Mexico’s Evolving Democracy
A Comparative Study of the 2012 Elections

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JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ

Guadalupe Loaeza (1994) asked, "What could be worse, that there be fraud or that millions of Mexicans would vote for the PRI?" The Mexican public intellectual penned that devilish sentence in the immediate aftermath of Ernesto Zedillo's election to the presidency in 1994, the first Mexican presidential election ever that even opposition analysts believed that the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or Institutional Revolutionary Party) presidential candidate won. Critics in 1994 still believed that there were pockets of fraud committed during the election, but Mexico had already changed a great deal, enabling Zedillo to claim a more democratic mandate. Yet Loaeza gave voice to the disgust of many at the spectacle that so many Mexicans would vote for a party that, some changes notwithstanding, had governed Mexico in authoritarian fashion since 1929.

In 2012, Enrique Peña Nieto led the PRI, after twelve years in the opposition, to win back the presidency and a plurality in both chambers of congress. Fraud had been remaindered as an issue of the past, thanks in particular to the establishment of the IFE (Instituto Federal Electoral, or Federal Electoral Institute), which had toiled extensively and effectively to eliminate it starting in the 1997 midterm national legislative election (Eric Magar, chap. 3). Yet, as table 11.1 shows, in the 2012 presidential election, over eight million more voters cast their ballots for the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional, or National Action Party) candidate, Josefina Vázquez Mota, plus for the candidate of the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, or Party of the Democratic Revolution) and its coalition, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, than they did for Peña Nieto, the candidate of the PRI. For these PAN and PRD supporters, echoes of Loaeza's (1994) lament lingered. The 2012 supporters and participants of

the social media movement #YoSoy132 voiced some of this anger during the 2012 presidential campaign (Alejandro Díaz-Domínguez and Alejandro Moreno, chap. 10). Across the decades, a cultural—not just a political—rejection of the PRI was a key to some Mexicans' civic self-identity.

"And, upon waking up, the dinosaur was still there," Lorenzo Meyer (1994), one of Mexico's leading historians, commented on the 1994 presidential election, quoting from a micronovel by Augusto Monterroso, as Kathleen Bruhn opens chapter 2. Meyer voiced amazement at the sheer endurance of the PRI's machine and its relentless capacity to win and win yet again, notwithstanding Mexico's transformation over the previous six decades from a rural to an urban country and from a producer of primary products to an exporter of manufactures. The Soviet Union had collapsed. Mexico's PRI had survived. But it survived just one more six-year presidential term. Vicente Fox in 2000 and Felipe Calderón in 2006, both heading the PAN, defeated the respective PRI presidential candidates Francisco Labastida and Roberto Madrazo.

Disgusting to some, antediluvian to others, Mexico's PRI had remained a successful and popular party even when its candidates lost presidential elections. As the electoral data in table 11.1 show, PRI candidates for the chamber of deputies outperformed the losing PRI presidential candidates in the 2000 and, markedly, 2006 presidential elections. In the elections for the chamber of deputies in 1997, 2000, 2003 (in alliance with the Green Ecologist Party, or

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Note: For deputy elections, the reported votes are for the proportional-representation party lists. For 2003, 2009, and the second of 2012, the votes are for each party standing alone. In the second column for 2012, coalition votes are allocated to parties according to Mexican federal electoral law. For 2000, 2006, and the first column of 2012, the votes are for the coalition for both presidential and deputy elections, attributing the votes to the lead party in each coalition, although the reported votes are for the respective entire coalitions. In 2000 the PRI (and in 2006 the PAN) ran without a coalition partner.
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PVE), and 2009, the PRI won between 45% and 47% of the seats, in each instance the largest plurality in the chamber (in the 2006 deputy elections, with the ballot headed by a disastrous presidential candidacy, the PRI's share of the chamber's seats fell to 21%). Moreover, out of the thirty-two units in the Mexican federation, between 2000 and 2012 the PRI won between seventeen and twenty elections for state governor per election cycle (Hernández Rodríguez and Pansters 2012). In many of these elections—including in emblematic states where the PAN had strong and deep roots, such as Chihuahua and Nuevo León—the PRI had lost the governorship to the PAN but would regain it from the opposition in a subsequent election.

