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# MEXICO'S PIVOTAL DEMOCRATIC ELECTION

CANDIDATES, VOTERS, AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 2000

Edited by

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## Conclusion: Why and How Did Mexico's 2000 Presidential Election Campaign Matter?

JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ

Democratic citizens "fly to the assemblies," in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous phrase from the *Social Contract*.¹ They ponder, argue, and decide. Disagreement and decision are as fundamental for democratic politics in large countries as in Rousseau's Geneva.² In our times, the principal opportunity for citizens to deliberate, disagree, and decide the fate of politics in their countries is during election campaigns. Election campaigns matter normatively for the quality of democracies; empirically, they shape the circumstances of governance.

Yet why and how do presidential campaigns matter?<sup>3</sup> How do they shape the views, values, and behavior of voters? Do they matter more in new democracies such as Mexico's than in consolidated democracies such as those in North America and Western Europe? Politicians and their backers everywhere think that campaigns matter, and they spend vast amounts of time and money on campaigns. Research on political campaigns has been most extensive in the United States. In general, as Steven Finkel summarizes the state of scholarship, the U.S. findings "show that the overwhelming majority of individual voters could be predicted from attitudes such as party identification and presidential approval that were measured before the political party conventions. Changes in orientations during the general election period had little impact on vote choices at both the individual and aggregate levels." For the U.S. 1980 presidential election, three variables unrelated to the campaign itself (race, party identification, and presidential approval)

predicted 81 percent of the votes. In elections as different as 1940, 1948, and 1980, only about 5 percent of the voters "converted" during the campaign, switching support from one candidate to the other.4

Scholars who emphasize the significance of economic factors in shaping the vote come to similar conclusions. Gregory Markus has studied the impact of the economy on U.S. voting behavior across time, using individual-level data, to predict election results taking into account just party identification, race, and sociotropic economic assessments (that is, assessments about the nation's economy, not about one's own pocketbook). Markus ignored the possible impact on the vote from campaign-related variables such as candidate assessments, issue positions, the nature of campaigns, the results of presidential candidate debates, and so on. He found only a 3 percent margin of error in his predictions of election results that might be attributed to omitted variables, such as campaign effects.<sup>5</sup>

Election outcomes in Western Europe can also be predicted without taking the campaign into account. Michael Lewis-Beck's research on economic voting in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain shows that social class, religiosity, ideology, and economic factors thoroughly explain variation in voting behavior across several elections in each of these countries. Economic voting is not short-sighted, moreover; it is a slower-moving, more stable variable than just the economic results in the run-up to the election.<sup>6</sup>

This book allows us to assess the impact of the 2000 presidential campaign. On July 2, 2000, for the first time since its founding (under a different name) in 1929, Mexico's ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), lost the presidency and accepted the loss.<sup>7</sup> The five months before the July 2000 election saw a shift of between 12 and 15 percent of the votes away from the PRI's Francisco Labastida in favor of the candidate of the lead opposition party, the National Action Party (PAN), Vicente Fox—a shift larger than Fox's 6.5 percent margin of victory or than comparisons to the United States and Western Europe might lead us to expect. Altogether, one out of every three Mexican voters changed their voting intention at some point between February and July 2000. Many did so just from "don't know" to one of the candidates, or from one of the candidates to abstention on election day. Yet there were also defections from, and shifts toward, each of the three main presidential candidates, the third being Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

In 2000, the prospects for a Labastida victory were good. There were four key reasons. First, both the PAN and the PRD had fielded presidential candidates, thus dividing the opposition vote. The PRI had not claimed a majority of the votes cast since the 1991 nationwide congressional election; a divided opposition made a PRI presidential victory possible. Second, the PRI retained a strong partisan base. Third, the PRI had won past elections by drawing support even from voters who held negative short-term retrospective assessments of its economic stewardship but who were averse to turning the government over to uncertain alternatives.8 The economy had performed quite well in each year but the first of President Ernesto Zedillo's six-year term, making it possible for the PRI to gather even greater electoral support. Fourth, in the months preceding the election, the public had a high assessment of Zedillo's performance as president. Not surprisingly, therefore, as the chapters by Chappell Lawson and Alejandro Moreno show, Labastida held a strong lead in the polls at the start of 2000. Indeed, a standard "North Atlantic democracy" voting behavior model (positive sociotropic retrospective economic voting, high regard for presidential performance, and strong PRI partisanship) would forecast Labastida's election as president of Mexico in a divided field under first-past-thepost election rules. As the election campaign started, most Mexican politicians, journalists, pollsters, and pundits expected a PRI victory. That did not happen.

