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Citizenship of the Conservative Movements in Mexico and Defense of the Formation of the Family: The Case of Frente Nacional por la Familia

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Abstract: The presence of the conservatives in Mexico, and their main characters, is long-standing. In Mexican history, some of the conservative movements have been present in religious thinking, especially in Catholicism, e.g., the quick departure from socio-cultural and political Mexican spaces as a consequence of the evangelical Spanish process, whose roots come from the XVI century. Of the population in contemporary Mexico (7.7% belong to Catholicism, 2.5% to Evangelical Christians and Protestants, and 2.5% to non-Christian groups, while 8.1% do not follow a religion). Catholicism has a significant presence and influence on different forms of belief and practice in daily life in Mexico. This paper aims to highlight the role of the conservative movement called Frente Nacional por la Familia. It presents its history as the heritage of other conservative movements in Mexico, the stages of its formation, and the agenda and intervention in public life. The methodological approach is qualitative, using multi-situated ethnography. The results allow us to visualize the construction of the public agenda with legislative strategies that have operated with relative success and national presence, obstructing the progress of the proposals of feminist groups and sexual diversity and the defense of a national and cultural project that has as one of the symbols the traditional family.

Keywords: conservative movements; Catholic church; Mexico; Frente Nacional por la Familia; religious law

1. Introduction

Some Notes on Religious Movements and the Secular Principle in Mexico

The secular character in Mexico is contained in the 1917 Constitution, with three central components: education, public and electoral politics, and land tenure. These three components marked the relationship between the State and the Church and configured a political culture in which someone could be a believer and admit the moral norms as a worshiper but not accept the intromission of the Church in political topics (Patiño et al. 2020, p. 75). The relationship between the State and the Church was distant in the public scene, different from the private, in which negotiation has been present since 1917. According to Velazco Ibarra Argüelles (2015, p. 9), the Constitution of 1857 and the Reform Laws promoted by a significant liberal politician generation in the context of a constant armed confrontation established the legal conditions that would be the foundation of a secular Mexican State. A century and a half later, the present legal system in the country related to this subject is the reflection of this legacy, considering the modifications of the Constitution of 1971 and the constitutional reforms of 1992.

However, the constitutional reforms of 1992 were a significant constitutional change that gave a legal personality to churches, because, until that point, they did not exist; this was the point when they created the LARCP (The Religious Associations and Public Worship Law)\(^1\).

The most significant changes were in Article 130, which reestablished the segregation principle between State and Church to only grant the possibility to the Union Congress...
to legislate on the subject of public worship, churches, and religious groups. Also, it awarded legal jurisdiction to churches to obtain their registration under the form of religious associations, which allowed foreigners to be ministers of worship. It also recognized the active but not passive vote of worship ministers. It supported the prohibition of associating with political interests and manifesting their political support in conformity to laws and institutions and added the ban to aggrieved national symbols. The heritages of the ministers of worship were modified to be limited. The forbid of forming political groups indicated any confessional association and celebrating reunions with political interest in temples (Velázco Ibarra Argüelles 2015, p. 51).

A new constitutional modification was introduced in 2012, which not only highlighted the secularism of the State (Article 40) but also modified the concept of the freedom of religion (Article 24). The consequence was that a group of Catholics and clerics initiated some strategies that could affect the legal field; this highlighted the freedom of beliefs presented in the Constitution, interpreted as the right to request reforms in the educative system, to include educative programs and ethical and moral values linked to religion in the curricula. These changes modified the third constitutional article that defined the attributes of elementary education: obligatory, universal, inclusive, public, secular, and with no cost. In addition, the freedom of religion helped as an argument to promote the traditional family as a guarantee and constitutional principle of values and wellness of Mexican citizens (Patiño et al. 2020, p. 76). This idea is common in large population sectors; some belong to Christian churches and some belong to groups distant from the religion. It means both coincide with a traditional general cultural model; they perceive it as an element that weighs on wellness citizenship and a harmonic society. According to Campos López and Velázquez Caballero (2017, p. 26):

During the XIX and XX centuries, conservativism in Mexico was divided into several trends. In the first century as independent, Mexicans of the Right didn’t hide links to the Holy See and the European Catholic Monarchy. Church in Mexico has contributed to politics by the active and passive dimension, resistance or silence. Church is a significant factual power that has a fundamental role in the political process of Mexico.

