

CHAPTER 3

MEXICAN ELECTIONS, 1910–1994: VOTERS, VIOLENCE, AND VETO POWER

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BETWEEN 1910 and 1994, voters turned out for around eighty thousand elections in Mexico.¹ These elections were deeply diverse, their form and function determined by level, region, and time. The analytical difficulty of generalizing about these contests has traditionally been resolved by not deeming them contests at all.² Instead modern Mexican elections have in the main been dismissed as epiphenomenal to the real business of recruiting elites, reproducing power, and constituting a political system.³ Most scholars since the 1960s identified their primary function as “ceremony,” “a mere legitimising ritual” through which a politically apathetic population periodically passed.⁴ Elections before the democratic transition were, Daniel Levy and Kathleen Bruhn judge, eminently “safe and predictable.”⁵ At the skeptical extreme, Frank Brandenburg considered even the denunciation of electoral fraud a Machiavellian gambit, deliberately and misleadingly suggesting “the authenticity of an organized opposition, of free and effective suffrage, and of a give-and-take electoral contest in which the official slate truly won by an overwhelming majority, even though a few minor electoral manipulations occurred.”⁶ Such smoke-and-mirror appreciations were a commonplace among political outcasts and public intellectuals across the century and were amplified during the protracted transition of the 1980s and 1990s.⁷ A broad consensus held that Mexican voters had invariably faced overwhelming institutional and informal, often violent impediments

to effective electoral representation. This chapter surveys the principal strands of this interpretation: the presidential elections that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and its ancestors invariably won, the key mechanisms of electoral manipulation, and the presidentialist nature of the ensuing political system. I then explore what might be called the unseen elections: the tens of thousands of other, lesser elections in which voters nevertheless participated over the course of the century. If Mexicans voted inside an electoral monoculture of top-down imposition, why did they bother going to the polls at all?

Answering that question in any authoritarian system is distinctly difficult, and Mexico for much of the period under consideration was an electoral authoritarian regime, one of those that, in Andreas Schedler's definition, "play the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national legislative assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than 'instruments of democracy.'"⁸ Under such regimes how many people voted and who for are usually unrecoverable data. The long-standing hyperpresidentialist model of Mexican politics largely bypassed methodological

**Table 3.1 Official Results of Presidential Elections,
1910–1994**

Year	Incumbent Party Share of Vote (%)
1910	100
1911	99
1917	97
1920	95
1924	84
1928	100
1929	94
1934	98
1940	99
1946	78
1952	74
1958	90
1964	88
1970	85
1976	93
1982	72
1988	50
1994	48

Sources: Pablo González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México: Evolución y perspectiva* (México DF, 1985); Juan Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad: Elecciones, autoritarismo y democracia en México* (México, D.F., 1991); Silvia Gómez Tagle, *La transición inconclusa: Treinta años de elecciones en México 1964–1994* (México, D.F., 2001).

handwringing, however, for in its terms the only elections worth consideration were also the most visibly rigged: the presidential polls that reliably returned the party in power from 1910 to 1994. There were four good reasons to see these as engineered anointments rather than open elections. The first was basic psephology: the winners enjoyed overwhelming majorities until the very end of the century, and official results painted only the 1994 election as competitive.⁹ The second was the raft of institutional measures by which other parties were restricted to loyal opposition and dissident voters disenfranchised. The third was the intensity and ubiquity of contemporary denunciations of electoral fraud; it became a popular trope to claim that exact results were known before the election was actually held.¹⁰ The fourth was hard evidence of the endemic fraudulent practices that PRIístas called *alquimia electoral*, evidence that has multiplied since the press grew freer in the 1990s and the government opened up the intelligence archives in the 2000s. A brief review of the most contested of these elections—the potential, and missed, transfers of power of 1910, 1929, 1940, 1952, and 1988—bolsters the conventional appreciation of Mexico’s twentieth-century elections as fundamentally noncompetitive (Table 3.1).

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The first two presidential elections of the period, those of 1910 and 1911, structured much of the electoral history of the twentieth century; the first sparked revolution, and the second consecrated no reelection as a core political value. In 1908 the aging dictator Porfirio Díaz, effective ruler of Mexico since 1877, unexpectedly announced his retirement and the country’s imminent democratization to a star-struck American journalist. The result was mass political mobilization, a Mexican glasnost, which culminated in the opposition campaign of a northern landowner and liberal reformer, Francisco Madero.¹¹ Madero formed the Anti-Reelectionist Party and campaigned vigorously for the presidency, drawing crowds of tens of thousands while touring twenty-two states of the republic. As the June election approached the Díaz government began systematic repression of the *maderistas*, banning rallies, deploying troops, suing Madero, and finally arresting him. The results were predictably one-sided: Madero was deemed to have won no votes whatsoever in his hometown.¹² The dénouement was less predictable: the genteel loser became the figurehead of popular and bourgeois rebels across Mexico, whose disparate revolutions forcibly retired Díaz in May 1911. The peace treaty scheduled new presidential elections for October 1911, pitting Madero against a Porfirian would-be reformer, General Bernardo Reyes. The general, however, entered the field late, asked for the elections to be postponed, and, when refused, cited street fighting with Madero’s supporters as a reason for withdrawing his candidacy. The hoped-for delegitimization failed, and Madero won peacefully with 98 percent of an allegedly large turnout. The election became totemic for future Mexicans, a moment of democracy manqué; Madero lasted little more

than a year before being toppled by a military coup and murdered. Its historical image owes something to martyrology. Madero went to the polls unopposed, he was in the main funded by his wealthy family, and he imposed an unpopular candidate for vice president, who scraped home on difficult-to-verify rural votes. A certain degree of fixing was evident, a fixing that would become more evident in the regime's subsequent subnational elections.¹³ As bars for democratic practice go, this one was not overly high. For later elites, nevertheless, 1910 exemplified the dangers of too much authoritarianism; the Madero regime, the defects of too much democracy.¹⁴

The northern revolutionaries who recovered national power through the civil wars of the 1910s were consequently unsqueamish election fixers. Both Venustiano Carranza and Pablo González issued manifestos in 1919 that explicitly linked a national lack of *educación democrática* with a need to restrict political campaigning.¹⁵ Yet the first three presidential elections after the armed revolution—those of 1920, 1924, and 1928—did not require massive, unmistakable fraud. Alvaro Obregón, the revolutionaries' greatest general, was also a charismatic candidate who cracked black jokes across the country in 1920.¹⁶ Plutarco Elías Calles, the candidate for 1924, was an unglamorous apparatchik—a 1922 poll placed him third in the forthcoming race—but an apparatchik with a well-organized, well-populated union base.¹⁷ Sweeping national-level fraud was, moreover, a high-risk option in the 1920s; in this period, as we shall see, Mexicans went to the polls in numbers and with some expectations that Madero's legacy would be honored. Hence despite the tendency for presidential elections to be preceded by military uprisings, and for elections of all kinds to be bracketed by violence, popular preferences counted. As one British diplomat put it, "It would be a complete misapprehension to imagine that the so-called elections are elections in the modern Anglo-Saxon sense of the word. . . . None the less, the outward symbols are there, and if the party machine wins without bloodshed, it will probably be found to represent the majority of the effective opinion of those whose ideals have lent them the courage to partake in the dangerous pastime of politics."¹⁸ The election of 1929 was different, first because it was extraordinary: Obregón had won a second term in 1928 and promptly been assassinated. Many held the surviving *caudillo* Calles responsible.¹⁹ It was difficult not to hold Calles responsible for the Cristiada, a bloody Catholic counterrevolution that his government had provoked and that was in its third year. Although the main conflict zone lay in the Center-West, small guerrilla groups sparked scattered fighting across Mexico. The war killed about 100,000, internally displaced another 80,000, and fueled extensive migration to the United States.²⁰ Finally, in the same years the Great Depression hit Mexico early and hard; oil and mineral prices and exports collapsed, and the economy shrank by over 5 percent in 1927 and 1929.²¹ Against this backdrop the opposition candidacy of the former education secretary José Vasconcelos was markedly more popular than that of Calles's puppet, the unknown Pascual Ortiz Rubio. Vasconcelos's vigorous campaigning mobilized large crowds across Mexico, crowds in which the young and the women (he claimed Madero's mantle and promised female suffrage) were prominent. In Mexico City some 100,000 attended the *vasconcelista* rally. Voters were discouraged, however, by systematic harassment and

violence: on election day government gunmen killed nineteen in the capital alone, and one year later one hundred bodies were discovered in a mass grave in Topilejo. The official results gave Ortiz Rubio an unconvincing landslide.²² The U.S. ambassador admitted the fraud to Vasconcelos, or so he claimed, and told him to accept decorously and await another opportunity; the British ambassador had “not met a single person who [was] a genuine supporter of [Ortiz Rubio].”²³ The loser left the country, proclaiming himself president-elect and calling for a national rebellion that never materialized. The election of 1929 is generally remembered for the founding of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), the ancestor of the PRI. It was also the year of the first great postrevolutionary fraud.