Why did the unexpected opposition victory come about? I argue that the campaign informed and influenced enough Mexicans to have a significant impact on the election's outcome, even if most Mexicans voted according to preferences set before the campaign began. Longer-standing factors such as party identification strongly mediated campaign effects. The campaign had strong effects on core partisans, and it informed and sorted out the politics of the opposition. Political communications were pertinent, therefore. Were it not for the campaign, the PRI's Labastida might have become president instead of the PAN's Fox.

The 2000 election and the campaign do not, of course, explain Mexico's slow-moving transition to democracy, though they are a part of it. Later in this chapter, I show how the transition, begun years earlier by many Mexicans from all walks of life, created the structural circumstances, reshaped aspects of political culture, and induced changes in laws and institutions to make the 2000 election opposition victory thinkable and possible. The steps taken before the 2000 elections to

found an independent Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), to reduce electoral fraud, to create greater freedom for intellectuals, the mass media, and public opinion pollsters, and to provide public funding for political parties, along with the leadership of social movements and opposition political parties are key elements—prior to the 2000 campaign—in Mexico's democratization.

#### Campaigns are less likely to matter if:

- 1. There are strong political attachments based on salient social cleavages. Voters whose behavior is determined by their residence, religiosity, or social class are less likely to be influenced by transient campaign events. Examples abound. Many Catalans, Scots, and Bavarians vote for regionally rooted parties. Many Dutch or Chilean Sunday-mass Roman Catholics vote Christian Democrat. There is strong working-class voting for the British Labour Party and the Scandinavian Social Democrats.<sup>10</sup>
- 2. Partisan attachments are strong. Party identification results from long processes of political socialization, confirmed repeatedly during adulthood. Parties of the Left often create partisan subcultures with networks of labor unions, community associations, women's groups, soccer clubs, and so on. Parties of the Right often buttress their support through overlapping memberships with religious organizations. The vote choice of strong partisans is less affected by campaigns. An electorate of strong partisans has few independents to swing elections depending on campaign events, and few strategic voters because citizens vote sincerely just for their party of long affiliation.<sup>11</sup>
- 3. Judgments about the economy's past shape the behavior of voters, that is, retrospective economic voting. Retrospective voting focuses on known facts, namely, how the economy has affected the country and my family's and my own economic circumstances. For this purpose, it does not matter whether citizens vote their "pocket-book"; that is, they focus on their personal or family economic situations, or are sociotropic. The key point is that retrospective economic voting behavior is less susceptible to the manipulations and promises of politicians during the campaign. Research in the United States and Europe shows, moreover, that economically oriented voters are not fools; they take a longer view of economic performance than just the few weeks or months during the campaign. 12

4. The election is a vote on the political regime and specifically on its democratic qualities and potential. Is the political regime authoritarian? Do citizens vote against the incumbent in order to bring about democratization or to deepen trends toward political opening already under way? Such judgments are likely to be standing preferences relatively unaffected by the conduct of an election campaign.

#### Campaigns are more likely to matter if:

- 1. Voter perceptions of presidential candidates have an impact on voters. Voters may be attracted to, or repelled by, a candidate. Candidates may effectively mobilize their voters as a function of their appeal. Voters are, however, not detached or uncaring about the characteristics of candidates. Modern electoral campaigns feature the "personalization of politics," most so in presidentialist political systems.<sup>13</sup>
- Issues shape the behavior of voters. Issues become salient during the campaign and help to modify the attitudes of voters. (Arguments about the predictability of U.S. and Western European elections characteristically exclude issue variables.)
- 3. Judgments about the economy's future shape the behavior of voters: prospective economic voting. Judgments about an economy's future are influenced in part by judgments about its past, of course, but also by the promises that candidates and parties make and by political reporting and mass media advertising. Prospective economic voting suggests that the campaign had an impact on voting. "Future expectations about what economic performance the government will deliver emerge as a decisive individual vote determinant in Western European electorates.... [T]hese future expectations," Lewis-Beck concludes, "appear to edge out the direct impact of traditional retrospective evaluations." Politicians shape expectations about the economic future.
- 4. Constitutional and legal structures create opportunities to maximize campaign effects. Party primaries do so because party identification is assumed while the focus is on the choice of candidates; candidates differentiate themselves through personality traits and, occasionally, appeal to issues. Party conventions have somewhat similar effects. Constitutional requirements for two-round presi-