For this reason, the incursions in the political scenarios of the conservative traditional movements with a religious inspiration show political processes and tensions in the socio-cultural spaces, even when presented by citizens; studying them allows us to visualize the processes of change and negotiation in the country. According to the Housing and Population Census conducted by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática in México (INEGI 2020), the affiliation of the population is 77.7% of Catholics, 11.2% of Evangelical Christians and Protestants, 8.1% with no religion, and 2.5% of non-Christian groups; however, according to the historical data of INEGI, the Catholic population was 90% and above from 1875 to 1970. Over the next few censuses, this decreased by several percentage points in each decade; in 2010, the percentage was 82.9%, and in 2020, it was 77.7%. It is important to mention that, in the previous census, one of the groups with the highest increase was citizens with no religion; this gives information on the situation of the religious reconfigurations in the country. However, socialization within Catholic values has remained strong because it is part of the socio-cultural references shared by large social groups.

Contemporary Catholicism in Mexico is very diverse and cannot be understood without a deep look that observes the different perspectives; people subscribe to Catholicism, but their beliefs and practices are differentiated. During recent years, several surveys have reflected the continuity of this adscription but a severe detachment of the ecclesiastic doctrine related to sexual morals; this topic has generated a negative image in recent years because of the pedophile crisis in the Catholic Church in Mexico.

In the National Survey of Beliefs and Religious Practices, Encreer Survey (2016) made it possible to observe Catholics assumed by tradition; this means they are Catholics because they were born and socialized in this religious tradition and continue this as part of their
family heritage. Some Catholics participate in practices with popular religiosity; another view is the indigenous Catholicism that has its roots in colonial syncretism. Other kinds of groups are part of the Charismatic Renewal movement, which centers on the experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; they also practice Catholicism more independently from the ecclesiastic structures. We also have more of a heterodox group composed of teams adscripted to social Catholicism, successors in charge of changes to the encyclic Rerum Novarum, and the Vatican Concilium II as the base of ecclesiastic communities. Others are successors of the conservative Catholicism that emerges in some secular groups suggested by the integral–intransigent ecclesiastic view; this is the origin of the conservative group called Frente Nacional por la Familia (FNF), and this paper is dedicated to it.

2. Materials and Methods

Multilocal ethnography was used based on the proposal from Hirai (2009, p. 86), following Marcus, that the methodological strategy consists of “literally following people, objects, life stories, metaphors, conflicts moving between multiple places… a method of mapping social space”. Therefore, the methodological intention was to follow the group’s activities from some of its workspaces. In the first instance, we attended several of the pro-life and present family marches; also, we analyzed the website, focusing on its mission and vision, as well as the proposed work strategies, signing its ideological platform in various states of the Republic with candidates for elected positions, as well as circulars and press conferences, photographs, and materials hosted on the site.

The pandemic forced the groups to move to screens and socio-digital networks, and the researchers to follow the broadcasts of conferences, round tables, news, virtual marches, and Twitter quotes; this meant the monitoring, systematization, and data analysis of digital ethnography. According to Bárcenas Barajas (2019), this type of approach is called the study of digital religion; the ethnographic method reformulated three essential aspects: field, ethnographer participation, and the duration of the work field. In this sense, “the construction of the field in the digital ethnography is created by connection patterns, the circulation of mobile scenarios and the multiple sites of the spaces in/offline”, connecting them all in a network. Ethnographer participation is considered to be a “mutual visibility finding forms of copresence in the net” and with relation to time. Regarding the necessary time in the field, “a long duration is fundamental to generate the experience and establish connections between platforms, online and offline actors and sites”, in order to formulate and reject emergent theories, and the most relevant technique to obtain data (Bárcenas Barajas 2019, pp. 303–4) is observation.

The analysis focuses on speeches and practices; both were useful for this work because they allowed us to highlight religious practices in the public domain and their meaning in the Mexican context. This work presents some moments with multi-site ethnography and some with digital ethnography.

2.1. Movements and Associations before Frente Nacional por la Familia in Mexico

As part of the historical process that has formed conservative thought and its main characters in Mexico, associations and movements that defend it are not new and can be classified from the proposal of Defago and Faúndes (2015, p. 340):

In general terms, the Catholic Church has had a protagonist role and hierarchy in this expository reaction with some other conservative evangelical churches; even with some similarities, these churches have presented a fight against the defense of a model of sexuality based on the heterosexual, conjugal, monogamic, and reproductive family.