In this chapter, I compare aspects of the 2012 presidential election to those of 2000 and 2006 and highlight some of this book's key findings. I review and revise some of my own findings in previous studies of earlier elections. But first I situate the 2012 Mexican presidential election in comparative context in order to understand how the former ruling party came back to again elect Mexico's president.

The PRI's Regeneration in Comparative Perspective

"We cannot continue as we have. A radical transformation of the party is not a tactical concession, but a question of political survival" (Grzymała-Busse 2002, 1). In January 1989, Jacek Zdrojewski, a member of the Polish United Workers' Party, summarized the predicament of the Polish Communist Party as it faced the onslaught of the democratic wave that washed away the Communist authoritarian regimes in east central Europe. Grzymała-Busse (2002) analyzed the response of the Polish Communists, comparing it with the Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak Communist parties. All four parties were forced from power in 1989, and each faced a capable opposition that contested the elections and further discredited them.

Grzymała-Busse (2002) formulated a set of explanations to shed light on the regeneration of some former ruling parties in east central Europe; her framework can be applied to explain the return of the PRI to the presidency. She first identified a set of ruling Communist Party practices that predispose a party to adapt and survive or to fossilize and fail. Communist parties were more likely to regenerate if their past practices had emphasized the recruitment of pragmatists over ideologues, the significance of political negotiations as a key party tool, and past experience with some significant policy reform. Pragmatism, negotiation, and experience with reform gave Communist parties a usable past as well as resources that its elites could deploy in new democratic settings. Second, Grzymała-Busse argues that, upon democratization, the old parties had to convince voters and other parties of their democratic intentions and capabilities. To do so, she argued, Communist parties had to be centralized in order to respond readily to voter preferences, impose flexibility on party organization in the face of new challenges, and sustain parliamentary discipline. The Polish and Hungarian parties would obtain the largest pluralities of the votes cast in elections in the mid and late 1990s, returning to national power at the head of respective coalitions. In contrast, the Czech and Slovak parties did not fare as well.

Between its first presidential defeat in 2000 and its victory in the 2012 election, the PRI followed a more elongated and complex trajectory than what is indicated for the more successful cases of formerly authoritarian party regeneration in east central Europe. The PRI survived as a large and influential party for gubernatorial and parliamentary elections but would go on to lose the presidency even more badly in 2006.

The PRI had not been an ideological party since the 1940s. It exemplified what Juan Linz (1975) called the "menalities" of authoritarian regimes. The PRI sought to promote economic growth and the widest possible inclusion of organized economic and social groups under the ruling party and its president, and to sustain nationalism featuring a modicum of sovereign autonomy in the face of US power. It had chosen pragmatic leaders, especially between 1982 and 2000, skilled in negotiations with friend and foe, who implemented dramatic market-conforming economic and social policy changes in those years. The PRI benefited from this inherited tool kit of skills and cadres that was portable from the authoritarian to the democratic regime. Taking serious note of a rising opposition electoral challenge in 1988 and increased public contestation, the PRI in the early 1990s under Presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–94) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) attempted to position itself to host and run a democratic election, what Slater and Wong (2013) call "conceding to thrive," or making concessions as an authoritarian ruling party in order to increase the likelihood of remaining a ruling party (albeit no longer authoritarian). But the PRI had depended on the country's president as its internal coordinating mechanism; having lost the presidency, the PRI responded to this breakdown of its coordination mechanism in three ways.