Yet this fraud did not establish the dominant party’s hegemony over elections, and in 1940 another revolutionary dissident challenged for the presidency. General Juan Andreu Almazán, a prosperous right-wing officer with a large construction company, was an unlikely popular leader. Under the reformist president Lázaro Cárdenas, however, the tightening grip of the dominant party, reinvented as the Partido Revolucionario Mexicano (PRM), over worker and peasant corporate sectors combined with the political exclusion of many of Calles’s followers, with renewed Catholic mobilization and strong bourgeois resentment of social reform to politically polarize Mexico. Almazán consequently found himself presented with a broad, prefabricated coalition that stitched together military conservatives with former vasconcelistas, Catholics with revolutionary outcasts, workers with industrialists, peasants with landowners. His campaign started early and played adeptly to these constituencies, promising local democracy, votes for women, support for collective farms as well as smallholdings, the rights of workers as well as the defense of capital. Voters on July 7 met an unprecedented level of violence as the regime’s gunmen and soldiers took control of polling booths and dispersed *almazanistas* with tommy guns. Both death toll and vote count are beyond reconstruction. The estimated death toll was thirty; the official election result gave the official candidate, Manuel Avila Camacho, 99 percent. Scattered indicators, however, suggest that Almazán may have won even in the teeth of the crackdown. Mexico City was believed to be overwhelmingly *almazanista*. In Durango the preliminary count for the first district gave Almazán 12,123 votes to Avila Camacho’s 421; official results ceded Almazán a mere 2,000 for the entire state.²⁴ Intelligence agents estimated that the opposition had taken overwhelming majorities in the main cities of Guerrero.²⁵ Perhaps the most convincing evidence that the incumbent party lost comes from their candidate, who, on election night, told confidantes teary-eyed that he had not won and could not take power.²⁶

The 1952 election shared important common features with 1940. Once again, important factions of the elite, this time party leftists and ambitious army officers, saw themselves blocked from power; once again, a substantial change in the economic model, the turbulent shift toward industrial state capitalism, created a large constituency of marginalized voters; once again, many of those voters saw institutional change diminishing their access to local power. Once again, a prosperous general with a construction company stepped forward. In 1951 General Miguel

Henríquez Guzmán, a close ally of ex-President Cárdenas, left the PRI and became the candidate of the ensuing umbrella movement, the Federación de Partidos del Pueblo Mexicano (FPPM). The *henriquista* movement was exceptionally broad, its leaders stretching from popular agrarian radicals such as Genovevo de la O and Rubén Jaramillo to conservative generals such as Antonio Ríos Zertuche and Luis Alamillo Flores.²⁷ While the campaign was never genuinely national, it was powerful in Mexico City and several states, where key leaders were arrested, jailed under the threat of decade-long sentences for *disolución social*, and then released into political oblivion.²⁸ Repression in the capital was broader based, and the police forces used horses, gas, and gunfire to break up the party's "victory parade" on election day; at least seven were killed, eighty wounded, and more than five hundred arrested.²⁹ Henríquez Guzmán rejected his 16 percent of the vote as an egregious fraud, and flirted with rebellion all the way up to the transfer of power in December; on November 16, for example, secret police counted twenty-five thousand henriquistas in a protest meeting.³⁰ Henríquez's substantial economic stake in stability, the poor quality of the movement's leadership, and, critically, the decision of Cárdenas to sympathize but not publicly support the general all made *henriquismo* anticlimactic; when the party was deregistered in 1954 there was little protest.³¹ Yet the 1952 election was nonetheless a watershed. Henríquez was the last military officer to run for the presidency, and he led the last major factional split from the PRI for thirty-five years. The 1952 election brought the PRI, in presidential elections at least, to what Barrington Moore describes as "the conquest of inevitability": the social construction of their permanence in power as a given.³²

The responses of city-dwellers to Almond and Verba's 1959 surveys clearly recorded that belief, simultaneously registering powerful cynicism toward individual politicians with relatively deep acceptance of the system as a whole.³³ It became yet clearer as the regime survived growing pressure from the late 1960s onward. Voters accumulated good reasons to punish the PRI: increasingly visible violence against urban populations, epitomized by the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre; economic incompetence, epitomized by the debt crisis and bank nationalization of 1982; political short-sightedness in excluding much of the Left from elections. There were, moreover, powerful structural reasons undermining the regime in the long run. The so-called Mexican miracle of postwar industrialization and steady economic growth (averaging 6.4 percent per annum) ended.³⁴ Simultaneously the strains of Mexico's exceptional population growth, some 700 percent between 1920 and 2000, left the state unable to maintain levels of social spending, facing the crowds of the swelling cities that never lost a tradition of popular protest.³⁵ PRIísta presidential candidates nevertheless won comfortably in 1970, 1976, and 1982, institutionally and informally insulated from real competition, to be sure, but also without the elite exits and massive popular disenchantment that such competition required.

By 1988 that had changed. The government reacted to the debt crisis of the early 1980s by shrinking the state and liberalizing the economy in the structural readjustment required by the International Monetary Fund bailout, whose initial stabilization was undone by the collapse of oil prices in 1985. The cumulative effect

of the two shocks was widespread hardship, a hardship deepened in Mexico City by the devastation of the same year's earthquake. By 1987 annual inflation ran well over 100 percent. Real wages had halved in four years; the price of tortillas had risen 400 percent, beans 800 percent, bread 1800 percent. The party elite responded by moving rightward and blocking leading leftists, who formed the Corriente Democrático around Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the totemic ex-president's son. When the party candidate was revealed as Carlos Salinas de Gortari, a neoliberal economist, Cárdenas left the PRI and ran as the candidate of a left-wing coalition, the Frente Democrático Nacional (FDN). Long-standing supports fell away from the PRI, from the "shell" parties (*partidos electoreros*) that lent noncontests a gloss of multiparty competition to the Christian Democrats of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), who exchanged their traditional role of fierce but fundamentally loyal opposition for a new, militantly antisystem campaign.³⁶ Former guerrilla organizations such as Génaro Vázquez's Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria dropped their opposition to electoral participation and endorsed Cárdenas.³⁷ With party enthusiasm for the PRI's candidate feeble, particularly among the peasant and worker sectors—the labor boss Fidel Velázquez walked out of Salinas's campaign launch—many Mexicans saw the 1988 election as an opportunity to end one-party rule.³⁸ On election night, as early urban counts showed votes flooding in for the FDN, the government announced that computerized vote counting had failed: "El sistema se cayó." "The system" was long-standing Mexican code for the PRIísta regime; the irony of the announcement that it had crashed was not lost on voters. Who won in 1988 is unknowable. Salinas officially took 50.48 percent of the vote, while Cárdenas gained 33 percent and won only five states, including Mexico City and the Estado de México.³⁹ President de la Madrid and other elite members subsequently confirmed what vox populi already knew: that the PRI had committed fraud.⁴⁰ It was probably not the first presidential election that the dominant party lost at the polls, if indeed they did lose.⁴¹ Unlike 1940, however, the damage proved irreparable.

