of Mexican society – religious freedom, family, private property – are being significantly undermined and threatened by communism, atheism, globalism, and feminism.

These dangers are understood as originating in both national and transnational forces. Cristeros and post-Cristeros believed these threats originated in countries like Russia or even the United States in the early twentieth century, or in Cuba, Chile, and Nicaragua during the Cold War years. In the contemporary context, the new Christian right associates these so-called "polluting influences" with Cuba and Venezuela, countries led by leaders that came to power with either leftist or socialist agendas and which are considered highly authoritarian. In a banner used on social media by Gilberto Lozano and the group FRENAA, images of Joseph Stalin and Kim Yong-un appear next to Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez, and Nicolás Maduro as individuals that shaped López Obrador's ideologies.[28] These threats are also linked to the United States, particularly within the ranks of democratic liberal "woke" politicians that are identified as communist, such as former vice-president and presidential candidate, Kamala Harris. For instance, in a post on X, Verástegui published a portrait of Harris looking like Che Guevara with the phrase "Ke-mala la Che-mala. ¿Qué tienen en común la comunista de Ke-mala y el Che Guevara?" [So bad Kamala. What do the communist Ke-mala and Che Guevara have in common?].[29]

Echoing previous generations of right-wing and militant Catholics in Mexico, new Christian right actors refer in their social media communications to mainstream or center-right political parties (like the Partido Acción Nacional) as spineless, cowardly, or too liberal.[30] Playing on misogynistic tropes, they characterize mainstream right-wing groups as effeminate and lacking the necessary courage to fight. Even within the Catholic and conservative camp then, they see enemies. This fatalistic and urgent vision of the present produces moral panic and authorizes belligerent and agonistic forms of political mobilization.[31]

5 The Need for Martyrs Who Act Also as Warriors

The third important trope refers to the figure of the martyr as a powerful symbol of faith, resistance, and virility. As several scholars have shown, in more traditional terms a martyr refers to an individual who dies defending his or her religion but without recourse to violence.[32] That is, a martyr is regularly thought of as the victim of an act of violence perpetrated by a so-called tyrannical authority. Nevertheless, historically speaking, militant Catholics have stretched the meanings of martyrdom and blended it with the figure of

news/mexicos-president-leverages-virgin-guadalupe-political-purposes. See also: Gema Kloppe-Santamaría and Julia Young, "The Long Shadow of Mexico's War Over Catholicism," *Americas Quarterly*, April 22, 2025, https://americasquarterly.org/article/the-long-shadow-of-mexicos-war-over-catholicism/.

27 In 2023, right-wing groups in Mexico, including the National Family Front, threatened to burn a new collection of books that were to be distributed across Mexico's public schools due to their alleged communist content. The concern for communist or socialist ideas being taught in public schools is an old concern in Mexico and was a key driver of the Second Cristiada. More recently, groups like Abogados Cristianos have argued that the killings of priests in contemporary Mexico – many of which are connected to the country's war on drugs and the violence produced by organized criminal groups – are indicators of religious persecution. See Abogados Cristianos, "Omar García Harfuch: ¡Defienda y proteja a los católicos!," https://abogadoscristianos.lat/mx/peticion/peligro-mexico-latam/.

28 The banner is a modified version of López Obrador's government official banner which featured Mexican reformers and revolutionaries including Benito Juárez, Francisco Madero, Lázaro Cárdenas, among others. FRENAA official (@OficialFrenaaa), April 11, 2022, https://x.com/OficialFrenaaa/status/1513353066443010053.

29 Source: Eduardo Verástegui (@EVerastegui), https://x.com/EVerastegui/status/1848017476027592814. Vérastegui attacked Harris while openly campaigning in favor of Donald Trump and praising the MAGA movement.

30 For a discussion of how Cristeros differentiated between the "authentic" and courageous Catholics that took up arms and the so-called effeminate Catholics that decided not to, see Weis, *For Christ and Country*.

31 For a long view of this tendency, see Ernesto Bohoslavsky, *Historia mínima de las derechas en América Latina,* (Mexico: Colegio de México, 2023); Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Rethinking the Right in Latin America," *Latin American Politics and Society* 64, no. 4 (2022): 146–56; Juan Pablo Luna and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Castigo a los oficialismos y ciclo político de derecha en América Latina," *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política* 30, no. 1 (2021): 135–55.

32 González, *Morir y matar por Cristo Rey*; see also López Menendez, *Miguel Pro*.

the warrior, who is not only willing to die but also to kill in the name of Christ.[33]

In the present context, key figures of the new Christian right deploy warrior-like symbols and gestures. For instance, in a controversial post via social media, Verástegui appeared wielding a machine gun against the "terrorist of the 2030 agenda, of climate change, and gender ideology."[34] Interestingly, as an actor, Verástegui played the character of Cristero martyr Anacleto González Flores in the film *For Greater Glory* (2012). González Flores (1888–1927) was a Catholic lawyer and Cristero martyr who, despite sympathizing with the Cristero cause, believed in peaceful and civic means to defend religious freedom and was known as the "Mexican Gandhi."[35]

Raúl Tortolero has also explicitly stated that Catholics need to fight, and he defines the current moment as one of cultural counterrevolution. Even when he claims to embrace pacifist methods, he continuously promotes a confrontational discourse. In the following excerpt from a post on social media we can observe this clearly and note how history (and the remaking and reimagining of history) is crucial for these individuals:

> The history taught in public schools is TRASH: pure lies and ideological indoctrination.
> This guy, Benito Juarez, became a CULT for the Freemasons in Mexico, and they worshipped him as a sort of "religion" of public service, of governmental liberalism. Why is his photo in government offices throughout the country, like a pagan god, as pagan as celebrating his birthday on spring day? Why the hell is his anti-Christian, anti-clerical, "priest-eating" name in so many schools, city halls, and streets, as if he had provided great services to the country?
> An opportunistic guy who as a young man went to the Seminary preparing to be a Catholic priest, but with little power, attacked the Church, and TRAITOR that he was, STOLE church properties so that they could be enjoyed by his friends and acquaintances, the nineteenth-century liberal mafia. …
> Down with Juarez, the pagan god, [the god of] ordinary things! Prayer and Action: Counterrevolution! Long live Christ the King and Saint Mary of Guadalupe!
>
> Dr. Raul Tortolero[36]

For Verástegui and other new Christian right leaders, the history and memory of liberalism, anti-clericalism, and of the Cristero War emerges as a generative historical site filled with stories of militant Catholics who reclaimed Catholics' recourse to arms as a legitimate means to defend religious freedom.

6 Conclusion

Whether the new Christian right will or will not acquire a greater presence in Mexico as it has in other countries of Latin America and Europe is a question that remains open. Independently of this, as scholars, it is our responsibility to provide a critical account on how the memory of the Cristero conflict might make these leaders' calls for radical, undemocratic, and agonistic political actions more appealing or legitimate. Social media communication has accelerated and amplified the voices of the new Christian right. Even if the traditional channels of conducting politics (including political parties and electoral cycles) have thus far remained elusive to these actors, their appeal amongst several sectors of Mexican society is undeniable and could potentially increase.[37]

As the centennial of the Cristero War approaches, new Christian right leaders and their sympathizers have appealed to a memory of the conflict that purposefully mobilizes fears and anxieties regarding the existence of a socialist, tyrannical, and irreligious government that, today, as in the past, demands urgent collective action on behalf of all people of faith. Historical evidence suggests that religious beliefs, next to notions of martyrdom and sacrificial violence, provide a powerful political and affective register to ignite belligerent

33 Kloppe-Santamaría, "Martyrs, Fanatics, and Pious Militants."

34 Source: https://x.com/EVerastegui/status/1708026393160810613.

35 In several interviews, Verástegui has expressed his admiration and identification with González Flores but also referred to the difficulties he has in understanding the martyr's embrace of peaceful methods in the face of tyranny and attacks on religious freedom. See BeliefNet, "Giving It All Up for Faith - An Interview with Eduardo Verastegui," https://www.beliefnet.com/entertainment/movies/articles/giving-it-all-up-for-faith-an-interview-with-eduardo-verastegui.aspx.

36 "La historia enseñada en las escuelas públicas es BASURA: puras mentiras y adoctrinamiento ideológico. Este sujeto, Benito Juárez, se fue convirtiendo en un CULTO para los masones en México, y adorarlo en una suerte de "religión" del servicio público, del liberalismo gubernamental. ¿Por qué está su foto en las oficinas de gobierno en todo el país, como un dios pagano, tan pagano como celebrar su natalicio el día de la primavera? ¿Por qué diablos su nombre anti-cristiano, anti-clerical, "comecuras" está en tantas escuelas, alcaldías, y calles, como si hubiera brindado grandes servicios a la patria? Un tipo oportunista que de joven fue al Seminario preparándose para ser sacerdote católico, pero con un poco de poder, arremetió contra la Iglesia, y TRAIDOR como era, ROBÓ las propiedades eclesiásticas para que las gozaran sus amigos y conocidos, la mafia liberal decimonónica…¡Fuera Juárez el dios pagano, de la vida cotidiana! ¡Oración y Acción: Contrarrevolución! ¡Viva Cristo Rey y Santa María de Guadalupe!", Raúl Tortolero (@raultortolero1), March 21, 2024, https://x.com/raultortolero1/status/1770622244181434536. [Translation by author].

37 The arrival of Claudia Sheinbaum to power in 2024 – a woman, an environmental scientist, atheist, and self-proclaimed feminist from Jewish descent – has provided new grounds for these actors. She is, in many ways, the perfect scapegoat or the perfect "specter" to fear and attack.

forms of political organizing in Mexico. Considering this, it becomes pressing to continue to theorize and historicize the contingent relationship between violence, politics, and religion in this and other Latin American countries.

Research ethics: Not applicable.
Informed consent: Not applicable.
Author contributions: GKS (single author).
Use of Large Language Models, AI and Machine Learning Tools: None.
Conflict of interest: None.
Research funding: The research leading to this article has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 754340.
Data availability: Not applicable.

Bionote

Gema Kloppe-Santamaría
University College Cork, Department of Sociology and Criminology, Cork, Ireland
GKloppe-Santamaria@ucc.ie

Dr. Gema Kloppe-Santamaría is a sociologist and historian specializing on questions of violence, gender, religion, and politics in Latin America, with a particular focus on Mexico, Central America, and US-Latin American relations. Kloppe-Santamaría is the author of the book *In the Vortex of Violence: Lynching, Extralegal Justice, and the State in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (published by University of California Press in 2020; translated to Spanish and published in Mexico in 2023). She holds a PhD in Sociology and Historical Studies from the New School for Social Research and a Masters in Gender and Social Policy from the London School of Economics. She is a Lecturer of Sociology at the University College Cork and an Associate Research Professor at the George Washington University.