One response was entirely expected. Having lost the presidency, the PRI decentralized instantly to the units of the federation. PRI state governors
became the new PRI coordinators within their respective territories. The PRI could not construct the party centralization that Grzymała-Busse (2002) had found was a key to Communist Party regeneration in east central Europe. The outcome for the PRI resembled the response of Argentina’s Partido Justicialista (Peronists) after it lost the 1983 presidential election. Peronist governors sustained the party in the provinces by means fair and foul. So, too, would PRI state governors after 2000. The empirical details differed but the outcomes—subnational autonomy and party survival—were comparable (Gibson 2012; Giraudy 2013). This organizational outcome—devolution of PRI coordination to PRI state governors—could only happen because most Mexican gubernatorial elections are not held at the same time as national elections for president or congress. PRI governors elected before the 2000 election thus remained in office, and new PRI candidates would subsequently run for governorships in their respective states on days of local electoral salience, far removed from the democratic wave that had swept their party from the presidency. As noted above, after 2000 the PRI consistently held more than half of the state governorships, and it remained the only party with a sufficient nationwide state partisan organization to contest effectively every gubernatorial election save the Mexico City Federal District. PRI governors oversaw and shepherded the election of PRI municipal, state, and federal officials, thereby saving the party albeit in decentralized fashion.

The second, perhaps unexpected, response was to maintain extraordinary party discipline in congress. Consider the chamber of deputies, where the challenging task of keeping 211 PRI deputies in line, with a PAN president and multiple governors jockeying for influence, could have led to the party’s early parliamentary splintering. During the 1997–2000 sessions, with PRI President Ernesto Zedillo in office, the PRI’s party discipline in the chamber of deputies, as measured by the Rice Index, was 99%. PRI deputies disobeyed the party whips in only 1.4% of the bills that came before the chamber. Matters changed, as would be expected after the loss of the presidency in 2000, for the 2000–2003 parliamentary sessions, but the change was barely perceptible. PRI party discipline fell only to 92%, and the proportion of bills on which deputies disobeyed the party whips rose just to 5.8%. The PRI sustained comparable levels of party discipline in the years that followed (Casar 2008, 241, 247).

With the advantage of hindsight, two explanations for this amazing feat of parliamentary centralization are worth noting. The first is structural. The Mexican Constitution barred reelection for all executive posts and immediately consecutive reelection for legislative posts; it mandated the circulation of elites in the authoritarian period and carried over to the democratic period. Mexican deputies serve three-year terms. Their political careers necessarily required partisan loyalty to secure support for their next post, whether city council, mayor, governor, state legislator, or federal senator. Incumbent deputies depended on the PRI floor leader and on PRI governors to help them win their next posts to sustain a political career. This constitutional rule also automatically made all candidates for the legislature nonincumbents who depended disproportionately on party resources to get elected. Although Mexico elected 300 of its 500 federal deputies through single-member districts (the remaining 200 were elected from party lists through proportional representation), constitutionally mandated nonincumbency tilted even single-member district deputies toward high partisan loyalty.

The second possible explanation, therefore, is the first PRI floor leader after the 2000 election defeat: Beatriz Paredes Rangel. She was the second woman in Mexican history to become a state governor (of Tlaxcala). Within the PRI, she rose through the party-led National Peasant Confederation. Before returning to the chamber of deputies in 2000, she had twice served as federal deputy and once as federal senator, providing her with significant legislative, executive, and partisan experience. She knew how to make use of the institutional resources that enhanced the likelihood of party loyalty in her chamber. And she kept together her PRI by the sheer force of smarts, energy, and commitment of time.