The ONGization, understood in this context as the presentation and organization of these groups, follows the rules and logic of non-governmental organisms that have obtained a strong power as strategy work. Juan Marco Vaggione (2009, p. 242) proposed the concept of “strategic secularism” to refer to the forms that several religious sectors have adopted as secular rhetoric to confront feminist, women, and LGBTIQ agendas without reducing
their level of dogmatism; under this scheme, secular and religions are thought of by these actors as the reflection of one same truth that looks forward to impact sexual politics in contemporary democracies. These groups start with the idea that we live in societies with a lack of values, which causes enormous social problems.

Mexico has a high percentage of insecurity and, in general, social harmony; for this reason, it is necessary to fight to try to recover the essential values identified with the moral and religious values present in Catholicism. In this sense, Juan Vaggione from Barcenas points out that “from the fracture of the hegemonic power of the catholic church [to norm the sexual moral] caused by the feminist movements and by the sexual diversity emerging reactions and articulations show not only the political terms of religions, also the possibilities of muting, transforming and adapting their political intervention”; this has been the process of the formation of contemporary conservative movements, but their face is also citizenship. However, they have strong articulations with churches; for Frente Nacional por la Familia, the reference is Catholicism and its genealogy has its background in historical religious organizations.

For this case study, we will consider three main groups, which, among others, have less hierarchy than the precedent, and collaborate with an expedited and significant form in giving a fast answer to governmental initiatives and locating Frente Nacional por la Familia in a public space. The first and most antique is the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia (UNPF), which started on 27 April 1917 as a national organization “on the defense of the rights and obligations of parents who attended against the freedom of education”\(^6\), promoting family as the fundamental core of the society, created as a reaction to the third constitutional Mexican article, which stipulates secularism in education in the country; using this, the participation of the Churches was limited in schools to form future citizens. This constitutional article has more than a hundred years of existence, and the UNPF also maintains its political activism and agenda, mainly the one referred to in the content of the free textbooks\(^7\), regarding, in particular, sexual education and the early years and the introduction to their “gender ideology”. They are part of the groups that supported the naissance and present strategies of the FNF.

There is no question that the Catholic Church had the highest number of educative centers at that moment, most of them through several religious groups around the country, which initiated diverse mobilizations to avoid this prohibition or avoid limitations in the educative centers they administrate; parents were the power behind this. García Alcázar (1996) states that the association considered its creation to defend the right of parents to choose the type of education they want for their children; in this way, it is possible to obtain the freedom of education by converting it into a fundamental objective.

Through the XX century, some initiatives were stated as “the opposition to socialist education in the 30s and the rejection of the unique and mandatory books of the Plan de Once Años” (García Alcázar 1996, p. 439) in Mexico. These objectives are still untouched, but the work strategies are changing.

The second group is Red Familia, which originated in 1999 after going to the II World Family Encounter\(^8\) in 1997 in Río de Janeiro, instituted by the initiative of Pope Juan Pablo II in 1994 and convocated by the Pontificia Counselor for the family, to promote human life, childhood, women, integral education, marriage, family, and human rights. Civil associations, private organizations, non-governmental organisms, local and national political groups, educative and research organizations, specialists, and friends from the Red all participated.

In 2005, by decree of former president Vicente Fox, an official date was established to celebrate Family Day in Mexico\(^9\) on the first Saturday of March; this date is a public holiday and in some years coincides with March 8th, the Day of the Woman. This is a difficult situation, as the Catholic Church organizes a march in favor of life and the family, which becomes a strategy against the traditional marches of feminist groups with opposite speeches. This becomes a public dispute for the cultural model of being a woman and a traditional family.
The last few years have been significant in helping and assessing the local constitutional reforms that protect life, from fecundation until death, in 22 of 32 entities of the country; this means that abortion and euthanasia are prohibited and sanctioned. Because of this, several feminist groups appealed before the Supreme National Justice Court and won various cases presented, starting from the jurisprudence that abortion cannot be punished in any place in the country from 2023. From that moment, some local congresses have been forced to enact the correspondent changes in their local constitutions; however, the conservative groups and the supporter legislators have shown, in different ways, their discomfort through press reports, marches, radio and television messages, and Twitter (now in the Red X), and showing this discomfort to the legislators who do not support their cause.

