



Indigenous unrest and the contentious politics of social assistance in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Is social assistance being used to contain ethnic and racial unrest in developing countries? There is a growing literature on social assistance policies in the Global South, but this literature largely focuses on economic and demographic factors, underestimating the importance of contentious politics. The case of Mexico shows that social assistance programs are disproportionately directed to indigenous populations, leading to diminished protest participation. Drawing on data from the 2010, 2012 and 2014 rounds of the Latin American Public Opinion Project, we apply multivariate regression analysis to examine the determinants of social assistance program participation in Mexico. Our study finds that after controlling for income, household size, age, education, and employment status, indigenous ethnic identity is a key determinant in who benefits from social assistance in Mexico. Our results show that high ethnic disparity in social assistance is not only due to higher poverty rates among the indigenous population. Rather, indigenous people receive more social assistance mainly because of their ethnic identity. In addition, this study demonstrates that indigenous people who benefit from social assistance programs are less likely to join anti-government protests. We argue that this ethnic targeting in social assistance is a result of the fact that indigenous unrest has become a political threat for Mexican governments since the 1990s. These results yield substantive support in arguing that the Mexican government uses social assistance to contain indigenous unrest. The existing literature, which is dominated by structuralist explanations, needs to strongly consider the contentious political drivers of social assistance provision in the Global South for a full grasp of the phenomenon. Social assistance in Mexico is driven by social unrest and this suggests that similar ethnic, racial, religious and contentious political factors should be examined in other developing countries to understand social assistance provisions.

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1. Introduction

Following the assassination of Zapatista leader José Luis Solís López (“Galeano”) by the Mexican paramilitary forces, Subcommander Moisés gave a memorable speech to pay homage to his comrade. Facing a crowd of over one thousand Zapatistas, the indigenous leader voiced his contempt of the Mexican state for exacerbating counterinsurgency in the region of Chiapas and blamed the famous social assistance program, *Oportunidades* (now named as “*PROSPERA*”), for feeding paramilitary groups in exchange for attacking Zapatista communities (Martinez & Olvera, 2014). He was proclaiming that “the bad government

wants us as indigenous people to kill one another” (EZLN, 2014). Such allegations in Mexico raise crucial questions over the motivations of social assistance programs, particularly of conditional cash transfer programs, given the global popularity of these programs during the last couple of decades.

The Mexican government operates over 150 different social assistance programs that involve conditional cash transfers, housing benefits, food programs, social pensions, child benefits, disability benefits, emergency benefits, and other social safety nets programs (CONEVAL, 2018; World Bank, 2016). Social assistance programs in Mexico covered 58% of the population in 2012 and social assistance expenditures increased from 0.51 percent of GDP in 2003 to 0.95 percent of GDP in 2013 (World Bank, 2016, 275; World Bank, 2018, 2018). As such, Mexico has received accolades from all over the world for building extensive and innovative social assistance programs, which are believed to have a large

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positive impact on poverty and inequality (Behrman, Gallardo-Garcia, Parker, Todd, & Velez-Grajales, 2012; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Rawlings, 2005; Rawlings & Rubio, 2005; Skoufias, 2005). Strictly endorsed by international organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, Conditional Cash Transfer programs like *PROSPERA* were embraced as a groundbreaking alternative to traditional social welfare. Given the unwavering reputation of this model, an investigation of the dynamics behind the provision of these programs is particularly important.

This article argues that indigenous social unrest has been a key factor determining the provision of social assistance in Mexico. Our analysis of social assistance in Mexico embraces a political standpoint and begins by pointing out a gap in the existing literature on global social assistance programs (including those in Mexico): the under-exploration of contentious political factors in explaining the provision of social assistance. We then outline the historical evolution of social assistance programs in Mexico. An overview of the history of indigenous movements in Mexico in relation to social assistance is followed by our quantitative analysis of social assistance provision, which shows that these programs have been disproportionately directed to the indigenous population. Our analysis also shows that social assistance program participation is associated with lower propensity of protest participation among indigenous population. The discussion and conclusion sections describe how this study's results bolster the argument that the Mexican government might be using social assistance to contain indigenous unrest by exerting control over the communities through local level discretion and geographical targeting. Our findings also imply that social assistance may be used as a counter-insurgency tool not only in Mexico but also in other developing countries, especially in those where ethnic social movements are politically salient.

2. A Missing link in the literature on social assistance: contentious politics

Over the last two decades, social assistance programs and services for the poor have become salient social policy tools in most developing countries. Social assistance coverage and benefits have increased and the terms and conditions of eligibility have been relaxed (Gao, 2006; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; ILO 2014; Jawad, 2009; Sugiyama, 2011). The ever-expanding literature trying to explain these dynamics has been dominated by structural explanations, underestimating the effect of political, particularly contentious political, factors. The dominant structuralist paradigm on social assistance emphasizes demographic and economic changes and argues that the expansion of social assistance programs was in essence a natural result of aging, labor informalization, unemployment, globalization, deindustrialization, the rise of poverty, and the rise of the service sector (Franzoni & Voorend, 2011; Gough et al., 2004; Hemerijck, 2012; Hong & Kongshøj, 2014; Matsaganis, 2012; Vanhuyse & Goerres, 2013).

Similar to the “logic of industrialization” thesis used to explain the rise of the post-war welfare state, many scholars explain the rise of income-based welfare policies by what we designate as the “logic of de-industrialization”—a thesis which we break down as follows: (i) before the 1980s, there existed informal safety nets that covered the informal sector, including illegal housing land opportunities and traditional solidarity mechanisms for the rural and urban poor, (ii) since the 1980s, with the rapid rural-to-urban migration, jobless economic growth policies and the commodification of urban land, structural poverty has significantly increased while informal safety nets have also eroded, (iii) this has necessitated the income-based social assistance systems to expand and cover the growing informal groups “as a natural

response” to the new order of things (Buğra & Keyder, 2006, O’Loughlin & Friedrichs, 1996). Scholars argue that the rise of informalization, contingent work, aging of populations and increasing dependency ratios have made it difficult to cover larger segments of the population through employment-based provisions, which are becoming difficult to finance, thus necessitating an income-based social assistance expansion (Hanlon, Barrientos & Hulme, 2010; Gough et al., 2004; Esping-Andersen, 1999).

In this paradigm, “contemporary role played by social movements in shaping social welfare has too often been neglected in the discipline of social policy” (Mooney, Annetts, Law, & McNeish, 2009, 1; also see Bebbington, Mitlin, Mogaladi, Scurrah, & Bielich, 2010), especially in the Global South. As a response to these structural accounts, a burgeoning literature bridges welfare provision and social movements. These works have focused on: (i) how grassroots groups resist changes in social policies (Pierson, 2001, Weiss, 2005), (ii) how social policies respond to “social welfare movements” (Agarwala, 2013; Money et al., 2009; Vanhuyse, 2006) that explicitly demand welfare provisions, and (iii) how social welfare is useful in diminishing terrorism (welfare-terrorism nexus) or sustaining regime legitimacy (Burgoon, 2006; Harris, 2013; Lü, 2014; Taydas & Peksen, 2012; Yom & Gause, 2012). Missing in this literature are explanations of whether and how social assistance (as dependent variable) is provided as a direct or indirect response to contentious politics of any sort (as independent variable). Only a limited number of studies have uncovered such politics behind social assistance programs in developing countries. Yörük (2012) argues that free health care program for the poor—namely the Turkish Green Card program—has been directed to the Kurdish minority, the primary reason for this being the containment of the ongoing Kurdish movement in the country. In a similar vein, Crost, Felter, and Johnston (2015) document empirical evidence on the relationship between CCTs and rebel presence in the Philippines. Akin to these scholarly attempts, our study is also inspired by an older generation of scholars. We particularly build upon Frances Fox-Piven and Richard Cloward’s discussion on how the American state used social policy welfare to control, contain, and repress insurgent populations after the 1960s urban riots in the USA (Fording, 1997; Isaac & Kelly, 1981; Jennings, 1983; Fox-Piven & Cloward, 1971; Schram & Turbett, 1983; Welch, 1975). We argue that an analogous mechanism could be in play in social assistance provision in Mexico.