Subnational gubernatorial coordination and parliamentary discipline did not suffice, however, to make the PRI happy. Deep interpersonal and factional battles broke out as politicians struggled for control of the national party organization. Their fierce jockeying for power at least conveyed their belief that the PRI was worth fighting for. Roberto Madrazo, former governor of the State of Tabasco—who had lost the PRI primary to Francisco Labastida, the defeated PRI presidential candidate in 2000—ran for the party presidency, outpolling Paredes for the latter post. Madrazo went on to win the PRI’s presidential nomination for the 2006 election, but in the process he provoked an alliance of PRI governors who had nothing in common except their opposition to him. Madrazo himself was smart and charming but beleaguered by allegations of abuse of power and corruption as Tabasco governor. Fragmented, factionalized, and thus enfeebled, the PRI in 2006 suffered its worst national election defeat ever (Hernández Rodríguez 2009; Pacheco Méndez 2009; Prud'homme 2010, 151–53).
To explain how the PRI responded to its 2006 election defeat, we examine the experience of Taiwan's Kuomintang Party. The Kuomintang and the PRI were for decades the two principal examples of long-ruling noncommunist parties in political regimes founded by military leaders who had devolved power over time to civilian leaders. The Kuomintang and the PRI were both defeated in presidential elections held in 2000, each for the first time ever. Anti-authoritarian themes combined with a strong critique of prevalent corruption to help defeat both. In each case, significant splits had weakened the ruling party. In Mexico, the principal breakaway dated from the late 1980s, but even through the 1990s significant PRI politicians defected in time and again to the PRD or to minor parties. In Taiwan, the Kuomintang's centralized top-down approach to candidate nominations led to a proliferation of rebel candidacies. Yet the most lethal rebellion occurred during the 2000 election itself when a former Kuomintang politician, who had lost the party's presidential nomination, formed his own party, divided the formerly united Kuomintang electorate, and opened the doors for the victory of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP; see Fell 2013, 157; Solinger 2001).

The Kuomintang, as had been the case with the PRI, retained significant strengths even after its 2000 presidential election defeat. It remained the majority party in the Legislative Yuan. It retained impressive organizational strength. As with the PRI, the Kuomintang had edged over time from ideology toward "mentalities," of which the most salient were its commitment to ensure high rates of economic growth and its affirmation of its nationalist identity as "China." Pragmatism, negotiating skills, and experience with successful market-conforming growth policies were part of the Kuomintang's tool kit, as they were of the PRI's. The Kuomintang had also depended on the country's president to enforce coordination. Yet Taiwan's president had been unable to ward off the party split that led to defeat in 2000. Early centralization of coordination did not serve the Kuomintang well because it fostered a counterproductive rigidity (Hsieh 2002).

The key to the Kuomintang's comeback was to establish a reliable alliance with those who had left it for other parties in the 2000 presidential election. In the 2004 presidential election, the Kuomintang and its ally together won fewer votes than they had won separately in 2000, but they set the bases for future victory. In the 2008 legislative election, a now-unified party under the Kuomintang banner, which won an outright majority of the vote, replaced this alliance (Tan 2009; Tan and Wu 2005). By the 2008 presidential election, the Kuomin-
Peña Nieto was able at last to implement Grynspan-Busse's recommendation to centralize power inside the party. As Bruhn argues in chapter 2, he plotted to win Mexico's presidency during his six-year term as governor of the State of Mexico. He emphasized promises rather than views on positional issues. This strategy served him well not just during the general election campaign but also much earlier to unite the PRI behind his candidacy in advance of the campaign. The PRI had been internally divided on economic and social policies; it was quite heterogeneous across Mexico's regions. Thus it was good to say little about the issues that would split the party (Paolini 2009). Instead, Peña Nieto would get a pothole fixed and call it a campaign promise fulfilled to the cheers of PRI identifiers. Early on, he mobilized his connections to get Mexico's television networks to portray him as Mexico's inevitable next president, as Chappell Lawhon indicates in chapter 1. Inevitability helped to build PRI cohesion and to impose his central will on the PRI organization throughout the country. The imagined certainty of a Peña Nieto presidency, overflowing from television coverage, explains the fury of the response of devotees of social media, active in the #YoSoy132 movement (see Díaz-Domínguez and Moreno, chap. 10). The use of social media was of course hip and modern, but, for Peña Nieto's opponents, it was also a political necessity given television network broadcasts oozing with pro-Peña Nieto messaging. Peña Nieto's disciplined and centralized approach to his campaign, mum on the issues other than his competence, worked to elect him president of Mexico.