The third group that we want to highlight is ConFamilia, which is part of the promoted efforts by the World Congress of Family (WCF). This organization comes from conservative Christianity, which congregates believers from different denominations. Its objective is the affirmation and protection of “the natural human family (which is) established by the Creator and is essential for the wellness of society”, which is the most relevant encounter of pro-life and pro-family groups around the world. ConFamilia assumes itself as “a pluri-religious association with solid ethical practice, a high level of credibility, with a high argumentative level on science and reason”; it sees itself as an “innovator concept that forms the first family association in Mexico with pro-family members, specializing in the environment of the families, and their main center of activity is the public opinion”. It is a national group whose objective is to have a high impact on citizen representation without having a defined political orientation. In 2017 and subsequent years, Agustín Laje and Nicolás Márquez presented their text El libro negro de la Nueva izquierda to several cities of the country. Several associations and conservative movements in Mexico have used their speech either in totality or partially.

The three described groups were part of the support in the alliance to form the movement that started Frente Nacional por la Familia. The FNF grouped its demands, and other groups, to conform to the defense of the traditional family, the elimination of the educative contents related to gender ideology, the defense of life from its conception until death, and the marriage of man and woman in exclusivity; all these demands are in one, in defense of the family and values, which is considered the core cell in any society.

2.2. Frente Nacional por la Familia: Stages of Its Constitution

2.2.1. First Stage: The Origin of the Movement

The FNF was born in 2016 as a reaction to the proposal of former president Enrique Peña Nieto tried to elevate to constitutional rank and expand the definition of marriage, within the framework of the Day Against Homophobia. They made public two initiatives of the decree and sent them to the legislators: one in favor of equal marriage, which was understood as the right of any person to marry freely, without conditions on sex or sexual orientation, and one for the right of couples of the same sex to adopt underage children. This generated controversy and awarded the sector of conservative citizens a national movement with groups, movements, and associations, mostly related to Catholicism. This organization had a fast reaction to this situation because, on the following day, May 18th, several institutions and organizations of parents created a request on the platform CitizenGo. Its interests are similar to Frente Nacional por la Familia: defense of life, family, and freedoms. At the same time, Mexican embassies of some countries (Spain, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, and Argentina, etc.) organized marches against this proposal. On social media, the hashtag #YoDecidoPorLaFamilia was used as part of the posts; on this, they asked for respect for the right of the parents to educate and not “proposing confusing ideologies as the genre ideology” (message from the social network). In this way, they created a base and called themselves Frente Nacional por la Familia on 24 August 2016, with the objective of “defending marriage and natural family, respect for
life, and the right of parents to educate their children”\(^\text{20}\); finally, they announced two large marches on September 10 and 24.

The following months would be the first public multitudinous call: The March of the Family, on 10 September 2016, had a large attendance\(^\text{21}\), with believers linked with the Catholic Church through their ecclesiastic associations; they promoted the march during sermons and videos created by bishops and priests, and, especially for this occasion, they invited people to participate and share it on social media. This march marks the beginning of the FNF’s presence; the FNF intended to openly be a presence as a group that was the voice of many people who shared their vision of the world and the country. For this occasion, one of the leaders of the organization gave this speech:

Parents and society in general, we are tired of the situation of the country caused by corruption, insecurity, violence, poverty, lack of education, health, and economic growth; we react before the direct attack headed by President Enrique Peña Nieto against the natural family\(^\text{22}\).

However, it was dismissed on 09.09 due to the jurisprudence of the previous year before the Supreme Justice Court\(^\text{23}\) in 2015; this stipulated that it “was the obligation of all judges to follow a favorable criterion to all advocacy presented in any part of the country and in places where this type of marriages is not legal yet”\(^\text{24}\); this means that their fight was in favor of the natural family, respect of life from conception and the right of parents to educate their children, as well as against the imposition of gender ideology and teaching this in schools, the legalization of equal marriage, and the possibility to adopt children.

In the following months, the FNF would add its demands against abortion in any circumstance; this would be one of the most successful causes. This first stage happened between 2016 and 2017. In this period, the FNF incorporated groups and believers of other denominations, mainly Christians, making agreements between them, the most significant being the creation of strategies for public intervention. This alliance with the Christian evangelical groups is particularly relevant because, historically, they have been distant and even “the enemy” to Catholic believers in recent decades.