The literature on Mexican social assistance programs has overlooked the relation between social assistance and indigenous unrest in the country. Most studies of social assistance are solely descriptive, some singling out, for instance, conditional cash transfer programs with their experimental design, which allowed effective impact analysis of the program on the beneficiary households (Adato & Hoddinott, 2010; Rawlings & Rubio, 2005; Skoufias, 2005). Departing from such descriptive lenses, many studies analyze the impact or outcome of social assistance programs, ranging from financial improvements (Rowe, 2011; Villarespe Reyes & Sosa Ferreira, 2008; Skoufias, 2005) to non-income indicators such as school enrollment rates (Todd & Winters, 2011; Behrman & Parker, 2010), reproductive health (Feldman, Zaslavsky, Ezzati, Peterson, & Mitchell, 2009; Darney et al., 2013), child growth (Fernald, Gertler, & Neufeld, 2009) and improvements on nutrition and healthcare (Adato, Roopnaraine & Becker, 2011; Morris, 2010; Hoddinott, 2010). While most of these outcome-focused scholarly work on social assistance in Mexico has essentially emphasize the positive impacts of these programs, a growing body of criticism of social assistance programs also question effectiveness in fighting poverty and social inclusion (Grimes & Wangnerud, 2010; Luccisano, 2006; Molyneux, 2006; Villarespe Reyes & Sosa Ferreira, 2008; Yanes, 2011), eligibility requirements (Delgado, 2013; Mora, 2008; Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012; Yanes, 2011; Firpo,

Pieri, Pedroso, & Souza, 2014), neoliberal logic (Gil-García, 2016; Luccisano, 2006; Mora, 2008).

There are only few number of studies focusing analytically on the causes or dynamics of social assistance provision. But, most of these studies are limited to structuralist perspectives that draw arguments predominantly from Mexico's concomitant problem of extreme poverty accelerated after the adoption of neoliberal policies, presenting social assistance expansion as a result of growing efforts to alleviate poverty (Briere & Rawlings, 2006; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Jara, 2007; Rawlings, 2005; Rowe, 2011; Skoufias, 2005; Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012). Finally, there are only a very limited number of political analyses of social assistance, yet these studies mainly focus on electoral competition, party politics and practices of clientelism as drivers of social assistance provision (Bruhn, 1996; Cornelius, 2004; De La O, 2013; Diaz-Cayeros, Estevez, & Magaloni, 2009, 2016; Green, 2006; Luccisano & Macdonald, 2012; Perez Yarahuan, 2005).

Despite abundant research concerning the dynamics of social assistance programs and particularly CCTs in Mexico, the literature falls short when it comes to the theorization of the contentious politics of social assistance, especially as a counterinsurgency tool. Inspired by the theoretical and empirical analyses provided by aforementioned scholars that investigate the contentious politics of social assistance in other countries (Yörük, 2012; Crost, Felter & Johnston, 2015) and in the past (Fox-Piven & Cloward, 1971), we propose to explain social assistance provision in Mexico by considering the effect of indigenous unrest and by showing that social assistance programs have disproportionately been directed to indigenous populations. In other words, we discuss social assistance programs in Mexico in relation to government attempts to contain indigenous autonomous struggle, namely, the Zapatista movement (Gil-García, 2016; Inclán, 2012; EZLN, 2014; Mora, 2008). We follow Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly who define contentious politics as "episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants." For them, "roughly translated, the definition refers to collective political struggle." (Tarrow & Tilly, 2008, 438). This conceptualization of contentious politics covers social movements as one subset and is extended to include civil wars, riots, civil unrest, strike waves, revolutions, and political violence.

It should be noted that there are a limited number of studies that observe a disproportionate targeting of indigenous populations in Mexican social assistance programs, most importantly Oportunidades (Patrinos & Skoufias, 2007; Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012; World Bank, 2009). Yet, their main problem is that they attribute this ethnic disparity in benefit incidence to ethnic disparity in poverty. In other words, they claim that indigenous people benefit from these programs because they are poorer than the rest of the population. Our study goes beyond this analysis. In what follows, we show that among indigenous and non-indigenous people from the same poverty level, indigenous people are much more likely to receive social assistance. This shows that indigenous people receive more social assistance not because of their higher poverty, but because of their ethnic identity. Following the Zapatista uprising, indigenous communities have become an important target of the government's benevolent control strategies given their proven record of collective action and strength in numbers.

3. The historical development of contemporary social assistance programs in Mexico

In Mexico, the economic crisis of the 1980s paved the way for liberalization policies that had a significant impact on the labor

market and class structure, fundamentally reshaping the existing welfare system. During that period, extreme poverty became a problem which still persists today (Rowe, 2011; Yanes, 2011). In 1988, Salinas came to power and took steps to privatize and reform the social insurance provided by the IMSS and ISSSTE (federal government organizations that administer the social security systems). Since then, the country has seen the increasing privatization of pensions and subcontracting of services, entering a period during which social insurance policies have been supplanted by social assistance programs which rely on noncontributory and targeted welfare benefits (Dion, 2010; Luccisano, 2006). PRONASOL (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad) was introduced as a targeted poverty alleviation program by the Salinas administration (Marques-Pereira, 1995) but lasted only one presidential term.

A major shift in the thinking concerning antipoverty policy in Mexico occurred when Zedillo came to power in 1994 (Dion, 2010; Niño-Zarazúa, 2011; Rowe, 2011). While debates on social protection unfolded, the Zedillo administration was pressured to come up with innovative approaches to reduce poverty in response to the economic crisis (Adato & Hoddinott, 2010; Davila Larraga, 2016). Indeed, due to PRONASOL's reputation for political manipulation, Zedillo distanced himself from his predecessor and dismantled the program, regardless of its political impact (Jara, 2007; Yashine & Orozco, 2010). Following the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which came into force on January 1, 1994, PROCAMPO was introduced as an agricultural subsidy program, designed for small farmers to provide them with income support and promote their competitiveness in the market by transferring cash per hectare of cultivated land (Sadoulet, de Janvry, & Davis, 2001).

In 1997, after the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) lost the congressional majority for the first time in the history of the legislative elections, PROGRESA (Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación), which was designed as a type of conditional cash transfer (CCT) program, emerged as an incentive-based, anti-poverty policy agenda and a social experiment that would have an unpredicted global impact (Adato & Hoddinott, 2010). PROGRESA became the largest single poverty-alleviation program in Mexico's history covering 2.5 million families (Jara, 2007; Niño-Zarazúa, 2011). The program was soon-to-be perceived as an ideal model in combating extreme poverty and was heavily praised by international organizations. More than a decade later, over 30 countries would adopt this model of social assistance. Today, as the pioneer of CCTs, Mexico represents an innovative case that, according to many, departs from traditional forms of social policy (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Rowe, 2011; Skoufias, 2005).

Another social assistance program called *Seguro Popular* was initiated in 2002. Prior to the introduction of this benefit, more than half of the Mexican workers went uncovered by health insurance because they worked in informal jobs (Azua & Marinescu, 2013). *Seguro Popular* was initiated to provide access to healthcare to those uninsured by social security in Mexico (Bosch, Belén Cobacho, & Pagés, 2014). After seven decades of one-party rule (PRI), the change of the government in the 2000 presidential elections raised questions regarding social policy. Vicente Fox of the right-of-center PAN (Popular Action Party), who was elected as the first president from an opposition party since 1910, decided to continue with the similar logic of conditional cash transfers. He renamed the program *Oportunidades* (Opportunities), maintaining its main objectives and design (Behrman & Skoufias, 2006; Coady, 2006; Yashine & Orozco, 2010). During his administration, the program further expanded by reaching out to the urban poor. In the following years, *Jovenes con Oportunidades* was initiated as a basic support program for young graduates of preparatory school (Behrman & Skoufias, 2006; Skoufias, 2005). The government also introduced an additional dimension that addressed senior citizens

(called *Setenta y Mas*) Later, the Pension for the Elderly, PAM (previously named as *Setenta y Mas*) that began as a modest benefit program for seniors over 70 living in rural communities, expanded to cover all individuals aged 65 or older (World Bank, 2016) (Barrientos et al., 2010; Yanes, 2011). Another new program provided support for the energy consumption of poor households (Yanes, 2011; Yashine & Orozco, 2010). More recently, in 2014, the Oportunidades program changed its name to PROSPERA (Social Inclusion Program) and was expanded to cover the entire country, becoming one of the largest poverty alleviation programs in the world (Davila Larraga, 2016).

4. Indigenous unrest, ethnic identity and its relation to social assistance provision in Mexico

Today, Mexico is home to 12–14% of the indigenous peoples living in Latin America, making it the country with the largest indigenous population in the continent (Panagides, 1994; Patrinos & Layton, 2006; Yashar, 2005). In 2015, 21.5% of the country's population self-identified as "indigenous."¹ For indigenous peoples, agriculture has been, and still remains, the main pillar of the economy (Farmer, Gupta, Milos, Scott, & Taylor, 2012; Ruiz Medrano, 2010). Thus, their dependence on land made indigenous communities even more vulnerable. The establishment of colonial labor systems not only expropriated indigenous territories, but also generated a landless indigenous agricultural workforce (Gonzalez, 1994).