- dential elections, if no candidate receives a majority in the first round, increase campaign effects between the two rounds: If my preferred candidate loses, whom do I support in the second round?
- 5. Major events mark the campaign, and these events modify voter preferences. Presidential debates exemplify events that might swing some voters, most likely those previously uncommitted but possibly those who had preferred a different candidate. Campaign processes could also matter, such as the effects of the mass media, candidate debates, and "negative" campaigning, that is, attempts to discredit one's opponents.
- 6. The vote of citizens can be bought or coerced. Parties, their electoral machineries, and candidates pay voters for their votes or engage in intimidating campaign practices to nullify prior voter preferences. Such mobilization may also override the impact of other campaign stimuli.

#### DID THE 2000 MEXICAN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN MATTER?

The attachment of Mexicans to social cleavages was relatively weak, and, as a consequence, campaign effects could be larger than in the United States or Western Europe. 15 Joseph Klesner's study of the structure of the electorate explored this question. His analysis shows that social attachments have a statistically significant effect in explaining positive or negative evaluations of the three major political parties in Mexico. Those who hold the PAN in high regard are much more likely to attend church and are more likely to live outside the Mexico City metropolitan region. Those who think highly of the PRI are generally less well educated and somewhat more likely to be female and live in rural southern Mexico. Those who have high esteem for the PRD are much more likely to be males who live in southern Mexico and more likely also to live in rural areas. The explanatory significance of all the combined social attachments on the evaluations of political parties, however, is very modest (the adjusted R2 is at most .07 for any one of the three parties). Other variables, such as approval of the incumbent president, propensity toward risk, and attitudes toward the political regime, are much more important explanations of the relative evaluations of the political parties.

In his chapter, James McCann finds that region of residence, age, gender, and, to a lesser extent, social class, religiosity, and union membership had a significant effect early on in the campaign. It helped to

distinguish between supporters of establishment-backed Labastida and his opponents in the November 1999 primary election contest for the PRI presidential nomination, which Labastida won. It also helped to explain citizen preferences early on in the campaign (February 2000). But the impact of all sociodemographic factors had weakened markedly by election day on July 2, 2000, when such variables proved much less important than others.

Chappell Lawson's chapter on mass media effects on voting behavior shows that sociodemographic variables had little impact, with the modest exception of union membership. Beatriz Magaloni and Alejandro Poiré's chapter on the issues and the mandate for change in the election finds "some tepid social cleavages" affecting voter behavior, with Fox benefiting from urban, better-educated, and higher-income segments of society, but these factors added little explanatory punch. Nor did demographic variables play a significant role in fostering strategic coordination among voters.

On the other hand, Wayne Cornelius finds that certain demographic factors have a greater impact on the voting choice than campaign gifts to voters or party representative home visits. Chappell Lawson and Joseph Klesner's chapter on the likelihood of turnout shows that the findings vary by level. At the level of districts, the extent of literacy in a community had no discernible impact on the likelihood of voting before the mid-1990s, but high-literacy communities became a significant fountain of votes in the second half of the 1990s. Higher levels of religiosity were also found in high-turnout communities on election day. On the other hand, at the individual level, few of the variables were significant predictors of change in the likelihood of voting, including education, socioeconomic status, gender, and other demographic variables. Only residence in central and northern Mexico was a factor affecting the likelihood of turnout among the social cleavage variables. Equally or more important were other variables.

Mexican politicians, the mass media, and many scholars have long attributed significance to social cleavage explanations of Mexican voting behavior. Social class, religiosity, education, and region supposedly account for differences in the choice of party and for election turnout. For the most part, this was not true in the 2000 presidential election. Variables tapping social cleavage effects had no impact on electoral results or were weak or inconsistent in their explanatory utility. Nor have social cleavage variables explained voting outcomes in any election since 1988, when Mexican elections became reasonably meaning-

ful.¹6 Social cleavage-based identities pose no bar to campaign effects in Mexico.