However, the FNF’s vision is very similar to the Christian values of the traditional family and their hostility to gender ideology. For this reason, they are allies to marches in the street and create a unique force; this does not mean they have forgotten their theological and pastoral differences but just move them to other spaces and moments.

2.2.2. Second Stage: Advocacy and the Dispute of the Meaning of Family

This stage happened in 2018, while the elections for the presidency of Mexico were also happening. There were some changes in the authorities of several states; in the legal field, the Republic Senators were reinstated for the next six years, as well as the federal deputies for the next three years.

Frente Nacional por la Familia was aware of the possibility of winning spaces in legislatures and impulse pro-life and pro-family laws to block progress on legislation different from their ideologic platform. This proximity and influence on laws of the federal Constitution in local constitutions was one of their main strategies; this stage is a process of institutionalization when safeguarding a national organigram with representations in each state of the country, an ideological platform, and common strategies.

The elections were held on 1 July 2018 and, in January, the mobilization started. The strategy was to create a political–ideological incidence platform with family as the core. The project also contemplated four fundamental axes, life, family, justice, and development, and fifteen theme objectives; their objective was “to reinforce family and have an influence on the three thousand federal, state, and municipal positions”\(^\text{25}\). In each of the thirty-two states of the country, the FNF was in charge of contacting diverse candidates of each different position in the election. It invited the candidates to sign the adscription to the program in a public way; in return, they received an offer to present themselves as candidates in favor of pro-life and pro-family beliefs\(^\text{26}\). In particular, the FNF collaborated on and promoted, with other associations, the platform “Saber votar”\(^\text{27}\).
This platform was for the citizens to understand the position of candidates in relation to different themes. We wanted to highlight the following: (a) integral education, which considers that parents have the right to choose the type of education that their children will receive—the FNF requested that the Federation stop deciding the topics of the books; (b) freedom of expression, which considers that this would protect ministers in teaching their religious belief and truths of faith; (c) the right to life, which recognizes and protects without discrimination any stage and circumstance from conception to natural death; and (d) the objection of conscience, in which public functionaries and citizens can, because of religious and ethical reasons, abstain from participating in certain official dispositions, such as appreciating and promoting the religious practice of citizens (positive secularism).

This platform followed up with each candidate through their press and social media declaration, their opinion to express questions, the electoral platform they had adscribed to, and their practices in their public record. With these locates, each theme was classified with the answers in favor (color green), against (red), indefinite (yellow), and not answered (gray); using this, the users were offered a factual view of the interests of each election candidate.

Another strategy conducted by the local groups of the FNF was to publish photos of the candidates when signing the points of their pro-life project. In the case of the candidates for the presidency of the Republic, they contacted two of them: José Antonio Meade, from the historical Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), and Ricardo Anaya, from the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). In both cases, the FNF promoted them as suitable candidates to lead the country. However, neither of them won the presidency; in the electoral competition of that year, none of the four presidential candidates showed openly in favor of the rights of the sexual diversity community, and they were not explicit on the demands of the feminist groups. In both cases, the candidates opted for ambiguous positions. In the statal field, the candidates on this platform were more successful in the legislative power and won some competitions; it gave them more results in the following months. We follow the proposal of Bárcenas Barajas (2020, pp. 763–93) when establishing the digital presence for these strategies:

1. The construction and appropriation of an imaginary under the gender ideology;
2. The elaboration and defense of a speech about false rights that allows appealing against the autonomy of the nation-states;
3. The conditioning of political actors through the vote of punishment, vigilance, and symbolic sanctions.

Even the work of Bárcenas Barajas (2020) quoted before points out what happened on the network; we also observed the same strategy in several scenarios used: on the streets, with pro-life and pro-family marches, advocacy with the candidates in election positions, and the frequent press conferences given in each state and at the national level. In all of them, a political agenda with gender ideology as an enemy to conquer and the conditioning of political actors was observed, with the last objective of the citizenship of the family understood as “The public enrollment of the family, as right and duty of the citizens to impulse initiatives and laws that protect Life, Family, and Freedoms” through participation on social networks, on the streets, and in the media.

### 2.2.3. Third Stage: Honoring Agreements

This stage occurred between 2019 and 2020; it has all the influences of Frente Nacional por la Familia in the legislative spaces of the states by the candidates that signed the public agreements to defend life and family. Many of them conducted initiatives of law to protect life from conception to death in their respective states; this demand converted into one of the most significant years because the Supreme Justice Court eliminated equal marriage due to the jurisprudence released in 2015.