The War of Independence, which led to the establishment of the Mexican nation in 1821, had a strong component of rural rebellion. The independence movement depended on a large component of organized indigenous communities. However, the end of the war did not bring political stability; on the contrary, the indigenous communities faced greater struggle with landowners. By the end of the century, the government's modernization efforts undermined rural communities, resulting in rapid erosion of communally-held indigenous lands (Newman, 2014; Ruiz Medrano, 2010). The Mexican Revolution was characterized by a strong demand for social and agrarian justice on behalf of the poor, who blamed the elites for their misery. The Zapatistas, under Emiliano Zapata, fought for agrarian reform in order to improve the conditions of rural agricultural workers living and working in the haciendas. In 1911, Zapata issued the *Plan de Ayala* that "dissolved the property ownership of the large landowners and distributed farmland to people (individually and collectively in community parcels known as *ejidos*)" (Newman, 2014, 19). Following the Revolution, the indigenous people managed to achieve a degree of local autonomy in the agricultural highlands that protected them from the state's pervasive control over their lands (Speed & Collier, 2000; Yashar, 2005). However, towards the end of the century, Mexico's shift to neoliberalism saw the weakening of the protection brought by the land reform (Yashar, 2005). During his term in office, Salinas implemented liberalization policies that limited the state's obligations to the peasants. One particularly controversial move was the amendment of Article 27 of the Constitution in 1992 (Harvey, 1998; Ruiz Medrano, 2010). Through privatization and deregulation of agricultural land, this reform signaled the end of long-standing protection of the *ejidos*. In a restructured Mexico, the reform was portrayed as a necessary step in the "modernization" process (SLAS, 1994) and a prerequisite to successfully negotiating the country's entry into NAFTA. However, it also "paved the way for a mass transfer of rural land from indigenous communities to multinational food corporations" (Kelly, 1994, 544). Such liberal agricultural policies of the Salinas administration undeniably catalyzed the upcoming indigenous rebellion.

On January 1, 1994, an armed rebel group of indigenous peasants calling themselves the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) declared war on the government by seizing control of nine towns in the state of Chiapas. In the following two years, EZLN continued their struggle for land tenure, indigenous rights, and democratization (Harvey, 1998), and both sides came to an agreement, drafting the San Andres Accords which officially recognized the autonomous rights of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. However, the agreement did not materialize and the armed conflict intensified towards the end of the 1990s. The emergence of paramilitary groups exacerbated the level of violence through low-intensity warfare (Farmer et al., 2012).

Despite the election of Vicente Fox in 2000 as the first non-PRI candidate, the 2000s have witnessed yet another period of conflict between indigenous populations and the Mexican state. Neither Fox nor his successor Calderon, both from PAN, have satisfied indigenous demands for human rights and control over natural resources (Teichman, 2012, 58–59). One of the largest marches in the history of Chiapas, "End of the World" march in December 2012, saw more than 40,000 indigenous Zapatistas marching in total silence to demonstrate that the counterinsurgency strategies followed by several governments have clearly failed and EZLN remains a substantial force within the indigenous communities (Mora, 2017; Navarro, 2012; Reyes, 2016). Furthermore, "the intricate structures of self-governments [...] demonstrate that the Zapatistas' community-level projects have not only maintained numerical significance but also gained in coherence and maturity over the last decade" (Reyes, 2016, 144). In 2018, the indigenous movement managed to wage a large mobilization to nominate a presidential candidate (Perrigo, 2018). In short, the political influence of indigenous peoples in Mexico has grown remarkably since the early 1990s, making them a political threat to the regime to this day.

Throughout these historical cycles of insurgency, there is evidence that the Mexican government has effectively utilized different social welfare and developmental programs in its effort to demobilize indigenous unrest. As an instance, in the wake of 1994 Zapatista rebellion, the government initiated a program of sustainable development known as the Pilot Forestry Program (PPF) that targeted the *ejidos* located in tropical areas of Chiapas in order to avoid further social conflict in the region. The program allowed local populations "to exploit limited amount of different kind of trees, within a long-term reforestation plan that would permit sustainable use and income" (Harvey, 2005, 635). Such measures taken by the Mexican government would hopefully mitigate local Zapatistas' demands for alternative sources of income following the laws/policies against deforestation and intervene further adherence to the EZLN groups (Harvey, 2005). Moreover, in her analysis of the interactions between pro-Zapatista and counter-Zapatista protestors in Chiapas, Inclán (2012) revealed that procedural concessions from the local governments in the form of expenditures on public works and social programs had significantly decreased pro-Zapatista protest activity. Indeed, Inclán invites further research to unpack the relationship between the decrease in Zapatista mobilization activities and increase in social programs (Inclán, 2012, 470). In light of these findings, we argue that the logic of "welfare as counter-insurgency" has fleshed out social assistance provision in Mexico in the particular context of indigenous revolts.

5. Data, variables, and methods

To support the argument that social assistance is being used as a tool of counter-insurgency strategy in Mexico, we present two sets of econometric analyses in this section. First set of economet-

¹ Available online: <http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/app/indicadores/>.

ric models investigates whether and to what extent indigenous identity is a significant predictor of being a social assistance beneficiary, controlling for variables representing households' socio-economic status. The second set of models analyze whether and to what extent receiving social assistance decreases the likelihood of protest participation. In this set of analysis, we are specifically interested in the interaction term between being a social assistance beneficiary and indigenous identity to understand the effect of social assistance on indigenous protest participation.

All of our analyses intend to show statistical associations that would lend strong support for our analytical argument that indigenous identity shapes social assistance in Mexico. Our goal is to show that social assistance has been disproportionately channeled to the indigenous population, which can be considered as a counter-insurgency strategy. We will also show that indigenous people receiving social assistance are less likely to participate in anti-government protests, signaling that Mexican government uses welfare policy tools to dissuade indigenous protest or constrain their potential for collective action.

Data for this study come from 2010, 2012 and 2014 rounds of the Mexican Barometer (N = 4657), part of a comparable survey conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) consortium on 26 countries in the Americas.² LAPOP is a nationally representative dataset based on face-to-face interviews and is carried on in all major languages. Samples in each country were developed using a multi-stage probabilistic design (with quotas at the household level for most countries) and were stratified by major regions of the country, the size of the municipality, and by urban and rural areas within municipalities. LAPOP is a good fit to the purpose of this study, as it contains detailed information on ethnicity, income, employment, education, and social welfare.

For the first set of analysis investigating the relationship between social assistance and indigenous identity, we estimated a series of probit regression models, where the dependent variable identifies the beneficiaries of any social assistance program in Mexico. LAPOP asks informants whether they have received regular (in cash or in kind) social assistance from the government and whether they are beneficiaries of *Oportunidades*. We used these two items to generate a binary variable which takes the value of 1 if the informant receives either *Oportunidades* or any other kind of social assistance or both, 0 otherwise. We observed that 22.8% of our sample were social assistance beneficiaries. The main explanatory variable in our models is ethnicity, which is broken down into four categories: 1) White, 2) Mestizo, 3) Indigenous, and 4) Other.³ Our study gives emphasis to indigenous ethnic identity due to the rising political power of indigenous people in the post-Zapatista era. In this sense, we believe ethnicity is the most reliable sign for the government to reach the indigenous population through social assistance. Bringing ethnicity into the forefront of our study, however, by no means, to suggest that the Zapatista uprising and other indigenous mobilizations thereafter are homogeneous movements that limit the participation of non-indigenous (e.g. mestizo/white/others) supporters. As such, even though EZLN's political discourse claim to speak for all the indigenous populations in Mexico, it should be noted that this communitarian attitude might not always be reflected in the opinions of indigenous citizens. In fact, in his study, Eisenstadt observed that "median indigenous attitude in Chiapas is more individual-rights oriented than commonly projected in academic studies, policy debates, and media renderings" (2012, 71). Nevertheless, indigenous identity, along with class, rep-

resents an important common ground for the insurgent groups such as Zapatistas to mobilize support and recruit rebellions into their movement (Trejo, 2012; Máiz, 2010). Indeed, according to a recent study, in the 1990s, 79.4% of the indigenous peoples in Chiapas lived in municipalities with Zapatista presence, and by 2010, this number had only decreased to 74.06%. This indicates that indigenous people yield a significant support base for the Zapatistas (Inclán, 2018), which might urge the Mexican government to win indigenous "hearts and minds" via social assistance services for purposes of counterinsurgency.

In our models, we utilize a set of control variables, such as income, household size, gender, age, education, employment status and place of residence (urban vs. rural). The year of survey (2010, 2012 or 2014) is also used as a control variable to account for the trend in social assistance over time. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. We expect that after controlling for these factors, indigenous ethnic identity is a significant determinant of who benefits from social assistance in Mexico.