This miracle of PRI regeneration shines brightly in James A. McCann's chapter 4. Three considerations explain the vote for Peña Nieto. Two have been explanatory workhorses of Mexican elections since political democratization began, namely, assessments of the presidential candidates and party identification. The novelty was the positive assessment of the PRI's past governance—conditions were better, the economy was better managed, and the government was more representative. This variable—the views of the old regime—remained statistically significant even after applying controls for partisanship, candidate traits, and a host of other factors. Crucially, as McCann also shows, the vote for the PRI did not result from an authoritarian mind-set among voters. Mexicans did not want to elect a tyrant. They wanted to democratically elect someone to competently govern them. Voters did not support the PRI to return to the authoritarian past. Voters trusted the PRI's brand and its aura of reliable governance (regarding party brands, see Lupu 2013). Mexicans had nostalgia for the future.
The desire for competence, not for tyranny, surfaces also in Kenneth F. Greene’s chapter 6. The PRI had been losing supporters for decades, and on the eve of the 2012 campaign its core backing was a minority of the electorate. Peña Nieto had to work hard to persuade those who did not identify with the PRI to vote for him. Television did a lot of the work; he had to smile handsomely and exude executive decisiveness. His victory did not result from re-surfaced authoritarian values but rather from persuading voters to back a candidate toward whom they had not been predisposed.

Peña Nieto won the presidency in 2012 on the backs of the four variables that have best explained the vote in the three presidential elections (2000, 2006, and 2012) during the democratic regime: partisanship, candidate traits, assessments of the outgoing administration, and economic policy preferences. Bruhn’s chapter 2 shows the intertwining of these elements during the unfolding campaign. The 2012 election was not, however, merely a rerun.

The 2012 Presidential Election: Discontinuities and Continuities

For the first time in Mexico’s democratic political regime, in 2012 the early front-runner in the end won the presidency. Peña Nieto began the campaign ahead of the competition, and he won. In 2000 and 2006, the PRI’s Labastida and the PRD’s López Obrador were the respective early front-runners, but both lost. Common across all three elections, however, was the impact of the campaign in shifting votes toward the eventual winner, as Greene shows in chapter 6. Peña Nieto’s personal and political traits no doubt helped him in this campaign success, but being the candidate of Mexico’s largest party, a factor that preceded the campaign, was surely enormously helpful. Parties matter.

For the first time also in a fully democratic Mexican presidential election, negative advertising mattered much less. As Magar shows in chapter 3, the change in the electoral rules that followed the 2006 election prohibited the private sale or purchase of electoral advertisements on radio and television as well as all negative advertisements. Lawson (chap. 1) thus explains the kind of messaging that remained lawful and possible, while Díaz-Domínguez and Moreno (chap. 10) highlight the turn of activist opponents of Peña Nieto to social media. On social media, these activists could denigrate Peña Nieto in ways expressly forbidden by the new mass media laws.

For the first time in Mexican elections, social media had a significant impact on voting behavior and public opinion. Díaz-Domínguez and Moreno (chap. 10) demonstrate the sustained importance for several weeks during the campaign of a social movement that sprung at a university but then widened quickly to a constituency that shared a predilection for the use of social media and an antipathy to the Peña Nieto candidacy. The use of social media to organize, motivate, and sustain a group of political activists for a period of weeks is, of course, neither original nor unique to Mexico. The so-called Arab Spring, in particular in Tunisia and Egypt, shows the effectiveness of such a communicative instrument in quite different countries. But #YoSoy132 was new to Mexico, and chances are that social media is here to stay for future Mexican elections.