The Inform “Vida-Familia-Libertades” presented on 18 July 2019 exposed what the FNF considers to be the main problem in Mexico.
We have all to work to stop the craziness of illegal organized crime and to make an effort to construct an authentic culture of life; it is necessary to start with family, the essential cell of society that not only exploits but also assumes and cares for life in all their vital cycle. Family and life are the antidotes to stopping the craziness of the anticultural of death and living in responsible freedom. (Frente Nacional por la Familia 2019)

This information offers a picture of the progress and regression in the states regarding the laws that protect life after conception. These were significant years for the Frente Nacional por la Familia because this initiative was accepted in twenty-two of the thirty-two states of the Mexican Republic; some of the states indeed included it in 2020 and even in 2021. All the initiatives started in 2019; as part of these agreements, we will talk about two cases. The first is in the State of Aguascalientes, which was the place where the first Family Secretariat (SEFAM) originated at the national level. The objective was to "join efforts from different government dependences and civil organization to reinforce families, improve functionality, cohabitation, development and construct a better society". This was a campaign promise in 2016 and caused opposition in the legislature and civil organizations when considering that it was an imposition of a unique family model; it was at risk of interfering with the actions of other dependencies such as the Integral Development of the Family (DIF) and the National System of Protection of Children and Teenagers (SIPINNA).

Even with the critiques of the governor’s initiative, it had the necessary guarantee to include it in the local constitution, and, when the new administration of 2021 began with a woman in charge, this continued and reinforced this instance.

The second case corresponds to the State of Queretaro, where Deputy Elsa Méndez promoted the Family Law perspective called "the first in its genre in Latin America" (8 December 2020), which is incorrect because in other Latin American countries such as Brazil, the Family Statute has been in place since 2005. Elsa Méndez referred to this as a long-standing desire by pro-life organizations; an objective of this was to consider the family as a public institution to guarantee the continuity of society that allows the transmission of values and knowledge, care, and security of the most vulnerable, and promotes co-responsibility between paternity and maternity. Family is an institution that all care to protect; the State, in a subsidiary form, should collaborate with families to support them in achieving their fundamental social functions, and to support, among other things, the discussion on family life. In this sense, it is necessary for politics from a family perspective to have public politics from an anthropologic, political, and economic perspective. In both cases described, they have the support of several pro-life and pro-family associations in Mexico, for example, Red Familia and ConFamilia. These cases show the capacity of the influence of the FNF in some state legislatures to impose a unique cultural model about family, its constitution, and its production.

2.2.4. Fourth Stage: Visualizing the Cause, Looking at the Allies Outside of Mexico

During 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic marked these years because it took over platforms and socio-digital networks. During these years, the different legislatures of different states in the country maintained their legislative work with the local leaders of the Frente Nacional por la Familia with the intention of not losing a presence in these spaces; they were observing the presentation and discussion of initiatives of law in congresses and implemented Twitter meetings with the Supreme Justice Court or with the federal and local deputies, depending on the situation. These meetings consisted of creating admiration for the Instagram and Twitter accounts of judges and legislators and implied in any legal or legislative decision to vote in favor of the pro-life and pro-family proposals. These years led to the increased use of technology for communication. The FNF allied with similar groups outside of Mexico and proposed an unprecedented number of conferences and round tables with a high rate of visits.

Regarding the FNF’s alliances outside of the country, we will refer to three. The first is the FNF’s link with Citizen Go, an ultra-conservative Spanish group in charge of the
platform HazteOír.org, on which the Frente Nacional por la Familia initiated the call against the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2016. This also has links with the Catholic conservative congregation Opus Dei, which, at the same time, has links with the Mexican group El Yunque; all these have similar interests and the same ideology and have a relationship with ultra-conservative sectors outside of the country. A second link is the FNF’s participation with ConFamilia, RedFamilia, and the Mexican NGO called Compartimos Mundo in the General Assemblies of the Organization of the American States (OEA). Since 2017, the FNF has regularly defended its proposals; with these organizations, it has gained visibility outside of Mexico and gained more followers with interests similar to those in Latin America. A third link is related to the homologous associations in Latin America and Spain such as Family Watch International, Cuide Chile, Padres por la libertad de educar, the International Youth Network, Pasos por la vida, 40 días, Iniciativa ciudadana, Gladium, a citizen participation platform in Mexico, and Civilitas, a group in Cordoba, Argentina. Some of these associations participate in the Iberoamerican Congresses for Life and Family and in encounters of Acción Política Conservadora (CPAC), which are considered the top extreme right movement in the world. At CPAC November 2022 in Mexico, the chairman, the Mexican movie producer and actor Eduardo Verástegui, called on people to speak, including Steve Bannon, ex-advisor for Donald Trump; Eduardo Bolsonaro, son of Jair Bolsonaro, who was at that moment the president of Brazil; Santiago Abascal, Vox leader in Spain; Javier Milei, the current president of Argentina; Lech Walesa, the former president of Poland; and Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union in the USA. Both of these associations are spaces for groups with similar proposals on an international agenda in favor of life and family.