The general specification of the models tested in this section can be represented as follows

$$\text{probit}(\pi) = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Ethnicity}_i + \beta_2 X_i + \beta_3 Z_i + \varepsilon,$$

where $\text{probit}(\pi)$ is the probit function of the probability that a person (or a member of his/her family) benefits from a social assistance scheme in Mexico. X_i is the vector of control variables specified above, Z_i is a vector of state dummies and ε is the idiosyncratic error term. The models are estimated with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered at the state level (Mexico has 32 states). All models include state-fixed effects (state dummies) to account for unobserved, stable, and state-level differences that influence patterns of social assistance distribution. The coefficient for the explanatory variable, therefore, indicates the impact of ethnicity on the probability of being a social assistance beneficiary within the same state. For the ease of comparison, marginal effects have been calculated and reported for all probit models.

6. Findings set 1: social assistance and indigenous identity

Cross-tabulations presented in Table 2 (Panel a) suggest that there is a geographic variation in the number of social assistance beneficiaries. We observed that regardless of ethnic origin, individuals living in small cities (29%) and rural areas (36.7%) receive more social assistance than those residing in large (16.7%) and medium-sized (21.1%) cities and metropolitan areas (21.5%). Our findings also show that the number of beneficiaries residing in southern Mexico is the highest, followed by central, central east, and northern regions. As expected, we observed that beneficiary incidence is the highest in the lowest income quintile in Mexico. Yet we found that around 20% of the wealthier Mexicans also receive social assistance. We believe that this can be explained by inaccuracy of targeting the "needy" population. This argument is in line with World Bank's (WB, 2018) findings in ASPIRE dataset. According to WB's "adequacy of social transfers" measure, 13% of individuals in the richest quintile in Mexico benefit from social assistance which points to an inadequacy of social transfers in the country. Our results echo with WB's findings. Table 1 reveals some striking ethnic differences in the numbers of social assistance beneficiaries. For example, 41.5% of the indigenous people were found to be social assistance beneficiaries, as opposed to around 20% among the Mestizo and White population.

Our findings also show a regional variation in the distribution of social assistance to different ethnic identities (Panel b). We found that in northern parts of Mexico, Whites and Mestizos are more likely to benefit from social assistance schemes, while in the central east, this distribution is almost equal among Mestizos, Whites,

² We provided our data and Stata codes in our replication folder: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1tePswf3qbXspUDEAbc15Y58nKuf7nxqZ>.

³ This category includes Blacks, Mulattos, and other ethnic minorities in Mexico. Because the number of observations insufficient in reaching meaningful and reliable conclusions, we pooled these categories.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Social Assistance	4.657	0,2278291	0,4194768	0	1
Ethnicity	4.269	1,974936	0,6548639	1	4
Protest Participation	4.636	0,0487489	0,2153659	0	1
Gender	4.657	0,4953833	0,5000324	0	1
Household Income	3.847	2,514947	1,219627	1	5
Household Size	4.657	2,298905	0,9870211	1	4
LFP Status	4.649	0,4973112	0,5000466	0	1
Education	4.657	3,223534	0,952513	1	5
Age	4.634	40,1066	15,81394	18	93
Rural Residence	4.657	0,2179515	0,4128986	0	1
City Size	4.657	2,751772	1,316125	1	5
Meeting Participation	4.657	0,2061413	0,4045766	0	1

Table 2
Percentage of beneficiaries of social assistance schemes.

Panel a: Benefit incidence by ethnicity, size of place of residence, region and income (%)								
		Ethnicity			Size of the place of residence			
White	Mestizo	Indigenous	Other	Metropolitan	Big city	Medium sized city	Small city	Rural area
20,0	20,0	41,5	28,6	18,3	16,8	21,2	29,0	36,7
		Region		Income				
North	Central East	Centre	South	\$0 - \$1.500	\$1.501-\$2.750	\$2.751-\$4.100	\$4.101-\$6.450	>\$6.451
16,6	20,4	22,7	31,9	29,3	24,0	18,6	17,6	20,2
Panel b: Benefit incidence by ethnicity and region								
		Region						
White	North	Central East	Center	South				
22,5	22,5	21,88	30,63	25				
Mestizo	20,1	21,12	32,71	26,06				
Indigenous	2,68	9,4	39,6	48,32				
Other	10,42	20,83	37,5	31,25				

and others. Likewise, we observed an almost equal distribution of social assistance across ethnic identities in the central regions of Mexico. In the south, however, more than half of the indigenous people are social assistance beneficiaries. We turn to the interpretation of this finding in the concluding section, where we discuss geographical targeting as a possible mechanism of ethnic-based social assistance provision.

The cross-tabular analysis, however, does not in itself present evidence for the argument that social assistance programs are disproportionately directed to the indigenous population on the basis of ethnic identity. Rather, it is possible that indigenous people receive higher social assistance just because they are poorer. In order to rule this possibility and to establish our argument that indigenous ethnic identity is a significant determinant of social assistance provision, in the econometric analyses below, we control for variables that represent social economic status.

The first model in Table 3⁴ regresses the social assistance beneficiary dummy on ethnicity only, to discern whether ethnicity is associated with benefiting from social assistance in Mexico. The findings show that *only* indigenous identity significantly predicts the likelihood of being a social assistance beneficiary. We found that the marginal effect of indigenous identity on receiving social assistance is 21.7%. This rate becomes more compelling when a comparison is made among social assistance beneficiaries only. The incidence rate of social assistance in Mexico is 22.8% and this suggests that being indigenous increases the likelihood of benefiting from social assistance by 95.2% (calculated as $(21.7/22.8) \times 100$). Because being a social assistance beneficiary is likely to be highly related to poverty, we control for age, education, employment status, and income in order to net out the effect of indigenous identity on

the probability of receiving social assistance. After controlling for these factors (Model 2), we found that indigenous identity is still a significant predictor of the likelihood of receiving social assistance. This finding suggests that social assistance benefits for the indigenous population in Mexico are distributed based on factors which go beyond socioeconomic status, contrary to the assumptions of most scholars.

Model 2 also indicates that, as expected, crowded households are more likely to benefit from social assistance (see Table A1). Education, on the other hand, has a negative impact on one's chances of receiving social assistance benefits, implying that educated individuals are less likely to be social assistance beneficiaries. Likewise, we found that income is negatively associated with receiving social assistance. Contrary to expectations, there was no statistically significant association between employment status and likelihood of receiving social assistance. Since education and employment status might be correlated with income, the third model excludes these variables and controls only for income. The coefficient of the indigenous origin variable in this model is still positive and statistically significant. Note also that the coefficient of the "Other" (ethnic origins) category is significant at 95% confidence interval. Since this category is significant only in this model we conclude that this finding appears only occasionally. Furthermore, observing that "conventional" variables predicting the likelihood of receiving social assistance, such as income, education etc. are also significant in our models, we are confident that our conclusions are not driven by any data or model specification problems.

To test whether rural indigenous people are more likely to receive social assistance, we predicted the probability of receiving social assistance in rural and urban areas separately. Results in Fig. 1 show that even among the rural population indigenous people are more likely to receive social assistance. Since the Zapatista movement is mostly a rural organization, the popular base of the

⁴ For robustness checks, we used Indigenous identity as the base category and rerun all the analyses. The results did not change; we report them in the Appendix.

Table 3
 Probit regression estimates for receiving social assistance (marginal effects).

	Ethnicity only	Ethnicity + Controls	Ethnicity + Controls (excluding Emp. Stat. And Education)	Ethnicity + Controls + Religion	Ethnicity + Controls + Political Participation
Ethnicity (Base Category: Whites)					
Mestizo	0.000 (0.017)	0.017 (0.024)	0.018 (0.025)	0.017 (0.024)	0.017 (0.024)
Indigenous	0.217*** (0.046)	0.091** (0.038)	0.106*** (0.041)	0.091** (0.038)	0.085** (0.038)
Other	0.089 (0.048)	0.077 (0.049)	0.106** (0.051)	0.077 (0.049)	0.070 (0.047)
Household Income (Base Category: < \$1.050)					
\$1.501-\$2.750		-0.027 (0.023)	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.027 (0.023)	-0.026 (0.023)
\$2.751-\$4.100		-0.060** (0.026)	-0.081*** (0.025)	-0.060** (0.026)	-0.060** (0.026)
\$4.101-\$6.450		-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.101*** (0.026)	-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.075*** (0.028)
>\$6.451		-0.035 (0.036)	-0.077** (0.030)	-0.035 (0.036)	-0.036 (0.036)
Employed (Base: Unemployed)					
		0.003 (0.016)		0.003 (0.016)	0.001 (0.016)
Educational Attainment (Base category: Illiterate)					
Literate		-0.035 (0.031)		-0.035 (0.032)	-0.040 (0.030)
Primary School		-0.099** (0.039)		-0.099** (0.039)	-0.104*** (0.039)
Secondary School		-0.145*** (0.027)		-0.145*** (0.027)	-0.150*** (0.026)
Post-secondary+		-0.137*** (0.025)		-0.137*** (0.025)	-0.143*** (0.024)
Non-Catholic				-0.001 (0.016)	
Meeting Participation					0.070*** (0.021)
Observations	4,269	3,541	3,545	3,541	3,541
Log Likelihood	-2215	-1670	-1691	-1670	-1662

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05
 Full regression output is reported in the [Appendix](#).