Also for the first time in these elections, the formal duration of the campaign was set and shortened by law (Magar, chap. 3), with the Federal Electoral Institute enforcing the rule. The shock of the new rule enforcement fell especially on the precampaign period, which disadvantaged candidates who lacked a public presence and advantaged well-known candidates, such as former presidential candidate López Obrador or Peña Nieto, who had been governor of the State of Mexico, facilitating his appearance on Mexico City–originated national mass media television and radio broadcasts. Along with the prohibition of negative advertising and private purchases of mass media time, these rules compelled parties to find alternative means to reach the electorate. As noted, social media access was one and, as we shall see, clientelism was another.

There were also important analytical continuities. As noted above, partisanship, candidate traits, assessments of the outgoing administration, and economic policy preferences remain the workhorses for explaining Mexican voting behavior in 2012, as in 2006 and 2000. These four variables explain the bulk of voter preferences at the start of each campaign (Greene, chap. 6). Mexican voters thus resemble voters across the democracies that straddle the North Atlantic region.

As in past elections, demographic factors mattered relatively little in voting behavior. In looking at Díaz-Domínguez and Moreno’s findings (chap. 10), the anti–Peña Nieto social media movement called #YoSoy132 began at the Ibero-American University and was broadly associated in news reports with young and fervid Internet users. Yet analysis of the #YoSoy132 movement shows that age was never statistically significant in explaining voter choice, attitude toward the presidential candidates, or policy preference. The #YoSoy132 movement mattered, but precisely because its impact was not just on the young.

Also as in past elections, positional issues—attitudes on specific policy issues—did not explain the voting choice. Lawson, Bruhn, McCann, and Greene
(chaps. 1, 2, 4, and 6, respectively) show that the presidential candidates blurred their policy disagreements and actively avoided differentiation along most positional issues. The various models across the chapters confirm that positional issues were never statistically significant. On the contrary, and also as in past elections, valence issues—Peña Nieto’s projected immense competence—remained statistically and substantively significant explanations of voting behavior (chaps. 4 and 6).

More strikingly, chapter 7, by Edgar Franco Vivanco, Jorge Olarte, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros, and Beatriz Magaloni, shows that a clearly significant impact of the prevalence of criminal violence was to decrease voting turnout in the country’s most violent localities. The impact of criminal violence on the voting outcome requires a nuanced analysis, however. First, Peña Nieto was the candidate most adversely affected by the prevalence of violence. Second, López Obrador captured a larger share of the votes in violent areas. Third, the partisan identity of the state governor in violent areas had a significant impact on vote outcomes. There may have been retrospective voter punishment related to violence targeted at state governors. Thus, in violent zones of states led by PAN or PRD governors prior to the elections, voters favored the PAN’s Vázquez Mota; in violent zones led by PRI governors, citizens voted against the PRI’s Peña Nieto, the incumbent governor’s candidate. This complexity made the positional issue—violence—difficult to discern in its impact on public opinion. Voters may have held state governors, not the Calderón presidency, as more responsible for the maintenance of public order in their communities, casting their votes differently depending on geographic context. Peña Nieto won the 2012 election for reasons unrelated to violence or the war on drugs.

A final important continuity, as Lawson notes in chapter 1, is that “campaigns matter much more in Mexico” than in the longer-established North Atlantic democracies, even if on many dimensions Mexican voters are similar to voters in the United States or other North Atlantic democracies. The 2012 campaign mattered, but so had its predecessors (Domínguez 2009, 303), although the ways in which campaigns have mattered, as noted above and discussed below, have changed.

**Analytical Rebalancing**

In each of the concluding chapters on two collective studies of Mexican elections by the same core scholarly team (Domínguez and Lawson 2004; Domínguez, Lawson, and Moreno 2009), I highlighted findings that may be new, or new to my own understanding of Mexican elections, thereby correcting either mistaken analyses or prior poorly specified findings. That is the purpose of this section—self-criticism. I focus on three questions: the relative strength of partisanship in the context of strong election campaign effects, the aggregative impact of positional issues as measures of public mood, and the impact of clientelist strategies on voter decisions.