During the pandemic, several groups coordinated events and conversations through diverse platforms with free access to participants from different countries to show their agreement with this agenda. Posters used to advertise these contained logos of the institutions, the speaker’s nationality, and the schedule for the conference in these countries. This strategy helped to show their power and number of followers. On several occasions, the FNF showed publicity with the logo of the Confederación Episcopal Mexicana (CEM); this group invited the Catholic bishops of the country to guarantee the event. In this way, the FNF gained larger audiences beyond national frontiers that, during the pandemic, were paying attention to what happened on television.

In 2022 and 2023, strategies on socio-digital networks and face-to-face events in the streets returned. The significant consequences of the pandemic left teachings and the logic of working differently from the conventional groups of prayers and chats in public spaces and allowed connection from home in a synchronic form. As a consequence, now we have differentiated strategies in both spaces and can obtain several differentiated groups. After some of the habitual activities with pro-life marches, each one had fewer people returning to their public presence in 2023, with the excuse of the opposition to the new Free Text Books (LTG)³⁸; in July of the same year, a new version of the LTG was released. Diverse groups, associations, and parents were opposed to it not only because they had attempted to introduce their new curricula, the gender ideology, to the children. For this reason, after convoking pro-life marches with not many people, the FNF returned to marches against the free books with little assistance. They occurred in all the states of the Republic and, in this way, the distribution of the book in Mexican schools was avoided. The FNF also had the duty of stopping the distribution of books and placed demands against the Public Education Secretariat for not having a public opinion that omitted the contents considered inadequate for the basic formation. In some states such as Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, and the State of Mexico, the FNF achieved this along with Frente Nacional por la Familia marches supported with videos and invitations that circulated social networks, in which Catholic priests and bishops asked their believers to participate in for the well-being of society.
3. Results and Discussion

The Frente Nacional por la Familia is a movement constituted by organizations joining the Catholic Church; however, the FNF’s public presence is for social harmony and for recovering the social and personal essential values to prevent and eradicate significant social problems. It is a player in the socio-cultural and religious field that has learned to work from the articulation of several social actors, not only of Catholicism but also from other churches of a Christian denomination, and even of persons with no religion but that share the same socio-cultural model of family, values, and traditions as part of the structure that forms the nation. Since the moment of its constitution, the FNF has emphasized its interest in showing its presence in the political field as citizens; this creates the possibility of participating and introducing its political agenda in the framework of a secular state in Mexico.

Their strategies have become face-to-face, showing that many citizens share the same idea of family and society, and they have disabled initiatives in local and federal congresses that go against their pro-family and pro-life positions. Before and after the marches, they hold press conferences, proselytize on the Internet, and their cause is frequently mentioned by priests during Sunday services. At this moment, the FNF has achieved some points of its agenda in the local congresses of several states. Some of its victories have been temporal; this offers new arguments to position new topics or to discuss new scenarios as in the case of the FNF’s presence in international organizations such as the Organization of the Interamerican States (OEA).

The FNF’s political power should not be underestimated, because it is revitalized by the local and federal elections. In 2024, there is a new election for the presidency of Mexico, and, for the first time, we are seeing candidates in charge of these ultra-conservative movements and promoting these causes, such as the movie producer and Catholic believer Eduardo Verástegui, who could not obtain a million signatures before the National Electoral Institute (INE), only achieving 14.7%. However, this first incursion helped to show him as a character in the political arena with the intention of being a future conservative politician option with relevant international relations and solid funding. Groups such as the Frente Nacional por la Familia would naturally be his allies; however, there are many interests and alliances with political parties and institutions prior to the contest, which people such as Verástegui can access through non-traditional secular spaces. Movements like this allow us to observe the revitalization and power of historical genealogies in contemporary movements and see the capacity of new proposals and strategies to revitalize traditional values in secular environments. The citizen action of religious movements has allowed the FNF to navigate in secular fields with enough solvency and legal personality; in this way, laypersons that are part of this group are the face of the conservative churches in Mexico.