In contrast, partisan attachments are very strong. Not surprisingly, Klesner shows that partisanship is a strong explanation for how voters evaluate the political parties. Lawson and Klesner's study of electoral turnout shows that partisanship was at least as important as other variables in explaining turnout patterns. Turnout was greater in districts where the PAN was strong than in those where the PRI was strong. In addition, a legacy of PRI voting loyalty explains much of the support for Labastida in the November 1999 PRI primary, according to McCann. McCann also shows that PRI primary-election participants who had voted for the PRI in the 1994 elections were much more likely to vote for Labastida in 2000 regardless of their choice during the PRI primary.

Alejandro Moreno's chapter on the impact of negative campaigning shows the importance of partisanship in explaining how negativity is perceived. For the most part, PRI partisans did not see their candidate, Labastida, as engaging in negative campaigning, whereas PAN partisans did see him that way. Similarly, most PAN partisans did not perceive Fox as a negative campaigner, whereas most PRI partisans did. Partisans are more likely to believe that their preferred candidate's negative campaigning simply provides accurate information that justifies their own partisanship. Party identification is also the most powerful explanation for the voting choice examined by Magaloni and Poiré. PRI, PAN, and PRD partisans were strongly likely to vote, respectively, for the PRI, PAN, and PRD presidential candidates. Partisanship is unrivaled in its capacity to explain voting behavior in Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

The explanatory impact of partisanship had changed, however, by the 2000 election. In the late 1980s, Mexico began a process of partisan realignment and dealignment. In the 1988 presidential election, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas drew a very large proportion of the electorate and established the basis for what would become the PRD. The PRD gathered voters who had once supported small left-wing parties, as well as former supporters of the PRI. The Cárdenas 1988 campaign also drew some voters who had typically supported the PAN in the belief that Cárdenas had the best chance of defeating the PRI—that is, strategic voters. Buring the 1990s, as Klesner's chapter makes clear, support for the PRI continued to weaken. The PAN and the PRD struggled for leadership of the opposition. The PRD beat the PAN in the 1988 and 1997 national elections, while the PAN came out ahead of the PRD in

the 1991 and 1994 national elections. This process of pull-and-tug set loose some voters from their partisan moorings. The weakening of partisanship enabled candidate effects to become important.

Mexico's 2000 presidential election, as Magaloni and Poiré demonstrate, showed strong candidate effects. The assessment of a candidate's utility for obtaining better national economic performance proved significant. Magaloni and Poiré also find that valence issues (those favored by everyone, such as peace and prosperity) help to explain the vote. Valence issues are useful when voters are asked to connect them to the expected performance of the candidates. A key valence issue was the desire for change; every candidate, including the PRI's Labastida, favored change. Fox sought to embody the prospects for change personally; his electoral coalition was called the Alliance for Change. Thus, in comparison to the four national elections in the 1988-1997 period, the salience and explanatory efficiency of party identification declined in time for the 2000 election; candidate and valence issue effects contributed more than in the past to explain the electoral outcome. Magaloni and Poiré also show that candidate effects helped to shape the voting choice of strategic voters. There were two effects: expectations of a given candidate's capacity to defeat the PRI, and perceptions of candidate competence.

Another effect of the partisan realignment and dealignment under way during the preceding decade and a half was the enlargement of a pool of independent voters who did not lean toward any political party. Each of the three principal presidential candidates, Magaloni and Poiré show, won a significant fraction of the independent voters, but Fox won the lion's share. Approximately 29 percent of the Fox coalition on election day was composed of independent voters, won over by the appeal of his personal candidacy.