Partisanship in Mexico may look impressive in comparison to other Latin American countries such as Peru or Venezuela, where the party systems have collapsed and political leaders have found it challenging to build new and enduring political parties. But, Greene argues forcefully in chapter 6, Mexican parties are not as strong as the scholarly literature and popular coverage may imply; they are also not as strong as our own team’s prior research and my own writing may have portrayed it. Voters change their voting intentions during the campaign, which should not happen if partisanship were unchanging and more powerful. The net campaign effect varied between 10% and 15% in the 2000, 2006, and 2012 presidential elections, in each case to the benefit of the eventual winner. “Net effect” implies that some vote shifts may cancel each other out. Greene also found that about a third of the electorate in these three elections became convinced during the campaign to support a candidate who was not in line with their precampaign dispositions. Partisanship in Mexico is therefore still a significant building block for the analysis of electoral behavior, but in comparison to past characterization there is a much greater role of political independents—“voter converts”—who help to shape the outcome of these elections.

The public mood matters as well in Mexico, as it does in other Latin American countries. This is Andy Baker’s important and persuasive finding in chapter 5. Our research team’s past work had shown that broad ideological perspectives help to structure Mexican public opinion, even if survey questions using words such as “left” or “right” do not capture them well (Domínguez 2009, 307), but the past research had not explored public mood as Baker has done. Moreover, the collective impact of past research, and for this book, de-emphasized positional issues.

Public mood, as Baker explains, is a metadimension, built on responses to questions regarding positional issues, but in its aggregation it is quite different from attitudes about any one positional issue. He shows that the public mood on the economically liberal versus statist dimension oscillated considerably in Mexico across the 2000, 2006, and 2012 presidential elections in ways roughly
consistent with their outcome. The analysis of public mood explains especially why the PRD has failed to win the presidency or a larger number of governorships; voters prefer officials who on economic topics are significantly to the right of the PRD. The public mood also explains the PRI’s victory in 2012, while it also shows that the PRI had squandered its ideological advantages in the electorate in the 2000 and 2006 presidential elections. This is an important correction to the view that positional issues “don’t matter.” Rather, the aggregation of positional issues into Baker’s construct of public mood sheds significant light on the attitudes and behavior of Mexican voters. It may be best understood in the context of opportunities and constraints for parties and candidates during campaigns.

“Clientelist strategies (i.e., handouts) had become much less effective at generating voter support” in the 2000 and especially the 2006 presidential elections, I once wrote hopefully (Domínguez 2009, 298). We lack the evidence and analysis to show whether that conclusion was simply wrong for those elections. Nevertheless, clientelism mattered in the 2012 election—perhaps as many as a fifth of the electorate in the postelection wave of the Mexico 2012 Panel Study may have received handouts. Given the work by Ana De La O (chap. 8) and Simeon Nichter and Brian Palmer-Rubin (chap. 9), clientelism probably mattered in 2000 and 2006 as well.

De La O shows why past analyses were prematurely enthusiastic regarding the alleged decline of clientelism in Mexico: less than 3% of Mexicans in the first wave of the Mexico 2012 Panel Study reported, in response to a direct question, receiving a gift, a favor, or access to services in exchange for their vote. Relying on a list experiment that was part of both waves in the 2012 survey, De La O detects much more clientelism than the direct survey question. The list experiment and the direct question may give us the upper and lower bounds for the likelihood that voters accept a handout, 21% and 3%, respectively. De La O also finds a clear relationship between perceptions of corruption and the practice of clientelism. People who strongly agree that corruption is widespread are forty-one percentage points more likely to sell their vote compared to respondents who totally disagree with the statement that corruption is widespread. She also shows that aggregate changes in corruption are important determinants of vote buying. Voters most exposed to corruption are also the voters most likely to be exposed to, and to experience, clientelist practices.