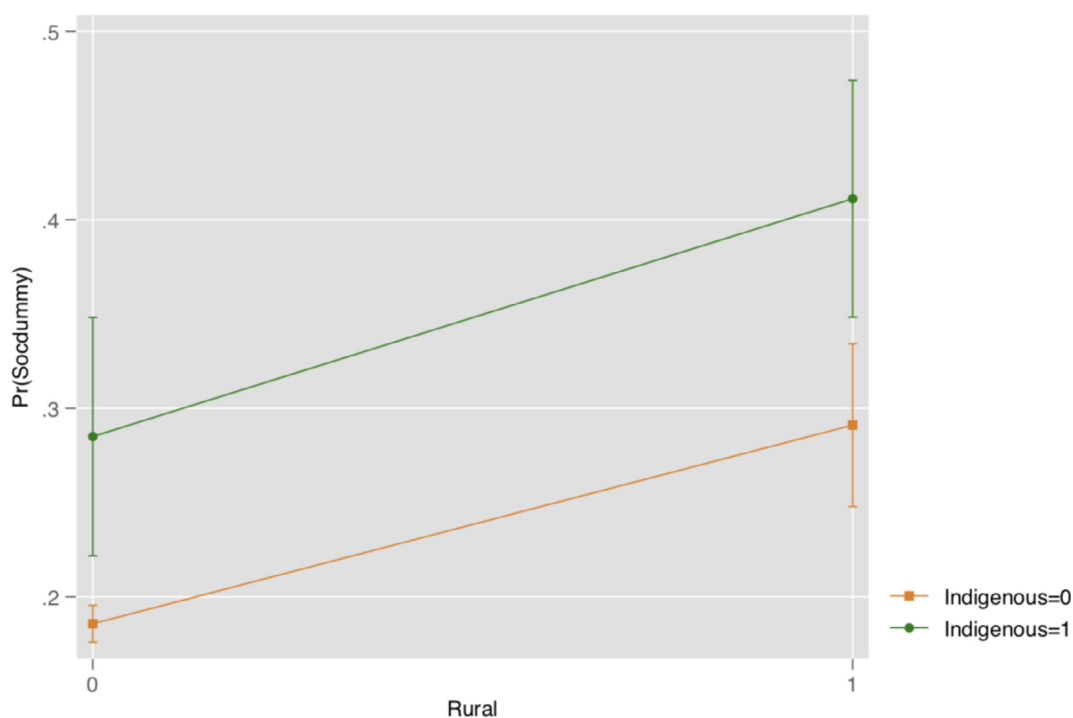


Fig. 1. Predicted probability of receiving social assistance among rural and urban population by ethnic identity.

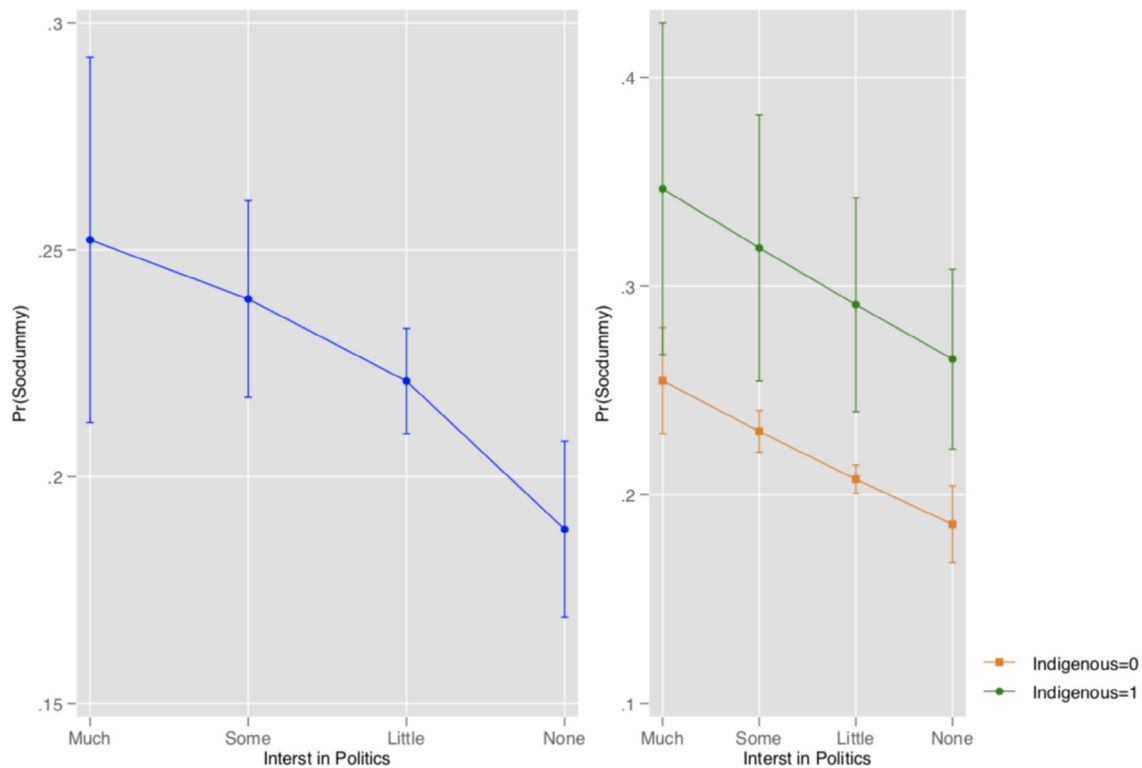


Fig. 2. Predicted probability of receiving social assistance by the level of interest in politics and ethnic identity.

Table 4
Probit regression estimates for protest participation (marginal effects).

Variables	(1) Race only	(2) Race + Social Assistance	(3) Race only + Interaction	(4) Race + All Controls + Interaction
Social Assistance		-0.003 (0.010)	0.006 (0.011)	0.010 (0.014)
Ethnicity (Base Category: Whites)				
Mestizo	0.001 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	-0.001 (0.009)
Indigenous	0.027** (0.013)	0.027** (0.013)	0.055*** (0.018)	0.054** (0.021)
Other	0.027 (0.020)	0.027 (0.020)	0.026 (0.020)	0.021 (0.018)
Indigenous * Social Assistance			-0.039*** (0.008)	-0.034*** (0.010)
Observations	4,248	4,248	4,248	3,541
Log Likelihood	-845.2	-845.2	-841.9	-700.5

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05.
Full regression output is reported in the appendix.

organization is the peasantry and rural population. Therefore, the finding that indigenous people are more likely to be included in social assistance programs even within the subset of the rural population also lends supports for our argument that higher social assistance is being used to contain unrest.

Mexico is known for both its racial and religious diversity, signaling a potential link between religious identity and the government's use of social assistance programs to contain social unrest. Model 4, therefore, includes a religious identity dummy, assuming the value of 1 if the informant is Catholic, and 0 if non-Catholic. The coefficient of this variable, is not statistically significant, indicating that religious identity does not have a significant influence on one's chances of benefiting from social assistance schemes. After controlling for religion, indigenous identity is still statistically significant,

reinforcing the argument that social assistance is distributed based on ethnic identity.

We also tested the effect of meeting participation on social assistance receipt. We created a binary variable taking the value of 1 if the informant participated in meetings of either a religious organization (LAPOP, cp6) or political parties (LAPOP, cp13), or woman associations (LAPOP, cp20); 0 otherwise. We found that the marginal effect of participating in these kinds of meetings significantly increases the likelihood (by 7 percentage points) of receiving social assistance. This illustrates that previous political activism is a factor that drives higher social assistance receipt, which may lend partial support for our argument. In this model the coefficient of indigenous identity is still significant.