THE MECHANISMS OF ELECTORAL MANIPULATION

The dominant party's adept blending of the forms of multiparty democracy with the functions of dictatorship demanded a broad panoply of election-rigging strategies. These were flexible, case-specific, and subject to constant refinement and renovation over time, and electoral manipulation by 1994 was a very different practice from that of 1934. The evolution of these practices, and the consequent shifting balances of elite and popular inputs into the political system, will be examined later; a basic division remained constant across the period. Mexican elites fixed elections through a constantly evolving set of formal, institutional measures: the metagame of producing electoral laws and party statutes that favored them in mobilizing sympathetic voters,

and above all in demobilizing dissidents and disarticulating organized opposition.⁴² Within these rules, which many Mexicans vigorously contested, elections were a complicated “nested game” with two main components: the intrapolitical negotiation behind choosing a candidate, and the dirty work of drumming up, scaring off, or writing off strategic groups of voters in order to elect them.⁴³

The metagame of institutional control and biasing of elections—the formal, visible loading of the dice—had five main arenas. The first, and fundamental, was the establishment of a dominant party. Revolutionary elites achieved this in 1929 and consolidated that party’s dominance in 1946, when they passed a new federal election law requiring other parties to fulfill extraordinarily stringent requisites to gain registry and win a place on the ballot. These requisites, administered by the *Secretario de Gobernación*, were further tightened in 1951 and 1954, banning significant competitors, including the *henriquistas*, the Communists, and the militant Catholic *sinarquista* party. They could also be discretionally loosened to diffuse other threats; the registry of five small fratricidal parties, for example, neatly divided Mexico’s Left in the late 1970s.⁴⁴ The combination of party machine and party registry system gave PRIista elites substantial control over access to formal politics.

Once the party was established, the next arena lay in centralizing candidate selection and neutering the overly independent. The first step in this was the congressional reform of 1933, which extended the principle of no reelection to legislators. The effect was to remove from government a generation of combative (sometimes, admittedly, in the most literal sense) and competent popular representatives, replacing them in many cases with party placemen. No reelection removed the possibility of legislators building political capital in their constituencies and, confident in their continuity in office, becoming experienced, quasi-autonomous actors in the federal government: a genuine regional check and balance to executive power.⁴⁵ Central control over congressional elections was further tightened in 1938, when Lázaro Cárdenas refounded the party as the PRM and instituted the block, sectoral vote as the means of designating candidates. The critical nature of such centralized designation in maintaining the party’s control of elections was clearly evinced in the periodic (once a decade) demand for primary elections within the PRI, a demand that party elites resisted bitterly. Grassroots party members fought for primary elections in 1945, the early 1950s, the early 1960s, the mid-1960s, the mid-1970s, the late 1980s, and the mid-1990s; revealingly they were finally implemented at the presidential level at the *fin de siècle*, as the PRI’s rule collapsed.⁴⁶

Control over party nominations more or less consolidated, the complementary task was to disenfranchise, disarticulate, and co-opt opposition. The three key blocs of voters whom elites excluded from electoral competition for lengthy periods were women (from before 1910 to 1952), militantly antisystem Catholics (1948–86), and Communists (1949–78).⁴⁷ The loyal opposition of the PAN, meanwhile, had taken the strategic decision early in its existence to build power gradually and from the bottom up. The regime periodically encouraged them in that decision with electoral concessions that ranged from isolated victories—a handful of federal deputies, a minority of *municipios*—to the more significant structural reforms of 1963, 1973,

1977, and 1983.⁴⁸ These introduced a limited measure of proportional representation into Mexican legislative and local elections, a measure that helped legitimize those elections and provided incentives for cooperation by the PAN and the opportunist “shell” parties, such as the Partido Popular Socialista (PPS), the Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (PARM), and the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM). They did not, it should be noted, completely cede formal control of even those elections: proportional representation districts were gerrymandered to water down regional poles of opposition such as the North and Mexico City.⁴⁹

The fourth arena was election day and its results, which the regime controlled via six key institutions: the Secretario de Gobernación, the national electoral commission, the party regional committees, the security forces (including the army), the polling booths, and the vote counters of the *juntas computadoras*. This was an imperfect control; between 1918 and 1946, for example, the polling booths were staffed by the first voters to secure them on election day, and the dominant party did not always win the ensuing struggles. National control and scrutiny of elections was, however, reliably divided between Gobernación and the electoral commission, which remained under effective PRIísta control through various incarnations until the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) and the Tribunal Electoral gained genuine autonomy in 1996.⁵⁰ On a local level the counters of the *juntas computadoras* were generally (although not invariably) subject to party discipline and eminently capable of party-induced innumeracy.

The fifth and final arena lay in assuring voter turnout in the face of these institutionalized odds. A reasonable, publicly witnessed participation in elections was critical in affording them some legitimacy. The PRIísta definition of “reasonable” turnout was by comparative standards high: party elites grew concerned when the 74 percent turnout for the 1952 election dropped to 65 percent by 1970. Their concerns were compounded by the regional concentration of abstentionism; notably fewer Mexicans in the North, Mexico City, and the Center-West bothered voting. In Chihuahua, for example, an average of 43 percent abstained from presidential elections between 1964 and 1982.⁵¹ Recent research suggests that this was a longer standing and deeper problem, and that many avoided registering in the first place. In 1946, for example, states as different as Veracruz and Chiapas shared the same rate of one in three eligible Mexicans registering to vote; only 43 percent of the eligible voted in that year’s presidential contest.⁵² (Subregional results could be far worse: in Papantla, Veracruz, a hill town with a secular tradition of stubborn resistance to central authority, only 7 percent voted, and that by official count.)⁵³ The formal response to this problem was twofold, and, in best PRIísta fashion, mixed coercion with co-optation. Mexicans who did not register were, from the 1940s onward, liable to widely advertised legal sanctions: fines or jail sentences of up to six months.⁵⁴ They were, at the same time, enticed to polling booths by periodic reforms of the electoral system, each proclaiming the final squaring of practice with the eternal promise of *sufragio efectivo*, a promise immovably lodged in revolutionary discourse.

Inside these rules of the game, which awarded overwhelming advantage to the incumbent party, elections were further rigged by a host of measures that PRIístas

summed up as *alquimia electoral*. A lengthy manual to the black arts of electoral fraud could readily be written (and politicians as different as Francisco Múgica and Gonzalo N. Santos made notable efforts in this direction).⁵⁵ In very schematic summary, elections were fixed by a combination of undue influence, corruption, chicanery, and violence. Local politicians, bureaucrats, agrarian and union leaders, and the press were all deployed to instruct (*orientar*) people as to whom they should elect. Such instructions only grew more intense as the century progressed and the reach of state-dominated media lengthened. Campaign meetings were given substance by *acarreados*: peasants, workers, street vendors, and bureaucrats paid to attend and sanctioned—by threats to livelihoods that ranged from losing wages to losing *ejidal* lands—if they did not.⁵⁶ Campaign workers, gunmen, and security forces meanwhile disrupted the day-to-day operations of dissident or opposition campaigns, raiding their offices, stealing their banners, arresting their operatives for posting flyers. The trucks that were essential to campaign beyond village level were denied by local authorities, and drivers who transported dissidents were fined. On polling day the legal and physical maneuvering peaked, and last-ditch rigging became increasingly overt. Squads of hired voters could be moved by bus or train to the polling booths, disregarding jurisdictional boundaries. The real costs of such mobilization—truck hire, food, a couple of pesos a head, favors owed—was reduced by the multiple voting of the *carrousel*, the merry-go-round. Ballot boxes got stuffed and became pregnant (*urnas embarazadas*). When filled for the wrong side they could be stolen.⁵⁷ Local authorities sanctioned such practices; during one 1944 congressional election, a policeman stopped a group carrying off a ballot box and, told that they had the governor's blessing, replied, "If that's the case, take it, I'll protect you."⁵⁸ Party hacks could close the polls early, in one hill town by advancing the church clock two hours.⁵⁹ And when the polls closed there always remained bureaucratic routes to better results. Local officials, seeing the voting run against the official candidate, could refuse outright to install the junta computadora, or the junta could "make" an election irrespective of votes cast. Some of these creations left traces: the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (PSUM), for example, "lost" 200,000 votes between initial and official counts in 1979.⁶⁰ The Alemán campaign, by contrast, won thirteen thousand votes in Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz, a municipality with an electorate of three thousand.⁶¹ There remained, in the permanent background, the simple veto that legislature or electoral commission could exert over any result. When Ferrer Galván was declared to have lost the 1947 state legislative election in Veracruz's 7th District by a factor of some 20 to 1 the agrarian sector protested, and the result, already public, was changed in his favor.⁶² Such postelectoral reverses could happen to anyone; the PRI candidate, for example, won the 1993 municipal election in Mérida, only for the federal government to cede that key city to the PAN in accordance with their pre-electoral agreement.⁶³ Elections that were strongly contested were inevitably characterized by assorted breaches of electoral law, and as such could always be decreed irretrievably flawed, making way for an executive appointment; when the PAN won Baja California in 1968 the election was duly annulled.⁶⁴ "Nullifying constitutional elections," one journalist complained

decades earlier, “is nothing new inside the squalor of national politics.”⁶⁵ When rigging failed, in short, there were multiple procedural safety nets protecting party brokers from undesirable electoral outcomes.