The decline in the explanatory utility of partisanship should not be exaggerated, however. Party identification remained a more important explanation of the voting choice than either candidate assessments or valence issues. The largest component of the Fox vote on election day was core PAN supporters. The largest block of Labastida voters was priistas. The decisive segment of Cárdenas's votes came from PRD partisans. Candidate effects had an impact on strategic voters, but such voters represented only about 5 percent of the vote for Fox. Moreover, specific policy issues had very little impact on the vote choice. Voters hold views on corruption, public safety, crime policy, economic issues, and political reforms, but those attitudes on specific issues explained

little about their choice on election day. Only attitudes toward the possible privatization of the state-owned electric power industry helped to distinguish Fox voters from Labastida and Cárdenas voters. Specific policy issues also had little explanatory utility in previous Mexican elections.<sup>19</sup>

The strength of partisan attachments constrains the impact of campaigns on Mexican voters. Most Mexican voters did not change their voting preferences at all during the campaign. But the weakening of partisan attachments by the 2000 election made it possible for PAN presidential candidate Fox to use the campaign, his image, and valence issues to good effect in fashioning the first-ever defeat of the PRI. Fox won over significant numbers of independent voters, former PRI partisans, and strategic voters who might have otherwise voted for Cárdenas.

The relative importance of economic voting is analyzed by Magaloni and Poiré. They find that economic voting played a significant role in the 2000 presidential election, just as it had in every election since 1988. Voters were pessimistic about the prospects for the Mexican economy, even though it had performed well since the last (1997) national election, as the introductory chapter reports. The principal reason for this economic skepticism was the overwhelming expectation that there would be an end-of-presidential-term economic crisis, just as there had been one at the end of each of the four preceding terms. Voters were unwilling to give credit to the PRI or Labastida for the economic growth of the Zedillo presidency because they thought that this PRI government would again lead the country to an economic fiasco, and, we suspect, because Labastida did not make Zedillo's economic record a centerpiece of his campaign. Mexicans did not believe in the PRI's promises about the country's economic future. Both retrospective and prospective economic assessments helped to shape the voting choice. They fed upon each other through the means of end-of-termcrisis expectations. Magaloni and Poiré also show, however, that prospective economic assessment was the stronger of these two economic voting explanations. The greater importance of prospective economic voting suggests that candidate campaigns could frame economic perceptions and voting.

Finally, assessments about the political regime had only a limited impact on the 2000 presidential election. Attitudes toward democracy, expectations of electoral fraud, and left-right self-placement (which, in Mexico, worked as a proxy for pro- or anti-PRI regime attitudes),

Klesner shows, influenced evaluations of the major political parties. On the other hand, McCann demonstrates that partisan and factional affiliation had little impact on the assessment whether Mexico had a democratic political system in 2000. Magaloni and Poiré show that attitudes concerning the issue of political reform had no impact on the voting choice, and that left-right self-placement had at most a modest impact. They estimate the change in the perceived extent of democracy in Mexico among PRD defectors, reporting that this change was statistically significant for those who chose to vote for Labastida but not for those who chose to vote for Fox. This variable thus affected just a tiny fraction of the electorate. In short, variables directly related to the prospects for, or the quality of, democratic politics in Mexico were not very salient in shaping the voting choice in 2000.20 Fox's mandate for change was an anti-incumbent vote more than an ideological embrace of democratic principles. The limited salience of these variables allowed for a greater crafting of the political choice during the campaign.

In short, political campaigning affected voting behavior in Mexico's 2000 elections because social cleavage attachments were weak (as always), partisanship had weakened compared to elections past, prospective economic assessments outweighed retrospective assessments, and evaluation of the political regime was not a salient factor in the voting choice. Valence issues and candidate effects had an impact on the electoral outcome, and their importance grew during the presidential campaign. The effects of political campaigning were still constrained, however, because partisan identification remained the strongest explanatory variable and because retrospective economic voting—the result of the experience of decades—also helped to shape the behavior of voters.

#### **HOW WERE CAMPAIGN EFFECTS FELT?**

In U.S. presidential campaigns, "one of the important roles of the campaign," Thomas Holbrook has argued, "is to help move public opinion toward the expected outcome." In U.S. campaigns, "as events unfold ... voters update their evaluations" of the parties. <sup>21</sup> Mexican voters, Magaloni has reasoned elsewhere, have long updated their information about the capacities of their rulers; they did so gradually, as might be expected from a Bayesian learning perspective. And yet the long-term impact of such updating turned voters against the PRI. <sup>22</sup> Further updating during the 2000 presidential campaign moved Mexican voters toward the unexpected outcome, that is, to defeat the incumbent

party's candidate despite good economic performance, high approval of the sitting president, and strong PRI partisanship facing a split opposition.<sup>23</sup>