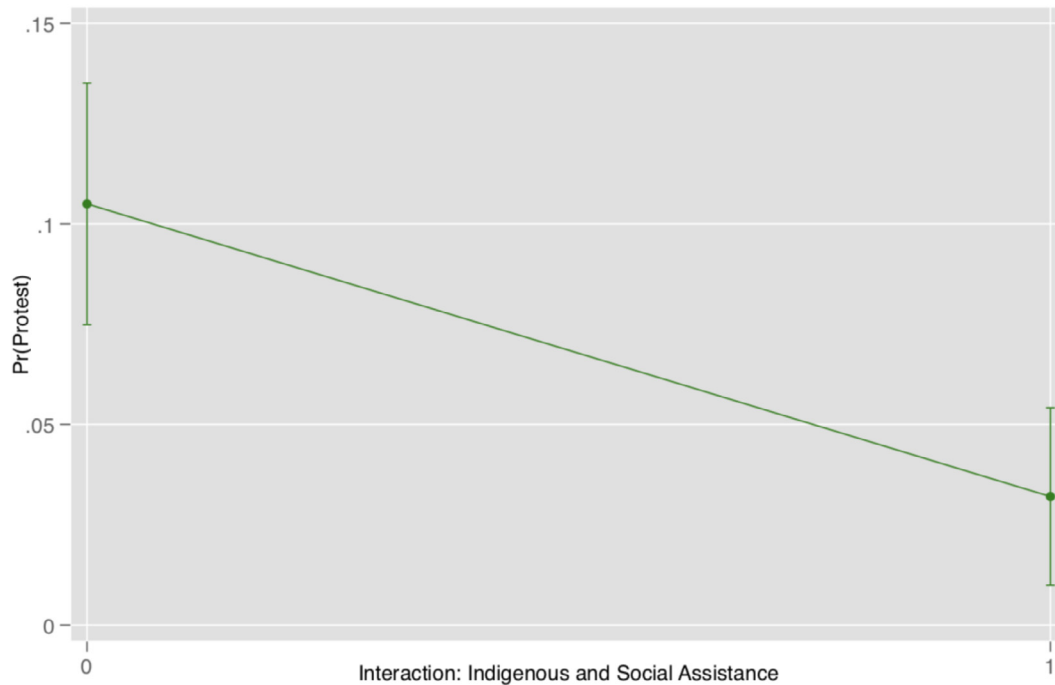


Fig. 3. Predicted probability of protest participation of beneficiary and non-beneficiary indigenous individuals.

Furthermore, it might also be plausible to claim that people receive social assistance because they are not actively supporting the contentious movements. In other words, government officials might be excluding people who are known to be “agitators.” To address this possibility, we expand our analysis by including a variable capturing an individual’s interest in politics. The new variable is an ordinal one ranging from 0 to 4; 0 indicating no interest in politics and 4 implying much interest in politics. We believe that this variable could be a proxy for potential “agitators” because they are likely to identify themselves as being more interested in politics. Our results (Fig. 2) show that the more interest one has in politics, the more likely she is to receive social assistance. This probability is even higher among the indigenous population. This can be interpreted that the local officials, deciding on who receives social assistance, indeed, try to channel these benefits to those who are more likely to be “agitators” to buy off their quiescence, a possibility more pertinent to the indigenous population. This, yet, does not alter the results of our main models.

7. Findings set 2: social assistance and protest participation

In the second set of econometric analyses, in order to determine whether social assistance is associated with lower protest participation, we estimate a series of regressions, with a dependent variable depicting whether the informant participated in a demonstration or protest march within the previous 12 months (LAPOP Prot 3 variable). In this case, the previously constructed social assistance recipient dummy is used as an independent variable. Some models include an interaction term between social assistance and indigenous identity to discern whether indigenous social assistance recipients are less likely to participate in protests. Control variables in our models are income, household size, gender, age, education and employment status, and place of residence (urban vs. rural). A series of probit models were estimated using heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

The first column of Table 4 shows that, when compared to Mexico’s white population, indigenous people are more likely to participate in protests. The marginal impact of indigenous identity on protest participation is 2.7 percentage points. Even though the impact may not sound substantive, given that protest participation in the whole sample is 4.9%, the magnitude is considerable. When we make similar calculations we did for social assistance recipients above, we find that being indigenous increases the likelihood of protest participation by 55% (calculated as $(2.7/4.9) \times 100$). Model 2 includes a social assistance recipient dummy to the right-hand side of the equation. Point estimates indicate that receiving social assistance, *on average*, does not have a significant impact on protest participation. When an interaction term between the social assistance recipient dummy and indigenous identity is included, however, we observe that receiving social assistance is associated with a lower probability of protest participation *only* among the indigenous population. Indigenous people receiving social assistance are 4 percentage points less likely to participate in protests compared to *the rest of the individuals in our sample*. This figure remains approximately the same when we control for income, household size, age, education and employment status, and place of residence.

Interaction term also provides us with the opportunity to make a comparison among the indigenous population. Fig. 3 depicts the predicted probability of protest participation of indigenous people who receive social assistance and of non-beneficiary indigenous individuals. It is clear from our findings that indigenous social assistance recipients are less likely to participate in protests than those indigenous people who do not receive social assistance. All these findings combined further support the argument that social assistance can be a tool to contain indigenous social unrest.

Our finding that disproportionate social assistance provision for indigenous people may demobilize their unrest resonates with existing qualitative observations in the literature. Scholars have shown that the outpouring of social assistance programs targets the insurgent regions, which provokes factionalism within

indigenous communities (Camargo & Rivera, 2015; Gil-García, 2016; Mora, 2008; Ramírez, 2017; Stahler-Sholk, 2010). In her extensive research on the Zapatista indigenous resistance in Chiapas, Mora (2008) observes the link between state repression and social assistance programs. She views *Oportunidades* as a “recolonizing force” that operates to “regulate, control and violate the social and biological reproduction of the indigenous population” (Mora, 2008, 202). The local indigenous peoples in Chiapas have developed strong skepticism towards the intentions of such governing mechanisms, fearing that they may be used as a form of military surveillance (Mora, 2008). Drawing from the interviews with Zapatistas in the Caracol of La Garrucha, Stahler-Sholk further confirms that social programs have a “disempowering” and disruptive impact on the indigenous communities who become increasingly dependent on “a fickle patron” and even describes government aid as a “counterinsurgency response to the rebellion.” (2010, 273). Moreover, Ramírez’s (2017) recent study on the officer-recipient relationship in the *PROSPERA* program illuminates how officers engage in discriminatory attitudes towards indigenous beneficiaries and diminish their sense of self-worth and competence. The study showed that such experiences generated submissive and passive behaviors among indigenous subjects and discouraged both individual and collective agency (Ramírez, 2017, 266). Therefore, it is likely that the government encourages the provision of these programs –regardless of the apparent departure from its rules of operation– in order to amplify domination over indigenous localities, benefiting from the power imbalance embedded in the officer-recipient relationships. Gil-García’s (2016) ethnographic fieldwork in the indigenous community of La Gloria also reveals how *PROSPERA* fosters community divisions to destabilize collective efforts towards indigenous autonomy through a process of coercion and consent (Gil-García, 2016, 462). Following the introduction of the CCT programs that occurred shortly after the Zapatista uprising, reported incidents of social decomposition and intra-communal conflicts within indigenous regions increased (Jara, 2007). This increase might be a result of the government’s attempts to isolate and dismantle rebel communities by offering access to the program in exchange for their support and controversially feeding counter-Zapatista forces (González-Hidalgo, 2017; Mora, 2008; Ochoa León, 2011).

8. Discussion and conclusion

Our empirical analysis illustrates that controlling for a diverse set of socioeconomic variables, being indigenous is associated with a significant increase in one’s probability of receiving social assistance. In addition, we found that receiving social assistance decreases the likelihood of indigenous people’s participation in protest events. In other words, (i) the significant effect of indigenous identity (more significant than income) on access to social assistance, and (ii) the negative effect of social assistance receipt on indigenous people’s participation in protests provides strong support for the argument that (i) the Mexican government may be instrumentalizing social assistance programs as a counterinsurgency strategy for indigenous social unrest. In a contemporary global context, this finding lends support to Fox-Piven and Cloward (1971) thesis that social assistance functions to contain social unrest.

Two questions still remain: First, what are the mechanisms that determine the uneven distribution of social assistance to indigenous populations in Mexico? We like to hypothesize a number of potential mechanisms: Affirmative action could be a possible answer, but, to our knowledge, there is no official affirmative action policy in Mexico that guarantees higher social assistance for indigenous people. The introduction of Social

Development Law (Ley General de Desarrollo Social)⁵ in 2004 by the Fox administration ensured access to social development for all, guaranteeing that every person can receive the benefits in an equitable way. Based on the principle of “distributive justice”, however, the law indicates no affirmative action towards indigenous beneficiaries.

The absence of affirmative action leaves us to question the possible mechanisms through which indigenous individuals are disproportionately selected in social assistance programs, mainly in the CCTs that are supposedly rule-based and transparent. In practice, the CCTs identify eligible households based on the calculation of a “marginality index.” This allows the government to select the most marginal localities, and to perform household proxy-means tests which gather data from the “Survey of Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Households” (*ENCASEH*) in order to identify eligible poor households. At the geographical targeting stage, we believe, discretionary decision-making could be at play and indigenous localities, especially those that are Zapatista strongholds, might be prioritized as beneficiaries. Most of these indigenous localities are already eligible for the program given the high concentration of low-income households in the regions. The process of selection of localities also involves prioritization of districts with high citizen demand. Local authorities call households by distributing flyers, making public announcements and establishing service desks to receive applications from families that would like to join the program (Davila Larraga, 2016, 12). It is possible that the Mexican government puts more effort to advertise the program in indigenous regions. If the government intentionally publicize *PROSPERA* or other social assistance programs relatively more in these localities, the disproportionate number of indigenous beneficiaries could be explained by larger number of applications.