There was also violence; threats, punitive jailings, beatings, kidnappings, stabbings, and shootings marked elections of all levels. Street fighting could erupt as polling day rivalries got out of hand or as one party attempted to sway the results; in 1947 the antagonism between Orizaba’s two main unions boiled over, despite the army patrols and the closed bars, into brawls that left one dead and various wounded.⁶⁶ Violence could also be a more deliberate phenomenon, and in extreme cases armed men made a show of violently taking over public space for the duration of election day and the ensuing transfer of power. These violent agents could be party gunmen, sometimes given police badges for the day, or they could be soldiers, or they could be the candidates themselves. In Iguala’s 1940 congressional elections, for example, would-be congressman Rubén Figueroa shot up polling booth number 5, killing four voters and a child.⁶⁷ While the most notorious such occupation was that of Mexico City in the same year—when Gonzalo N. Santos and his gunmen “to the cry of ‘death to the reactionaries’ ... peppered [the voters] with pistols and bursts of tommy guns”—similar takeovers occurred in the plazas of provincial cities, market towns, and villages in elections across much of the century; they constituted forcible, undeclared cancellations of the electoral process.⁶⁸

Violence was not monopolized by the party in power, and for much of the century it was a given of the rough-and-tumble of electioneering. Even bourgeois liberal democrats—the maderistas, the vasconcelistas—had their street fighters.⁶⁹ Less genteel politicians were capable of the same performative violence irrespective of party affiliation; thus the conservative gunman and agrocapitalist Gonzalo Lagunes, a committed almanista in 1940, “went round heavily armed threatening peasants that those who did not vote for Almazán would be buried alive.”⁷⁰ The reflexive interpretation of such threats and acts—that they invariably indicate low-quality, uncompetitive elections—is straightforwardly wrong. Electoral violence in the postrevolutionary state was neither endemic nor particularly intense. Elections such as those of 1940 stood out as exceptional for their bloodiness. The 1958 elections, Philip Taylor concluded, only produced “one genuine martyr.”⁷¹ Furthermore the rhythms of electoral violence, which will be explored in more detail below, are deeply suggestive. In very schematic outline, electoral violence peaked in the 1920s and 1930s. It began to decline in the late 1940s, when, amid hotly contested local elections, only one in five municipios in Guerrero, and one in twenty of those in Veracruz, actually reported violence.⁷² Violence was comparatively low across the PRI’s more stable years; it then rose markedly in the late twentieth century. This fluctuation correlates, as we shall see below in slightly more detail, with the ebb and flow of competitiveness in elections.

Rulers and ruled made largely rational choices in employing violence, and the only good reason for either to do so was to sway the course of an election whose result was unpredictable. Protest violence in particular had two sound rationales. The first was the defense of the vote on polling day itself (or indeed the same

aggressive means of inflating it as employed by state agents). After the sun went down on a rigged election, however, violence could still pay. Riotous marches and stormed town halls were comparatively common postelectoral phenomena. In 1948 a quarter of all Guerrero's municipal governments faced parallel, opposition bodies, sometimes installed in the town hall; in 1983 twenty of Oaxaca's town halls were stormed by the opposition; in 1986 a crowd of PANistas, feeling themselves cheated of victory, burned the *ayuntamiento* of San Luis Potosí.⁷³ Mexicans risked these mobilizations because they often resulted in the removal of a particularly unwanted election winner and the installation, at least somewhere in the regional power structures, of a more popular representative.⁷⁴ In the worst case—a postelectoral massacre by state forces or gunmen—the election result and the regional executive would be overturned from the center, an unwritten rule that ceded considerable tactical advantage to protesting crowds. Violence did not vitiate the competitiveness of elections; instead popular violence fostered more representative outcomes, in a Mexican variant of what Eric Hobsbawm dubbed collective bargaining by riot.⁷⁵ This was time-honored practice; it obtained in the fiercely competitive local elections of the 1920s, and it was salient in the PRI's retreat from power in the 1990s.⁷⁶ It quite often made everyday voters into what George Tsebelis defines as veto players: “individual or collective actors whose agreement (by majority rule for collective actors) is required for a change of the status quo.”⁷⁷

THE PROBLEMS OF PRESIDENTIALIST ANALYSES: UNSEEN ELECTIONS AND UNINTENDED POLYARCHIES

As long as the consensus model of modern Mexican politics centered on an imperial presidency and a corporatist party running “a leviathan state capable of controlling society,” it made sense to simplify the history of Mexican elections to that of presidential elections.⁷⁸ The readily visible finding that these were noncompetitive could then be generalized across the system's other elections, as an all-powerful president designated his electoral underlings. Yet this interpretation is no longer historically valid. The copious historiography of the revolutionary period (1910–40) has established that Mexico was nowhere near a hyperpresidentialist system in 1940.⁷⁹ The PRIista Golden Age has turned out to be something of an El Dorado, vanishing into the distance as historians hack through the political undergrowth of the 1950s and 1960s. It is clear that during the 1940s the party frequently lost control of local elections; that popular protests vetoed the accession of mayors and governors, or toppled them once in power; and that key presidential policies, such as conscription and literacy campaigns, were successfully flouted or reversed by massive civil disobedience.⁸⁰ Most national politicians were nominal rather than militant party

members; many were not party members at all.⁸¹ Major regional political bosses (*caciques*) endured until the early 1960s; some were serving army officers, part of a quiet pact with a military that remained central to controlling the unruly countryside.⁸² Some parts of that countryside carved out substantial local autonomy.⁸³ The central government did admittedly monopolize public revenues, absorbing 90 percent of the budget by the 1950s, but that budget, some 6.9 percent of GDP in 1950, remained anemic due to Mexicans' endemic refusal to pay taxes.⁸⁴ The state, in Alan Knight's phrase, was "full of holes like Swiss Cheese," its politics, as Jeff Rubin pointed out, "conflictual and turbulent throughout," its corporatist story one "that drops history out at every turn."⁸⁵ In this system unseen elections were substantially more competitive than previously believed; many, in fact, permitted the contestation and participation that are the principal elements of Robert Dahl's definition of polyarchy.⁸⁶ This polyarchy—more accurately a series of regionally specific, fluctuating, unintended polyarchies—passed through four key stages: the violent, decentralized pluralism of 1910–40; the authoritarian transition of 1940–50; the electoral authoritarianism of 1950–80; and the democratic transition of 1980–2000.