This case allows us to visualize what De la Torre and Seman (2021, p. 11) assume to be part of the religious reconfigurations in the world, where we observe “the intensification of the competence dynamics and conflict in the religious field, also the religious projection to the public space with corporative and political claims”. Movements such as the Frente Nacional por la Familia revitalize and modify the traditional dynamics. This is another piece of moral conservative activism with heterogenous characteristics that is gaining more space in contemporary democratic societies because it is accessing frameworks close to it where “the Catholic Church, as most of the religious institutions have a hyper moralized posture of sexuality and must be reflected in the legal system to protect marriage and the reproduction as universal values. In this way, the law has the main function to order and prioritize the sexuality according to certain values non-negotiables” (Vaggione 2021, p. 385). The presence of groups such as the Frente Nacional por la Familia in public spaces makes sense in this context, for this is the reason for their revitalization in the last decade through reactive activism to the Sexual and Reproductive Rights paradigm.
Even groups with similar ideologies that have a large following in Mexico found that their potential to interfere in the public area was restricted. The most relevant change of movements such as the Frente Nacional por la Familia was the public incursion as a citizen in instigating the permanence of change and, in some cases, the return of the traditional society model. Raising a voice, filling the streets, making public speeches, using socio-digital networks, and pressuring the legal fields to encourage the popular vote for candidates during an election are strategies that propose a different form of politics in Mexico. In the center of the tension, the socio-cultural ruptures, specifically the Sexual and Reproductive Rights paradigm, are placed with the traditional model of society, which references the historical presence of Christian/Catholic values in the Mexican context.

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Notes

5. They defend Catholic morality and ecclesiastical teaching as the main and immutable sources of doctrine.
7. Since 1960, books have been designed, printed, and distributed to students around Mexico. They come from educative programs created by the Public Education Secretariat and are used in different grades by public and private schools of the country.
8. They are conducted every three years; the most recent was in Rome in 2022.
9. UNESCO International Day of Families is observed on 15 May.
11. The decision of the National Supreme Tribunal of Justice Court was in September 2023.
14. Agustín Laje is a politician and writer who lives in the United States; he is president and founder of the Free Foundation of the conservative position.
15. This book has been in the ten best-sellers on Amazon; both authors are Argentinians.
16. A wide discussion of the origin is found in Pedroza et al. (2020).
17. Citizen Go Works like Change.org. It gives voice to requests and proposals of conservative sectors in the world. It was born in 2013 in Spain. It is linked to the movement.
18. Symbol hashtag (#) used at the beginning of a word or a combination of these; it generates a hyperlink that surfs to other similar contexts, which helps the message to transmit.
20. Organizers counted 1,300,000 participants.
22. 2015.05. Jurisprudency 43/2015.
Since 1940, books have been designed, printed, and distributed to students around Mexico. They come from educative programs. According to RAE, it is a neologism used for the symbol @ followed by the person to link to; this person will then receive a notification indicating their mention in a topic.

From 1929, the country was led by either one of these parties. That changed in 2018 when Andrés Manuel López Obrador won with MORENA.

The two cases correspond to states with a high Catholic history presence and high percentages of Catholic religious belief.

However, one new sentence of the National Supreme of Justice Court released on 9 September 2021 repudiates the “competency to define the origin of human life, concept of person and titleury of human rights in the States because this corresponds exclusively to the General Constitution”, which with no doubt will be modified sooner or later in the local legislations.

The two cases correspond to states with a high Catholic history presence and high percentages of Catholic religious belief.

Elsa Méndez’s proposal was widely circulated. Months later, she was accused by an LGBTIQ group in charge of protecting rights because her declarations encouraged hate for their community. The FNF called this out, celebrated the absolution, and circulated it.

According to RAE, it is a neologism used for the symbol @ followed by the person to link to; this person will then receive a notification indicating their mention in a topic.

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