The discretionary power of caseworkers could play a role in delivering social assistance for indigenous people as well. To collect the households’ socio-economic information, local officers conduct interviews when they make house visits. Once families are registered in the program, they must fulfill co-responsibilities related to health, nutrition, or education components. Beneficiaries are monitored every two months to determine whether they have fulfilled the general requirements; and if they have not, they are removed from the program (Azevedo & Robles, 2013; Briere and Rawlings, 2006; Coady, 2006; Davila Larraga, 2016). It could be that the caseworkers who collaborate with local authorities in indigenous territories are encouraged to be more generous in their assessments. Considering these procedures and the absence of official affirmative action, we suggest that future ethnographic research in social assistance offices containing detailed communications with bureaucrats, caseworkers, and social assistance beneficiaries, particularly those of indigenous identity, can unveil the daily mechanisms behind uneven social assistance provision.

Another significant issue that deserves further scholarly attention is the alleged link between counter-Zapatista groups and government programs. Following the uprising in 1994, then-ruling party PRI lost considerable support from the indigenous communities in Chiapas who had previously formed their power base. Those who remained loyal to the ruling party, however, were rewarded with an increase in allocated resources that led to factionalism within the indigenous communities (Moksnes, 2004, 110). It is curious whether such rewards were later distributed in forms of social assistance programs with an aim to produce and amplify

⁵ Available on-line: http://www.uacj.mx/cs/Documents/PIFL_2012/Ley%20General%20de%20Desarrollo%20Social.pdf.

intra-communal conflicts among indigenous populations and weaken the Zapatista movement. Indeed, many argue that the Mexican government have facilitated paramilitary forces by providing them with social programs in order to disempower EZLN insurgents and instigate further division in the region (EZLN 2014; Galindo de Pablo, 2015; Ochoa Leon, 2011; Stahler-Sholk, 2010). While it is beyond the scope of this article to explain this link, our findings can stimulate further research to shed light on the government's strategy to reward local anti-Zapatista forces with social programs that may result in allocation of larger budgets of social assistance towards indigenous regions.

This urges us to ask the second question that remains: What are the responses of the Zapatista movement and indigenous people (whether bystander, pro- or anti- Zapatista) to this possible government strategy of using social assistance as counter-insurgency? Inclán's (2012, 470) study on movement-counter-movement dynamics of the Zapatista uprising portrays that the government expenditures on public works and social programs have significantly decreased pro-Zapatista protest activity and increased counter-Zapatista mobilizations. One might argue that the decrease in propensity to protest occurs as a result of the government pleasing indigenous protesters by providing them with better services. However, this explanation is convoluted by the fact that the Zapatistas refuse any government aid as they are vigilant about the potential control and containment that comes with it (Inclán, 2012; Ruiz, 2004).

We argue that provision of social assistance functions as political containment given the fact that the majority of these programs fail to address indigenous peoples' central demand for territorial autonomy and cultural and political recognition (Máiz, 2010; Nash, 2001; Ruiz, 2004). Although some of the organizations who were previously involved in social movements have decided to collaborate with the local government by receiving resources to achieve their own interests or simply chose to accept government programs irrespective of political implications, "there are very few cases where [these] practitioners consider the participatory space as a means to achieve the realization of [indigenous] rights" (Ruiz, 2004, 78) and thus, are not convincing enough to conclude that indigenous actors have stopped to protest as their demands are met. Indeed, the Zapatistas' firm position to reject any government aid and previous studies uncovering the oppressive and corrupt practices in social programs support our idea that social assistance is part of the hegemonic control exercised by the government on indigenous communities to disempower their movement.

Indigenous populations, who constitute a historically disadvantaged group, are still discouraged to express their issues related to human rights abuses and material deprivation, especially if they are receiving financial support from the government. Their continuing struggle for autonomy is also inhibited by regional authorities' abuse of power through social programs that limit individual expression and produce low intensity conflicts among communities (Camargo & Rivera, 2015; Gil-García, 2016; Ramirez, 2017; Stahler-Sholk, 2010). As such, social movement actors still face many obstacles for their efforts to achieve political power (Inclán, 2018). Therefore, the Zapatistas endeavor to establish indigenous autonomy with "pride and self-esteem" by organizing the "provision of social programs and services [...] that would elsewhere be considered the responsibility of the state" (Stahler-Sholk, 2010, 273). This strategy has also been observed in Turkey, where the Kurdish movement has developed its own social assistance programs for the poor as a response to the Turkish state's use of social assistance to contain the Kurdish unrest (Yörük, 2014). Our finding of indigenous beneficiaries' lower propensity to protest might be explained by the regulation, control and coercion embedded in social programs that generate a fear of

losing the cash allowance in case they engage in rebellious activities and criticize the regime.⁶

Following Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's (AMLO) recent landslide victory in the 2018 presidential elections, it is curious whether such strategies of counterinsurgency will persist. Regardless of his leftist political stands, AMLO is adamantly rejected by the EZLN (Nájar, 2018). Indeed, his signature project, The Mayan Train, a massive railroad that would connect Yucatan Peninsula, starting from the archeological sites of Palenque in Chiapas and traveling all the way to the beach resorts of Cancun in Quintana Roo, faced severe controversy from the Zapatistas who perceive the project as an attempt to destroy indigenous lands (Peoples Dispatch, 2019). The president's claims to promote a constitutional reform to implement the long-delayed San Andres Accords and attempts to initiate a dialogue with the EZLN prove that Zapatistas remain as a significant political movement that still has relevance even after over two decades since appearing to the public eye. Our study may inspire further research investigating the link between social welfare provision and contentious politics in light of this new political chapter of Mexico.

Our analyses imply that contentious politics might be an important parameter of social welfare provision in Mexico, and perhaps in other countries of the Global South. In the growing literature on global poverty alleviation programs, however, most accounts have thus far focused on structural factors, largely neglecting grassroots political factors. Such literature mostly disregards contentious politics and depicts the poor population as passive victims. Nevertheless, Arab Spring and the uprisings in southern Europe, as well as in emerging markets such as Turkey, Ukraine, Brazil, and China, however, have shown that the poor are not such passive victims and have emerged as important political actors capable of paralyzing existing political regimes (Onuch, 2014; Singer, 2014; Sridharan, 2014; Yörük & Yüksel, 2014). Such mobilizations have occurred in Turkey by Islamist or Kurdish groups; in Brazil by criminal drug trafficking; in India by Maoists and Hindu or Muslim fundamentalists; in China by ethnic/religious movements and extra-legal labor organizations; in South Africa by left-wing neighborhood organizations, landless movements, and criminal groups; and in Indonesia by ethnic and religious groups (Hasmath & MacDonald, 2017; Nepal, Bohara, & Gawande, 2011; Taydas & Peksen, 2012; Souza, 2006; Yörük, 2012). It is also important to note that we of course do not claim that the state can determine people's protest propensity. What we claim is state shapes its social policies by considering people's protest propensity, with the political objective of containing propensity by providing social assistance. But, whether

⁶ An alternative interpretation might suggest that the protest activity of indigenous individuals diminished as they were no longer dependent on the system of clientelism and patronage networks that have been permeated the region throughout the PRI's hegemonic rule and led to collective contestations against the regime. According to this logic, social assistance programs used to be part of a control mechanism that subordinated people and prevented their transition from "clients" to "citizens". It follows that these patronage networks were supposedly undermined, even eliminated, by the introduction of the CCTs (Camargo & Rivera, 2015; Fox, 1994). Nevertheless, even though poverty alleviation programs such as PROSPERA claim to eliminate such practices embedded in previous programs, studies observe persistent patterns of clientelistic networks and corrupt practices that manipulate the distribution of benefits to gain electoral advantage or to discipline indigenous communities, leading to the emergence of semi-clientelism and patronage in the delivery of benefits (Camargo & Rivera, 2015; De La O, 2013; Diaz-Cayeros, Federico, & Beatriz, 2009; Luccisano & Macdonald, 2012; Zucco, 2013). Such observations of corrupt mechanisms that allow for selective distribution and manipulation of benefits can also help us to explain the disproportionate distribution of social assistance to indigenous individuals. The Mexican government might take advantage of the newly emerged/existing patronage networks to guarantee the delivery of benefits in a way that would undermine indigenous peoples' organizational capacity and autonomy as demonstrated by the power of Zapatista uprising forces. Having said that, there is a need for further studies to investigate this possibility (We thank one anonymous reviewer to raise this possible alternative explanation).