Beyond the presidential level, competitive elections with unpredictable results began in 1912, with the election of the first of a series of pluralist congresses and local governments, including that of Mexico City in 1921. While both presidents and legislators were skeptical regarding the benefits of universal suffrage, they were challenged by the intense popular mobilization of the period.⁸⁷ Out of the myriad armed groups of the revolution, satirized by B. Traven as five thousand governments, came an explosion of party formation in the 1920s.⁸⁸ Obregón's first presidential campaign was backed by three hundred different groups; by the time of the 1929 race, 1,250-odd registered political organizations would start out in support of the presumed Callista candidate, Aaron Sáenz, leaving a mere 550 other parties uncommitted.⁸⁹ Parties were so numerous that potential names became exhausted and had to be recycled, sometimes with some irony; thus the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, Calles's precursor to the PRI, shared the same name as the party of one of the men he shot for rebellion, General Francisco Serrano.⁹⁰ These were not the fly-by-night, personalist shams characteristic of the Porfiriato: organizations such as the Partido Obrero de Acapulco, the Partido Socialista Fronterizo, and the Confederación Social Campesina "Domingo Arenas" were locally effective in obtaining rewards and representation for their grassroots members, while regional parties such as the Partido Socialista de las Izquierdas elected their own congressmen, senators, and governors.⁹¹ Their stability and legitimacy enabled some parties to survive the mass extinction of 1929. Outside Mexico City the early PNR, while capable of quelling national threats, was slow to suppress local rivals in states such as Guerrero and Michoacán, where Cárdenas' local party remained outside the PNR/PRM until 1938.⁹² The PNR actually lost provincial elections with some regularity. In 1932, 1938, and 1940 the governor of Guerrero ignored explicit instructions from Gobernación and rigged elections against the PNR/PRM at municipal, legislative, and gubernatorial levels, while Miguel Alemán won the chaotic 1936 gubernatorial race in Veracruz despite the entrenched opposition of the state government.⁹³

In Yucatán's 1938 local elections the governor ignored the party and installed his own slates, while in Sonora the party lost the 1936 gubernatorial elections.⁹⁴ Even the embryonic Partido Acción Nacional, generally seen as toothless in this period, won its first municipal election in 1940 in the village of San Vicente Nuñú, Oaxaca.⁹⁵ It is teleological to project the PRI's later power onto its earlier incarnations; beneath the cupular level the PNR, and to a lesser extent the PRM, were entities as much shambolic as hegemonic.

The ensuing period, 1940–50, saw the transition to Mexico's peculiar soft authoritarianism. This was also—and this is generally overlooked—a failed democratic transition. The pent-up political demand of the early 1940s, repressed in the name of wartime unity, found expression in three phenomena, all of which contemporary Mexicans saw as auguries of democratization: the removal of soldiers from presidency and party sectors, the formation of rival national parties, and the re-creation of the ruling party as the PRI.⁹⁶ The first, the demilitarization of politics, was partial and came at the price of notable institutional and regional autonomy.⁹⁷ The second was largely a red herring. While the PAN won four congressional seats in 1946, neither it nor the Partido Popular (PP) were as effective challengers to the center as their earlier, regional forebears: the PAN waited until 1989 to win its first governorship. The third, however, was highly salient. The early PRI was not, as assorted scholars have claimed, a more centrally controlled organization than its predecessor.⁹⁸ Rather it was constituted to be markedly more democratic and decentralized. Party elites founded the PRI largely as a reaction to a particularly shambolic election, that of 1945 in León, Guanajuato, in the aftermath of which scores of Catholics protesting fraud were killed.⁹⁹ The new party made substantial promises of democracy, promises in part influenced by the global ubiquity of the term immediately after the war, but in part realized by a new nomination process: primary elections. These became the sites of heated contests between candidates from across the ideological spectrum, from agrarian Communists through rancher conservatives to businessmen and union bosses. Copious correspondence from the period (and copious protests) make it clear that primaries were viewed as unpredictable if flawed elections. In one peasant leaders' words, "The Party elections have many times been taken as an expression of the people and the candidates [chosen] have been confirmed in the Constitutional elections."¹⁰⁰ Comparisons of elite preferences with election outcomes backs up such judgments. The results of southern Veracruz's 1946 municipal elections matched party diktat in only a quarter of cases.¹⁰¹ Even the archetypal cacique Santos was forced to allow opposition forces into local government in northern San Luis Potosí, albeit in subordinate positions.¹⁰² Mexicans realized clearly that primaries led to polyarchies; reformist PRIístas struggled for them across the second half of the century, and the opposition parties of the 1980s insisted on them, irrespective of costs, in what Steve Wuhs has called a "savage democracy."¹⁰³

Party elites shared that realization and shut down their democratic experiment as quickly as they could. In 1950 the PRI changed its statutes, replacing primaries with the older and more manipulable system of sectoral assemblies.¹⁰⁴ This

was the abrupt beginning of a series of measures that tightened central control of elections. The federal election law of 1951 raised the bar for new parties to register for the ballot, requiring them to have thirty thousand members distributed across two-thirds of the states, to sustain civic centers in those states, and to have attendance at their assemblies certified by public notary. In 1954 the threshold was raised to seventy-five thousand members. Such requirements made it impossible for popular regional parties, the bane of the early dominant party, to compete and expand toward national status.¹⁰⁵ The resulting suppression of intra- and interparty competition was the basis for the PRI's longevity atop an electoral authoritarian system from 1950 to 1980. Results demonstrated its efficacy: in congressional elections between 1952 and 1961 the PAN's greatest victory was six seats, and the PPS's two. Across the entire period only one opposition member ever entered the Senate; no opposition candidate ever won a governorship.¹⁰⁶ Yet this was no static system, but rather a dynamic equilibrium that required continual accommodation, and the "authoritarian peak" that began in 1950 lasted a mere thirteen years.¹⁰⁷ In the early 1960s the dominant party came under pressure on several fronts: growing voter abstentionism, internal party reform demands, the formation of a schismatic national labor union, ex-President Cárdenas' involvement in the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN) and the PAN, who in 1958 questioned their role as loyal opposition by refusing to take up their congressional seats. Elites reacted with the 1963 introduction of a measure of proportional representation in congressional elections, awarding minority parties five seats for every 0.5 percent they won of the national vote. This proved to be the thin end of the wedge: in 1977 the Ley Federal de Organizaciones Políticas y Procesos Electorales (LOPPE) expanded proportional representation seats to form 25 percent of the total and extended the system to state and municipal elections. By 1986 they constituted two of the five hundred seats in Congress.¹⁰⁸

Even at its authoritarian peak, or as Juan Molinar Horcasitas dubs it, "the golden parenthesis," elections counted.¹⁰⁹ This was most notably the case at the municipal level, the level that most Mexicans traditionally cared most about. More than one president described the national division of power as federal legislators and governors for the presidency, local legislators for the governors, and municipal governments for the *pueblo*.¹¹⁰ This should not be accepted wholly at face value. Most municipal elections between 1950 and 1980 were single-party affairs, and in the early 1970s only five states enjoyed multiparty elections in more than half their municipalities.¹¹¹ The dividing line between *pueblo* and *cacique*, moreover, was fuzzy and frequently difficult to discern from the haze of Mexico City. Regional studies are well-populated with cases of elections taken year after year by *caciques*. Yet in a field that is notably underresearched, there are nonetheless important indicators of representation in municipal elections. Between 1962 and 1978 the PAN won 26 of the 236 leading *municipios* in Mexico; important victories across the period included San Luis Potosí in 1958, Hermosillo and Mérida in 1967, Monclova in 1978, San Julián in 1979, and Juchitán in 1981.¹¹² Such visible competitive elections were complemented by more numerous invisible contests, in which popular

mobilizations from outside the party were either preempted—by the consultation mechanisms of *auscultación* and, sometimes at least, sectoral assemblies—or were recognized begrudgingly with a PRI label.¹¹³ In Tequixtepec, Oaxaca, the PAN won the 1952 municipal election running as the Frente Zapatista, a front organization officially part of the PRI.¹¹⁴ In Juchitán Charismo, a powerful blend of the popular and the cacical, dominated from the 1940s to the mid-1960s.¹¹⁵ The PRI, in short, was never just an unstoppable bandwagon that unpopular carpetbaggers rode to victory. It was also booty, a title that the party conceded to unstoppable local candidates in de jure recognition of de facto grassroots power.