Were Labastida's chances hurt because of a divisive PRI presidential primary? McCann's chapter describes the PRI's first-ever adoption of a presidential primary election in November 1999 to choose its nominee, replacing the previous method, which was the incumbent president's de facto appointment of the nominee. McCann shows that the primary campaign was divisive and left a sour taste (evident in our February 2000 poll) among primary voters who had supported someone other than Labastida. The non-Labastida PRI primary voters were significantly more likely to prefer an opposition candidate in the general election than they were to vote for Labastida; indeed, they were more anti-Labastida than voters who had taken no part in the PRI primary election. And yet, as the campaign progressed from February to July 2000, McCann shows that the debilitating effect of the primary on Labastida's chances vanished. Yes, support for Labastida's candidacy dropped precipitously in those months, but the effects of the PRI primary election had little to do with that electoral plunge. The anti-Labastida primary voters remained less likely than pro-Labastida primary voters to support Labastida in July, but all were more likely to support Labastida than those who had not participated in the primary. Between February and July, the likelihood of voting for an opposition candidate increased more among Labastida primary supporters than among his primary opponents. McCann thus suggests that the primary election innovation had no lasting adverse effects on the PRI and, on the positive side, may have contributed to party building. This institutional change does not, therefore, explain Labastida's defeat in July 2000.

Did long-successful PRI practices of mobilization during the campaign determine voting behavior? Did other political parties engage in such practices in the 2000 election? Wayne Cornelius argues that the efficacy of vote buying and coercion declined in the 1990s; it was rather low in the 2000 presidential election. All three major parties engaged in these practices to some extent in 2000, although the PRI, not surprisingly, did so the most. Alas, the PRI also got the smallest payoff from these tactics. Home visits by party representatives worked more effectively for the PAN than for the PRI. Nor did many government social programs targeted at the poor give the PRI presidential candidate much of a boost. In short, old-fashioned mobilization had only modest effects on voting behavior and does not exemplify campaign effects well.

In contrast to such factors that mattered little for the voting choice in 2000, a key instrument for bringing about the "unexpected" outcome was the role of the mass media. As Lawson shows in his first chapter in this volume, exposure to Mexican television network news exercised a statistically significant influence on voting behavior in the 2000 election, controlling for other factors. Those who watched Televisión Azteca news broadcasts were more likely to vote for Fox than were those who watched Televisa news broadcasts. Exposure to Televisa coverage tended to increase support for both Fox and Labastida, reducing the number of undecided voters. TV Azteca depressed the vote for Labastida and increased the vote for Fox dramatically as weekly viewership increased from one to five days. The reason for this effect is noteworthy. Televisa's news was biased against Fox; his support increased, nonetheless, as a result of the exposure but could not grow too much. TV Azteca provided relatively balanced news coverage, enabling many voters to discover that they were foxistas at heart.24

There were also two televised presidential debates during the campaign. Lawson's chapter on the "great debates" demonstrates their impact. Viewership levels were very high, as is typical of "first" debates in countries that had not had them before. The debates boosted audience impressions of Fox's leadership abilities, solidified his own partisan base, and helped him lure away some voters from Labastida. Fox's political career had put him at odds with some leaders of his own party; the reinforcement of PAN sympathizer commitment to Fox's candidacy was thus an important accomplishment. The debates also reinforced the commitment to Cárdenas of his own previously committed partisans, but they weakened support for Labastida among PRI sympathizers. Some PRI sympathizers switched to Fox.

The comparative scholarship on debates has emphasized their limited impact on electoral outcomes. The two presidential debates in Mexico's 2000 election had an impact on the electoral outcome in part because of their relative novelty (there had been just one presidential debate in 1994, the first ever in Mexico), but they had little impact in other respects. The debates did not increase turnout on election day, change attitudes toward the parties, or contribute to citizen political knowledge. Thus the debates did not foster "issue voting," but they did significantly shape the impressions of the candidates as individuals. This was what mattered on election day.

Fox's effective mobilization of his supporters—through his public personality, use of the mass media, and PAN activism—significantly

increased voter turnout. As Lawson and Klesner show, the 2000 campaign made it more likely that PAN sympathizers and Fox supporters would vote on election day. The partisan composition of the vote shifted between February and July 2000, with PAN identifiers confirming their intention to vote in the presidential election.