or not this strategy works in different settings is a different story, which deserves another research design. In other words, we tried to infer about the *raison d'état* underlying social assistance policies, independently of the effectiveness of these policies. It is equally likely that these policies do or do not work to pacify, as this depends on the agency of the people who revolt or the tactics and strategies of the organizations that radicalize the people. Some grassroots organizations, like the Kurdish movement in Turkey, have developed their own social assistance programs as a response to state-sponsored programs that aimed to pacify insurgents, turning the entire field of social policy into a ethno-political battleground (Yörük & Özsoy, 2013). Whether or not social policy is a containment tool depends on the overlap between what a movement demands and what the state provides. If people demand social assistance and state provides social assistance, this is not political containment but a movement reaching its objectives. But, if a movement demands something (ethnic rights, land distribution etc), but the state provide social assistance rather than meeting these demands, i.e. if people are receiving some social policy benefits for which they are not struggling, this is more likely political containment. This study, therefore, contributes to a burgeoning literature on the global use of social assistance as a counter-insurgency strategy against movements by the ethnic poor. Further research, particularly large-N analysis with time dimensions, is needed to confirm that this is a global causal factor that drives worldwide social assistance expansion.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

Authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix

Tables A2 and A3

Table A1
Probit regression estimates for receiving social assistance (marginal effects) – full model.

VARIABLES	Race only	Race + Controls	Regions + Controls	Race + States + Controls	Race + Controls + Political participation
Ethnicity (Base Category: Whites)					
Mestizo	0.000 (0.017)	0.017 (0.024)	0.018 (0.025)	0.017 (0.024)	0.017 (0.024)
Indigenous	0.217*** (0.046)	0.091** (0.038)	0.106** (0.041)	0.091** (0.038)	0.085* (0.038)
Other	0.089 (0.048)	0.077 (0.049)	0.106** (0.051)	0.077 (0.049)	0.070 (0.047)
Gender		-0.018 (0.011)	-0.019 (0.013)	-0.018 (0.011)	-0.010 (0.011)
Household Income (Base Category: < \$1.050)					
\$1.501-\$2.750		-0.027 (0.023)	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.027 (0.023)	-0.026 (0.023)
\$2.751-\$4.100		-0.060** (0.026)	-0.081*** (0.025)	-0.060** (0.026)	-0.060** (0.026)
\$4.101-\$6.450		-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.101*** (0.026)	-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.075*** (0.028)
>\$6.451		-0.035 (0.036)	-0.077** (0.030)	-0.035 (0.036)	-0.036 (0.036)
Household Size (Base Category: HH Size < 3)					
HH Size between 3 and 4		-0.000 (0.024)	0.005 (0.025)	-0.000 (0.024)	0.001 (0.025)
HH Size between 5 and 8		0.066*** (0.019)	0.073*** (0.021)	0.066*** (0.019)	0.065*** (0.019)
HH Size > 8		0.060*** (0.022)	0.053** (0.022)	0.060*** (0.022)	0.057*** (0.022)
Employed (Base: Unemployed)					
		0.003 (0.016)		0.003 (0.016)	0.001 (0.016)
Educational Attainment (Base category: Illiterate)					
Literate		-0.035 (0.031)		-0.035 (0.032)	-0.040 (0.030)
Primary School		-0.099** (0.039)		-0.099** (0.039)	-0.104** (0.039)
Secondary School		-0.145*** (0.027)		-0.145*** (0.027)	-0.150*** (0.026)
Post-secondary+		-0.137*** (0.025)		-0.137*** (0.025)	-0.143*** (0.024)

Table A1 (continued)

VARIABLES	Race only	Race + Controls	Regions + Controls	Race + States + Controls	Race + Controls + Political participation
Age		0.000 (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Year		0.028*** (0.007)	0.029*** (0.007)	0.028*** (0.007)	0.029*** (0.007)
Rural			0.108*** (0.033)	0.098*** (0.034)	0.097*** (0.034)
Non-Catholic				-0.001 (0.016)	
Meeting Participation					0.070*** (0.021)
Observations	4,269	3,541	3,545	3,541	3,541
Log Likelihood	-2215	-1670	-1691	-1670	-1662

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05.

Table A2

Probit regression estimates for receiving social assistance (marginal effects) – indigenous as base category.

VARIABLES	(1) Race only	(2) Race + Controls	(3) Regions + Controls	(4) Race + States + Controls	(5) Race + Controls + Political participation
Ethnicity (Base Category: Indigenous)					
White	-0.156*** (0.026)	-0.076*** (0.027)	-0.086*** (0.027)	-0.076*** (0.027)	-0.072*** (0.027)
Mestizo	-0.200*** (0.035)	-0.068*** (0.025)	-0.080*** (0.025)	-0.068*** (0.025)	-0.063** (0.025)
Other	-0.090*** (0.027)	-0.013 (0.029)	-0.001 (0.030)	-0.013 (0.029)	-0.014 (0.029)
Gender		-0.018 (0.011)	-0.019 (0.013)	-0.018 (0.011)	-0.010 (0.011)
Household Income (Base Category: < \$1.050)					
\$1.501-\$2.750		-0.027 (0.023)	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.027 (0.023)	-0.026 (0.023)
\$2.751-\$4.100		-0.060** (0.026)	-0.081*** (0.025)	-0.060** (0.026)	-0.060** (0.026)
\$4.101-\$6.450		-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.101*** (0.026)	-0.075*** (0.028)	-0.075*** (0.028)
>\$6.451		-0.035 (0.036)	-0.077** (0.030)	-0.035 (0.036)	-0.036 (0.036)
Household Size (Base Category: HH Size < 3)					
HH Size between 3 and 4		-0.000 (0.024)	0.005 (0.025)	-0.000 (0.024)	0.001 (0.025)
HH Size between 5 and 8		0.066** (0.019)	0.073*** (0.021)	0.066** (0.019)	0.065*** (0.019)
HH Size > 8		0.060*** (0.022)	0.053** (0.022)	0.060*** (0.022)	0.057** (0.022)
Employed (Base: Unemployed)					
		0.003 (0.016)		0.003 (0.016)	0.001 (0.016)
Educational Attainment (Base category: Illiterate)					
Literate		-0.035 (0.031)		-0.035 (0.031)	-0.040 (0.030)
Primary School		-0.099** (0.039)		-0.099** (0.039)	-0.104*** (0.039)
Secondary School		-0.145*** (0.027)		-0.145*** (0.027)	-0.150*** (0.026)
Post-secondary+		-0.137*** (0.025)		-0.137*** (0.025)	-0.143*** (0.024)
Age		0.000 (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Year			0.029*** (0.007)	0.028*** (0.007)	0.029*** (0.007)
Rural			0.100*** (0.029)	0.091*** (0.030)	0.090*** (0.030)
Non-Catholic				-0.001 (0.016)	
Meeting Participation					0.070*** (0.021)
Observations	4,269	3,541	3,545	3,541	3,541
Log Likelihood	-2215	-1670	-1691	-1670	-1662

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05.

Table A3

Probit regression estimates for protest participation (marginal effects) – full model.

VARIABLES	(1) Race only	(2) Race + Social Assistance	(3) Race only + Interaction	(4) Race + All Controls + Interaction
Social Assistance		–0.003 (0.010)	0.006 (0.011)	0.010 (0.014)
Ethnicity (Base Category: Whites)				
Mestizo	0.001 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	–0.001 (0.009)
Indigenous	0.027** (0.013)	0.027** (0.013)	0.055*** (0.018)	0.054** (0.021)
Other	0.027 (0.020)	0.027 (0.020)	0.026 (0.020)	0.021 (0.018)
Indigenous* Social Assistance			–0.039*** (0.008)	–0.034*** (0.010)
Male				0.013** (0.006)
Household Income (Base Category: < \$1.050)				
\$1.501–\$2.750				–0.006 (0.010)
\$2.751–\$4.100				–0.005 (0.010)
\$4.101–\$6.450				–0.007 (0.014)
>\$6.451				0.009 (0.021)
Household Size (Base Category: HH Size < 3)				
HH Size between 3 and 4				–0.002 (0.010)
HH Size between 5 and 8				–0.004 (0.011)
HH Size > 8				0.006 (0.013)
Year				–0.004 (0.003)
Rural				–0.017 (0.015)
City Size (Base Category: Metropolitan Area)				
Big city				0.009 (0.009)
Medium size city				0.017 (0.013)
Small city				0.005 (0.011)
Rural area				0.031 (0.020)
Observations	4,248	4,248	4,248	3,541
Log Likelihood	–845.2	–845.2	–841.9	–700.5

Robust standard errors in parentheses ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05.

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