It is unsurprising, given the significance and the competitiveness of municipal elections for many Mexicans, that the protracted transition should have started in provincial towns and cities. The black irony of the PRIísta electoral system was that the urban populations who benefited most from half a century of the transfer of resources from countryside to city were also the populations who voted the least for the PRI. By the end of the twentieth century socioeconomic and electoral models were fundamentally mismatched in Mexico. When the conjunctural crises of the early 1980s met with this structural problem the result was a collapse of party membership and party vote, and a rapid rise in support for both the PAN and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), the left-wing party created by elite exits from the PRI. In the early 1960s nearly 25 percent of Mexicans were members of the PRI; by 1990 fewer than 10 percent remained.¹¹⁶ The chronology of the ensuing transition was staggered. In 1983 the PRI began to lose municipal elections in large numbers, as the opposition won a clean sweep of Chihuahua's cities. These victories had both demonstration and diffusion effects.¹¹⁷ In 1986 the party was reduced to very public fraud to hold on to the governorship of Chihuahua, and in the 1988 congressional elections their share of the vote dropped to 50 percent.¹¹⁸ (The center's weakening hold on elections was also reflected inside the party, as the numbers of "locally oriented" candidates rose dramatically.)¹¹⁹ The 1988 presidential election marked the point of no return. The opposition used that contest's low legitimacy to pressure a president who was weakened from the start, and, by means of questioning every subsequent electoral result, ably managed to convert constant pressure into a growing quota of power from municipalities through legislatures to governorships. By 1994 the only thing left to go was the presidency.

Across the twentieth century Mexicans went to the polls with a programmed regularity that was interrupted only by the armed revolution. These elections were frequently neither safe nor predictable. Gonzalo N. Santos defined the Mexico of the 1920s and 1930s as "a real gunman's democracy"; later PRIístas spoke revealingly of "the electoral problem."¹²⁰ This problem was that some elections, some of the time, in some places, were competitive, far more than has been traditionally appreciated. Others, presidential elections in particular, were more ritualistic, and the more important the election the less competitive it became. Yet even hollow rituals with entirely predictable results are more than mere theater. They help generate and maintain, as Frank O'Gorman reminds us, an electoral culture.¹²¹ And that culture was highly salient in structuring Mexico's transition to democracy.

NOTES

1. This estimate ranges from the nineteen presidential elections of the period to the approximately sixty thousand municipal polls; it excludes, of course, party primary, ejidal, and union elections.
2. A dismissive, at times superficial, approach to elections is not confined to Mexico; it characterizes much work on Latin American and authoritarian politics until the recent past. Andreas Schedler's recent collection, *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2006), is an example of the utility of studying elections outside liberal democracies. See also Eduardo Posada Carbó, "Elections before Democracy: Some Considerations on Electoral History from a Comparative Approach," in *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America*, ed. Eduardo Posada Carbó (London: ILAS, University of London, 1996), 1–15; Guy Hermet, "Les élections dans les régimes autoritaires: Esquisse d'un cadre d'analyse," in *Des élections pas comme les autres*, ed. Guy Hermet, Alain Rouquié, and Juan J. Linz (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1978), 21, 35.
3. Under the PRI, Peter Smith found, elections largely ceased to work as effective routes for political mobility to high-level office. Peter H. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 251.
4. A broader spectrum of opinions obtained through the 1950s. Donald J. Mabry, "Changing Models of Mexican Politics: A Review Essay," *New Scholar* 5, no. 1 (1976): 31–37; Pablo González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico* (Oxford, 1970), 12–13, 120; Luis Javier Garrido, "Una apuesta por la democracia," in *Votar ¿Para que?: Manual de elecciones*, ed. Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa (México, DF: Ediciones Oceano, 1985), 8; Evelyn Stevens, "Protest Movement in an Authoritarian Regime: The Mexican Case," *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 3 (1975): 376; Richard S. Weinert, introduction to *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, ed. José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert (Philadelphia: ISHI Press, 1977), xiii.
5. Although they did, it is conceded, also form channels of communication between rulers and ruled, entry points for the ambitious to low-level politics, and mechanisms for the political classes to define agreements and contain disagreements. Daniel C. Levy, Kathleen Bruhn, and Emilio Zebadúa, *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 87–88; Pablo González Casanova, "Democracia en tiempos de crisis," in *Las elecciones en México: Evolución y perspectiva*, ed. Pablo González Casanova (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1985), 17–18; Carlos Martínez Assad, "Las elecciones legislativas y la ilusión democrática," in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 233.
6. Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 149, echoing Barthes, who claimed, "To instill into the Established Order the complacent portrayal of its drawbacks has nowadays become a paradoxical but incontrovertible means of exalting it." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1957), 41–43.
7. José Vasconcelos, *Obras completas* (México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957), vol. 1; Alberto J. Pani, *El retroceso democrático del nuevo régimen* (México, D.F., 1947), 38–45; Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La crisis de México* (1947), reprinted in *Proceso* 1061 (March 2, 1997): 20.
8. Schedler, "The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism," in Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*, 3.

9. In the sense of the PRI receiving less than 50 percent of the vote. Juan Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad: Elecciones, autoritarismo y democracia en México* (México, D.F.: Cal y Arena, 1991), 79.
10. Kenneth F. Johnson, *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 118; Vasconcelos, *Obras completas*, 2:275; *Diario de Xalapa*, July 7, 1952.
11. Friedrich Katz's analogy. Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 55.
12. Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1:55–75.
13. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vi:392–297; Lorenzo Meyer, “La Revolución Mexicana y sus Elecciones Presidenciales,” in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 71–74.
14. Pablo Piccato, “El parlamentarismo y la construcción de una esfera pública posrevolucionaria,” *Historias* 39 (October–March 1998): 67–69.
15. Alvaro Matute, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1917–1924: La carrera del caudillo* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1980), 17, 51.
16. For an example of Obregón's humor, see Gonzalo N. Santos, *Memorias* (México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1984), 167.
17. Katz, *Villa*, 759–60.
18. Overy, Mexico City, to Chamberlain, February 14, 1929, National Archives, London, FO371/13488/1533/39/26.
19. Tzvi Medin, *El minimato presidencial: Historia política del maximato* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1982), 28–29.
20. Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People between Church and State, 1926–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 159–80; David C. Bailey, *¡Viva Cristo Rey! The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 174–76.
21. Stephen Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890–1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 152–53.
22. Meyer, “La Revolución Mexicana y sus Elecciones Presidenciales,” 88–89; John Foster Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919–1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 422, 488.
23. Vasconcelos, *Obras Completas*, 2:166–71; Ogilvie Forbes, Mexico City, to Henderson, November 22, 1929, National Archives, London, FO371/13490/A8433/39/26.
24. Luis Medina, *Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1978), 121; Meyer, “La Revolución Mexicana y sus Elecciones Presidenciales,” 93–96; Juan Andreu Almazán, *Memorias del General J. Andreu Almazán: Informe y documentos sobre la campaña política de 1940* (México DF: Ediciones de “El Hombre Libre,” 1941), 94–97.
25. Though this was his home turf and “probably the state most riddled with Almazanismo in the entire Republic.” PS-10 to Gobernación, July 18, 1940, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-173/311(7.2)1.
26. Santos, *Memorias*, 723.
27. Carlos Martínez Assad, *El henriquismo, una piedra en el camino* (México, D.F.: Colección Memoria y Olvido, 1982), 19.
28. Mizayawa to De la Fuente, January 18, 1952, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DFS-Guerrero-100–10–14–51H219L4, *El Universal* 7/08/1952.
29. Martínez Assad, *El henriquismo*, 58–60.
30. Assorted reports, November 16, 1952, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-104/2–1/131/1062.