Political advertising was also significant, as Moreno demonstrates in his chapter.<sup>25</sup> Negative political advertising through the mass media worked for Fox by influencing many Labastida partisans to abandon their candidate. Labastida's own negativity had an unexpected result: it turned off some of his early supporters. At the heart of the national campaign, there was a single, clear political cleavage: all the opposition candidates versus PRI candidate Labastida. Within the opposition, early in the campaign Fox became the principal alternative to continued PRI rule. Fox built his campaign on a high volume of strongly negative communication, criticizing Labastida for his politics and also for his looks and alleged personal character defects.

How did this negativity work for Fox? In U.S. Senate elections, Kahn and Kenney have argued "that people distinguish between useful negative information presented in an appropriate manner and irrelevant and harsh mudslinging." Something like this happened in the Mexican 2000 presidential election. Moreno concludes that most strong partisans did not consider their preferred candidate's criticisms as negative information; they considered them apt and useful evidence. (One qualifier is that some of the negativity in the Mexican election—Fox calling Labastida a fag or a drag queen, for example—could hardly be considered "presented in an appropriate manner.") Most strong partisans were outraged mainly by the negativity of the candidate who was criticizing their party's standard-bearer. The odd result in the Mexican election, as Moreno notes, is that Labastida's negativity hurt him among some of his own partisans.

Thus political advertising worked in two ways. Labastida's negativity hurt him with some PRI identifiers and did not attract votes or dissuade Fox supporters from such support. Fox's negativity did not hurt him with his own partisans, but it helped to dissuade some Labastida supporters from continued adherence to the PRI candidate. Fox gained few votes from these Labastida defectors, some of whom voted for Cárdenas and a significant number simply failed to vote. This important campaign effect stands in contrast to more common comparative findings about the null effects of negative political advertising.<sup>27</sup>

Moreno's findings buttress conclusions reached in other chapters. Magaloni and Poiré show that partisan defectors were a small fraction of all voters—even of Fox's voters—in July 2000 because the core of each major candidate's vote pool was the sum of his own partisans plus a share of the independent vote. Negative ads help to explain Magaloni and Poiré's finding that candidate effects significantly shaped voting behavior in July 2000. The effects of negative advertising contributed to the gap in partisan turnout that favored the PAN, which Lawson and Klesner highlight. All of these campaign effects were strongly mediated by partisanship.

The fact that Labastida defectors were more likely to abstain than to vote for Fox is also consistent with John Zaller's findings with U.S. data. Zaller shows that a highly politically aware person will be attentive to campaign events but also most likely "to resist information that is inconsistent with her basic values or partisanship." Moreover, "conversion" experiences—switching support from one party to another—are relatively infrequent and take considerable time. Citizens "respond to new issues mainly on the basis of the partisanship and ideology of the elite sources of the messages." 28

These same observations support the proposition that most voters did not change their views as a result of the campaign, yet this does not mean that the campaign had no effect on them. Gelman and King have examined election poll volatility during U.S. presidential election campaigns. They conclude that campaigns convey information to voters that enables them to behave according to what might be called "underlying variables," among them partisanship and economic assessments, rendering the election more predictable in the long term. This assumes that candidates and parties have conducted an effective campaign.29 These findings apply to Mexico as well. In 2000, the effect of the campaign was to confirm cardenista partisan voters in their intention to vote for Cárdenas, even if his chances of winning the presidency remained slim. The campaign was even more important in solidifying PAN leaners as Fox voters; Fox's campaign also increased substantially his share of the baseline PAN vote in the electorate. Only an ineffective campaign such as Labastida's lost votes for its presidential candidate. We turn to this puzzle in the next section.

#### WHY WERE SUCH CAMPAIGN EFFECTS FELT?

Mexican politics changed substantially during the 1990s, and these changes were a key to explain the electoral outcome in 2000. The PRI

had been the "party of the state." In the 1990s it had to learn to become a more normal political party, contesting power with fewer advantages than in the past. In his chapter, Roderic Camp notes the gradual changes in Mexican political culture, including the loss of fear to criticize the government or support the opposition. The role and impact of parties changed. The PRD was born from the experience of the 1988 presidential election, and the PAN was reinvigorated by the political contestation of the decade that followed. Cornelius's chapter on the declining efficacy of vote buying and coercion also makes a strong case that Mexico has changed in important ways.

