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Maria Waldinger*

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Abstract

This paper examines the long-run effects of different Catholic missionary orders in colonial Mexico on educational outcomes and Catholicism. The main missionary orders in colonial Mexico were all Catholic, but they belonged to different monastic traditions and adhered to different values. Mendicant orders were committed to poverty and sought to reduce social inequality in colonial Mexico by educating the native population. The Jesuit order, by contrast, focused educational efforts on the colony's elite in the city centers, rather than on the native population in rural mission areas. Using a newly constructed data set of the locations of 1,145 missions in colonial Mexico, I test whether long-run development outcomes differ among areas that had Mendicant missions, Jesuit missions, or no missions. Results indicate that areas with historical Mendicant missions have higher present-day literacy rates, and higher rates of educational attainment at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels than regions without a mission. Results show that the share of Catholics is higher in regions where Catholic missions of any kind were a historical present. Additional results suggest that missionaries may have affected long-term development by impacting people's access to and valuation of education.

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