31. Joy Langston, “Breaking Out Is Hard to Do: Exit, Voice and Loyalty in Mexico’s One-Party Hegemonic Regime,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 3 (2002): 71.
32. This should not be taken to mean political apathy but rather a recognition that presidential politics were not one of the spaces in which popular mobilization could effect meaningful change. Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (New York: Sharpe, 1978).
33. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitude and Democracy in Five Nations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1989), 39, 203, 361–63.
34. Peter H. Smith, “Mexico Since 1946: Dynamics of an Authoritarian Regime,” in *Mexico Since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 321–96.
35. China’s population rose only 246 percent across her demographic transition. Massimo Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 102. For popular protest in the PRIista state see Paul Gillingham, “Maximino’s Bulls: Popular Protest after the Mexican Revolution,” *Past and Present* 206 (February 2010): 175–211.
36. “Shell” parties opposed the regime rhetorically but often adopted the PRI’s presidential candidate and always voted with the party on the all-important electoral commissions. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 185–208; Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, “Mexico: The Presidential Problem,” *Foreign Policy* 69 (Winter 1987–88): 40–60.
37. Barry Carr, *La Izquierda Mexicana a Través del Siglo XX* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1996), 310.
38. Jorge I. Domínguez, “The Scholarly Study of Mexican Politics,” *Mexican Studies/Studios Mexicanos* 20, no. 2 (2004): 386; Aguilar Zinser, “Mexico: The Presidential Problem,” 41; Mathew C. Gutmann, *The Romance of Democracy: Compliant Defiance in Contemporary Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 162.
39. Although the Federal Electoral Commission’s initial count gave Salinas 49 percent. Carr, *La Izquierda Mexicana a Través del Siglo XX*, 312; Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 219, 245.
40. Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.
41. The unverifiable results—the ballots were subsequently destroyed, with the PAN’s agreement—have generated their own subfield. Pre-election polling of urban Mexicans (generally recognized as more oppositional than rural populations) revealed lower support for the PRI than did the eventual results, but still gave Salinas a ten-point lead over his nearest competitor. For useful survey-based analyses of voter preference, which suggest appreciable residual loyalty of a hard-core PRI vote and a failure by Cárdenas to mobilize previous abstainers, see Jorge I. Domínguez and James A. McCann, “Shaping Mexico’s Electoral Arena: The Construction of Partisan Cleavages in the 1988 and 1991 National Elections,” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 1 (1995): 34–48; Franz A. Von Sauer, “Measuring Legitimacy in Mexico: An Analysis of Public Opinion during the 1988 Presidential Campaign,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 8, no. 2 (1992): 259–80. For the FDN case that Cárdenas won, see J. Barberán et al., *Radiografía del fraude: Análisis de los datos oficiales del 6 de julio* (México, D.F.: Nuestro Tiempo, 1988); for a critique of that work’s methodology, see Juan Molinar Horcasitas, “El lecho de Gauss o la campana de Procusto,” in *Cuadernos de Nexos* (México, D.F., 1989).
42. Francisco José Paoli Bolio, “Legislación electoral y proceso político, 1917–1982,” in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 129–61; Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 22–25, 64–70, 96–100.

43. Schedler argues that elections in electoral authoritarian systems tend strongly to be nested games, as their claim to free and fair multiparty elections makes it difficult for such regimes to wholly repress debate concerning electoral rules. Schedler, "The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism," 12–13.
44. Carr, *La Izquierda Mexicana a Través del Siglo XX*, 297.
45. Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez, *El centro dividido: La nueva autonomía de los gobernadores* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de , 2009), 29.
46. Primaries were finally admitted at the 1996 party assembly. Party statutes of 1946, in *Historia Documental del Partido de la Revolución, PRM-PRI, 1945–1950*, Vol. 5 (México, D.F.: Institución de Capacitación Política, 1982), 5:276–80; Todd A. Eisenstadt, *Courting Democracy in Mexico: Party Strategies and Electoral Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99–100; Hernández Rodríguez, *El centro dividido*, 214.
47. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 34, 103, 186–87.
48. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 64–66, 87–89; Jorge Madrazo, "Sistema política y legislación electoral de las entidades federativas," in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 289.
49. Carlos Martínez Assad, "Las elecciones legislativas y la ilusión democrática," in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 252, 257.
50. Julio Labastida Martín del Campo and Miguel Armando López Leyva, "México: Una transición prolongada (1988–1996/7)," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 66, no. 4 (2004): 791–98.
51. Rogelio Ramos Oranday, "Oposición y abstencionismo en las elecciones presidenciales, 1964–1982," in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 163–94.
52. *Excelsior*, May 5, 1946; Xalapa Electoral Commission to Federal Commission for Election Monitoring, June 22, 1946, Archivo Histórico del Estado de Veracruz, México, AHEV-1408/548.1/0; González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico*, 221.
53. "Padrón de votantes" and "Informes numéricos de votación," both in Archivo Histórico del Estado de Veracruz, México, AHEV-1408/548.1/0.
54. *La Verdad de Acapulco*, April 10, 1949.
55. A copy of Múgica's instructions to the *presidentes municipales* of Michoacán on how to rig the 1926 congressional election fell into the hands of the opposition, which sent them on to Mexico City. Santos's entire memoirs are an education in the sharp end of contemporary politics, particularly his descriptions of the 1940 and 1946 presidential elections. See Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and Its Heritage* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1928), 462–63; Santos, *Memorias*, 707–23, 851–55.
56. Paul Gillingham, "We Don't Have Arms, but We Do Have Balls': Fraud, Violence and Popular Agency in Elections," in *Soft Authoritarianism in Mexico, 1938–1968*, ed. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2012), chap. 11; *La Reforma*, May 2, 2000.
57. Reports of *robo de urnas* remain frequent in contemporary elections. *Diario de Xalapa*, September 13, 1949; Leonardo Curzio Gutiérrez, "Tabasco," in *La República Mexicana: Modernización y democracia de Aguascalientes a Zacatecas*, 3 vols., ed. Pablo González Casanova and Jorge Cadena Roa (México, D.F.: Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Humanidades, UNAM, 1994), 3:150.
58. Forzán to Gobernación, July 4, 1944, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-98/6.
59. Friedeberg to Gobernación, July 8, 1940, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-173/311(7.2)1.
60. Carr, *La Izquierda Mexicana a Través del Siglo XX*, 296.

61. “Padrón de votantes” and “Informes numéricos de votación,” both in Archivo Histórico del Estado de Veracruz, México, AHEV-1408/548.1/o.
62. *Diario de Xalapa*, August 9, 1947; Liga to Sánchez Taboada, May 28, 1947, Archivo Histórico del Estado de Veracruz, México, AHEV-1506/548/o.
63. Hernández Rodríguez, *El centro dividido*, 181–84.
64. U.S. Embassy Mexico City to State Department, August 19, 1969, www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB92/mexelect_7.pdf.
65. *Trópico, semanario independiente de información*, January 14, 1945.
66. *Diario de Xalapa*, July 7, 1947.
67. Pedrote to Gobernación, July 18, 1940, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-173/311(7.2)1.
68. Santos, *Memorias*, 720; Delgado Cruz Grande, Gro., to Alemán, December 5, 1944, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-2.311M(9)/5B/71; ejidatarios Cuetzala del Progreso to Ruiz Cortines, January 1, 1953, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-2.311M(9)/3B/23; CIA Directorate of Intelligence, “Mexico: The Problems of Progress,” October 20, 1967, www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB92/mexelect_1.pdf.
69. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1:55–75; Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 475.
70. Liga de Comunidades Agrarias Veracruz to Avila Camacho, August 31, 1942, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., MAC-540.1/2.
71. Philip B. Taylor Jr., “The Mexican Elections of 1958: Affirmation of Authoritarianism?” *Western Political Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1960): 723.
72. Author’s analysis, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-2.311 M(9) and M(26) series.
73. Alvaro Arreola Ayala, “Elecciones municipales,” in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 336–37; Gillingham, “We Don’t Have Arms”; Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 126, 131.
74. Eisenstadt notes the ease with which this could be done, but identifies it as a 1980s phenomenon. Eisenstadt, *Courting Democracy*, 101.
75. Eric J. Hobsbawm, “The Machine Breakers,” *Past and Present* 1, no. 1 (1952): 58–59.
76. As Beatriz Magaloni argues, “The threat of violence . . . created the incentives for the PRI to credibly pledge itself not to commit electoral fraud by delegating true independence to the IFE.” Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*, 269.
77. George Tsebelis, “Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Mutipartyism,” *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (July 1995): 289.
78. Mabry, “Changing Models of Mexican Politics,” 31–37.
79. See, for example, Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 163–64; Adrian Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked On Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1998), 219–24; Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Alan Knight, “Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994).
80. Thomas Rath, “‘Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio . . .’: Conscription, Recalcitrance and Resistance in Mexico in the 1940s,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 3 (2005); Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), chap. 7; Paul Gillingham, “Ambiguous Missionaries: Rural Teachers and State Facades in Guerrero, 1930–1950,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 22, no. 2 (2006): 357–58.