In the same vein, Nichter and Palmer-Rubin present in chapter 9 robust quantitative evidence of the link between declared support and vote buying. Citizens who declare their public support for a party, with political posters on their homes, are significantly more likely to receive partisan offers of reward. However, the panel survey does not allow us to determine whether the support is declared in order to obtain a handout, declared only following the receipt of a handout, or declared simply as an expression of genuine allegiance that happens to coincide with the transmission of money. But there is likely a strong connection between the declaration of support and the receipt and acceptance of handouts. The survey evidence indicates that politicians from all parties engaged in some clientelist behavior (see also Müller 2012), yet the analysis also shows that the PRI engaged in disproportionately more clientelist practices in the 2012 election, interacting with those voters ready to express their support publicly.

The campaigns’ reliance on political posters at homes and the use of clientelist practices respond to the changes in the electoral law, which Magar reports in chapter 3. Banned from certain practices using mass media, anti-Peña Nieto supporters resorted to social media while pro-Peña Nieto supporters (as well as to a lesser extent supporters of all parties) resorted to clientelist practices. Mexico’s 2012 election was not bought, but the stench of clientelism spoiled the process.

Conclusion

Writing about the United States, Alesina and Rosenthal (1995) have argued that “divided government is not an accident, but the result of the voters’ desire for policy moderation” (2). In Mexico, this argument applies with even greater force. As shown in table 11.1, many more millions of Mexicans voted against Enrique Peña Nieto than had voted for him in the 2012 presidential election. Similarly, many more millions of Mexicans voted for deputies and senators from the PAN, the PRD, and various small parties than for the PRI’s congressional candidates. The PRI increased significantly its representation in both chambers of the federal congress but obtained an outright majority in neither chamber. Voters seemingly wanted to compel PRI politicians to draw into their tool kit as pragmatic negotiators to make deals with other parties to enact legislation.

Voters got their wish. At the start of his term, President Peña Nieto unveiled the Pact for Mexico, supported by the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD, which committed the parties to support significant legislation regarding various areas of public life. Mexico’s past coalescent tendencies would blossom during Peña Nieto’s first year in office as significant laws were enacted. Peña Nieto, a candidate who sought to say as little as possible on positional issues during the campaign, as president focused impressively on enacting policy change. But the
voters’ insistence that the PRI must look for allies also installed the opposition, thanks to the PRI’s alliances to govern, as watchdogs over the PRI in congress and in executive branch appointments. Mexican citizens were ready to return the PRI to the presidency but through divided government they also secured an insurance policy against renewed authoritarian lordship.

In my reflections about Mexico’s pivotal 2000 election, which ended seventy-one years of one-party rule, I wrote that “the hero of Mexico’s democratic transition has been the voter” who behaved “prudently, cautiously” by supporting reform through the PRI and then electing two consecutive PAN presidents, neither of whom had a majority in either chamber in congress (Domínguez 2004, 341). In 2012, the voters concentrated greater power in the PRI, but deprived it of the capacity to govern Mexico simply on its own. The 2012 election is still a story of the admirable Mexican citizen—a prudent democrat.

Twice in this century Mexicans have witnessed a shift in the political party controlling the presidency. Therefore honor in constitutional democratic behavior also belongs to the presidents—Ernesto Zedillo in 2000 and Felipe Calderón in 2012—who handed over power, peacefully and professionally, to their opposition successors who had defeated their party on Election Day. May President Enrique Peña Nieto earn the same respect as a constitutional democrat as his predecessors, and may he best them as a successful policy wonk.

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NOTES

1. López Obrador did not acknowledge his 2006 election defeat and instead proclaimed himself Mexico’s legitimate president. For analysis, see Loaeza (2007).