81. Roderic Ai Camp, *The Metamorphosis of Leadership in a Democratic Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60, 66–67.
82. Hernández Rodríguez, *El centro dividido*, 214; Paul Gillingham, “Military Caciquismo in the PRIísta State: General Mange’s Command in Veracruz, 1937–1959,” in *Forced Marches: Militaries, Cacicazgos, and the Uneven Development of Mexican Politics*, ed. Ben Fallaw and Terry Rugeley (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, forthcoming 2012), chap. 7; Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax PRIísta* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 214–23.
83. The classic, if slightly sui generis case study is that of Juchitán in Oaxaca. Jeffrey Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).
84. A refusal indirectly critical in bringing down the PRI, as it pushed the state into short-term, high-interest loans in the 1970s. These in turn generated the 1980s debt crisis, the economic beginning of the end for the dominant party. González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico*, 25; Benjamin T. Smith, “State Formation on the Cheap: Taxation and Popular Consent,” in Gillingham and Smith, *Soft Authoritarianism*, chap. 13; INEGI, *Estadísticas históricas de México* CD-ROM (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2000).
85. Alan Knight, “Historical Continuities in Social Movements” and Jeffrey Rubin, “Popular Mobilization and the Myth of State Corporatism,” both in *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*, ed. Joe Foweraker and Ann L Craig (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1990), 100, 247–66.
86. I refer to Dahl’s later, minimalist, and usefully ambiguous definition of polyarchy as a system permitting regularized participation and contestation. (Few if any Mexican elections would meet the early and more exacting definition, which establishes polyarchy as a synonym for a sophisticated liberal or social democracy.) That modern Mexico was to some extent polyarchic is also argued by Diane Davis, Viviane Brachet-Márquez, and Rafael Aranda Vollmer. Staffan Lindberg seems to suggest that electoral authoritarian regimes tend in general to elements of polyarchy. Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 85–90; Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971), 1–17; Diane Davis and Viviane Brachet-Márquez, “Rethinking Democracy: Mexico in Historical Perspective,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 1 (1997): 86–119; Rafael Aranda Vollmer, *Poliarquías urbanas: Competencia electoral en las ciudades y zonas metropolitanas de México* (México, D.F.: Miguel Angel Porrua, 2004); Staffan I. Lindberg, “Tragic Protest: Why Do Opposition Parties Boycott Elections?” in Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*, 149.
87. Piccato, “El parlamentarismo,” 65–71, 79–81.
88. B. Traven, *The General from the Jungle* (London: Robert Hale Ltd, 1954), 277.
89. Linda B. Hall, *Álvaro Obregón: Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911–1920* (Texas, 1981), 228; Meyer et al., *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1928–1934* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México), 58, 88.
90. While the Partido Popular, Lombardo Toledano’s would-be leftist “loyal opposition.” was preceded by Michoacán’s Partido Popular, “a Catholic party with ties to economic elites.” Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 335; Christopher R. Boyer, “The Cultural Politics of Agrarismo: Agrarian Revolt, Village Revolutionaries, and State Formation in Michoacán, Mexico,” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997, 77.
91. Armando Bartra, *Guerrero bronco: Campesinos, ciudadanos y guerrilleros en la Costa Grande* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1997), 52–54; A. Alvarado Mendoza, “Perfil político de Emilio Portes Gil,” in *Estadistas, caciques y caudillos*, ed. Carlos Martínez Assad (México, D.F.:

UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, 1988), 73–96; Timothy J. Henderson, *The Worm in the Wheat: Rosalie Evans and Agrarian Struggle in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley of Mexico, 1906–1927* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 104–7.

92. Medin, *El Minimato Presidencial*, 130–33; Bartra, *Guerrero bronco*, 72–77; Boyer, “The Cultural Politics of Agrarismo,” 284.

93. Assorted election reports from Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-2.311M(9)/5B, 6B; *Excelsior*, January 8, 1939; Santana to Gobernación, 1, 30 July, August 2, 1936, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-171/7.

94. Assorted election reports, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-2.311M(9)/5B, 6B; *Excelsior*, January 8, 1939; Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised*, 132; Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked on Earth*, 66.

95. Luis de Guadalupe Martínez, *La lucha electoral del PAN en Oaxaca, El bipartidismo, PAN-PRI en Huajuapán de León, Tomo I (1939–1971)* (Oaxaca, 2002), 28.

96. Gillingham, “We Don’t Have Arms.”

97. Thomas Rath, “Camouflaging the State: Soldiers, Politics and the Myth of Demilitarisation,” in Gillingham and Smith, *Soft Authoritarianism*, chap. 4.

98. José Luis Reyna, “Las elecciones en el México institucionalizado, 1946–1976,” in González Casanova, *Las elecciones en México*, 103; María Antonia Martínez, *El despegue constructivo de la Revolución: Sociedad y política en el alemanismo* (México, D.F.: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2004).

99. For the case study see Daniel Newcomer, *Reconciling Modernity: Urban State Formation in 1940s León, Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

100. Ojeda to Alemán, October 18, 1944, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-239/2/311 G (9) 2 v.II.

101. Author’s analysis, election data from Absalón Pérez to Ruiz Cortines, August 22, 1946, Contreras to Ruiz Cortines, October 7, 1946, Archivo Histórico del Estado de Veracruz, México, AHEV-1412/549/0.

102. Wil Pansters, “Tropical Passion in the Desert: Gonzalo N. Santos and Local Elections in Northern San Luis Potosí,” in Gillingham and Smith, *Soft Authoritarianism*, chap. 12.

103. Steve T. Wuhs, *Savage Democracy: Institutional Change and Party Development in Mexico* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2008).

104. JNM and JGV to Gobernación, 2, 3/02/1950, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGIPS-19/12.

105. Paoli Bolio, “Legislación electoral y proceso político,” 146–52.

106. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 51; Martínez Assad, “Las elecciones legislativas,” 231.

107. That the (weak or thin) hegemony enjoyed by the PRI was the fluid product of constant negotiation has become a commonplace in the recent historiography of Mexico, strongly influenced by Raymond Williams, Michel Foucault, and James C. Scott. For useful reviews see Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 11–24; Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

108. Paoli Bolio, “Legislación electoral y proceso político,” 153–61; Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 148.

109. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 85.

110. Hernández Rodríguez, *El centro dividido*, 41–42.

111. Nayarit, Aguascalientes, Tamaulipas, Puebla, and Nuevo León. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 116.



112. Arreola Ayala, "Elecciones municipales," 330–34; Hernández Rodríguez, *El centro dividido*, 151; Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 161–205.
113. This applied, albeit with decreasing frequency, for elections further up the political ladder, and for local deputies in particular. L. Vincent Padgett, "Mexico's One-Party System: A Re-evaluation," *American Political Science Review* 51, no. 4 (1957): 995–1008; Hernández, *El centro dividido*, 41; Gillingham, "We Don't Have Arms."
114. Benjamin T. Smith, "The Priest's Party: Local Catholicism and PANismo in Huajuapam de León," in *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*, ed. Matthew Butler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 271–72.
115. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 52–54.
116. Joy Langston, "Why Rules Matter: Changes in Candidate Selection in Mexico's PRI, 1988–2000," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 497.
117. Molinar Horcasitas, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, 123–25; Jonathan Hiskey and Damarys Canache, "The Demise of One-Party Politics in Mexican Municipal Elections," *British Journal of Political Science* 35 (April 2005): 257–84; Aranda Vollmer, *Poliarquías urbanas*.
118. Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 149.
119. Caroline C. Beer, *Electoral Competition and Institutional Change in Mexico* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2003), 95–117.
120. Santos, *Memorias*, 255–56; Liga to Avila Camacho, April 27, 1945, Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., DGG-2/311P(29)1/110B.
121. Frank O'Gorman, "The Culture of Elections in England: From the Glorious Revolution to the First World War, 1688–1914," in Posada Carbó, *Elections before Democracy*, 17–31.