On the eve of the 2000 elections, opposition mayors governed half of Mexico's people and opposition governors headed states that accounted for nearly half of Mexico's gross domestic product. Mexican citizens no longer feared rule by PAN or PRD leaders, who had proven their competence as subnational executives. Electoral institutions and processes had already changed in many states and municipalities, making PAN and PRD opposition victories thinkable. Klesner demonstrates the growth of partisan competition since 1979, when the electoral law for the first time created somewhat better conditions for competition. In 1979, the PRI was hegemonic in 242 out of 300 electoral districts. In 1997, PRI hegemony persisted in only 25 of the 300 districts.

Mexico also built new electoral institutions, especially the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), as the book's introduction notes. Reforms enacted in 1996 contributed to make the IFE highly autonomous and professional. Lawson and Klesner show that the perception that electoral fraud would decline increased turnout from opposition sympathizers on election day.<sup>30</sup> That same 1996 law, Kathleen Bruhn reminds us, created a vast pool of funds for the public financing of elections. The distribution of public funds to finance the 2000 election was based on the distribution of votes for the 1997 nationwide congressional election, adjusted to ensure a fairly level playing field. In 2000, public financing for the opposition parties was more than twice the public financing for the PRI.<sup>31</sup>

Yet another key change was the emergence and public acceptance of professional public opinion polling and the dissemination of polling information through the mass media. Mexicans could learn that there was opposition, that others critical of the PRI shared their views, and that some opposition politicians were more likely than others to defeat the PRI. Pollsters informed voters about electoral trends and likely winners, solidifying partisan and ideological commitments in some

cases but also enabling strategic voters to calculate how to vote effectively. The impact of polling on the conduct of the campaign depended, albeit indirectly, on the long-term development of an increasingly independent mass media willing and able to pay for and print information about professional polling, a public sufficiently well educated to understand that numbers mattered, and professionals who could guarantee the procedural integrity of the process. Significant social, intellectual, and institutional changes are part of the "big picture" of political change in Mexico in the 1990s. Thus the possibility of greater change in 2000 was rooted in slow-moving structural change in the Mexican national experience.<sup>32</sup>

These institutional and electoral reforms, a more vigilant mass media, and well-funded political parties made it more difficult for the longtime PRI machinery to work as before. Electoral fraud was much less probable. Even the assertive use of pork-barrel projects or old-fashioned individual vote buying became more difficult to implement. The PRI's electoral machine under-performed, as Bruhn, Cornelius, and Lawson and Klesner indicate.

Strategic decisions made by politicians and voters before and during the campaign also help to explain the election results. Zaller has argued regarding the United States that "the public changes its opinion in the direction of the information and leadership cues supplied to it by elites.... [C]itizens hold opinions that they would not hold if aware of the best available information and analysis."33 One illustration of elite shaping of public opinion occurred in Canada's 1988 national election. Johnston and his co-authors call attention to "priming," a key to "the electoral manifestation of the elite struggle for control of the agenda." They show that, for different reasons, Canada's leading party politicians kept the status of Quebec off the electoral agenda even though the recently signed Meech Lake Accord, focused on Canadian federalism and the standing of Quebec within the federation, could just as easily have been the election's centerpiece. Instead, the candidates for prime minister argued about the 1987 U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA), favored by the incumbent Conservatives and opposed by the opposition Liberals and the New Democratic Party. "Opinion shifts on the FTA responded to parties' rhetorical initiatives.... The very emphasis on the FTA was far from inevitable; the subject dominated because party organizations laboured to make it so."34

The Mexican 2000 presidential election exhibits these same key characteristics. Fox succeeded in framing the election as being about "change." As Bruhn shows in her chapter, all candidates, including the PRI's Labastida, accepted this framing. The main parties, Bruhn also shows, had blurred differences between them on many specific issues, so the candidates battled over the ownership of the concept of change. For Labastida, this was perhaps a hopeless endeavor, but he embraced this framing enthusiastically. Lawson's "great debate" chapter shows that Labastida's opening statement during the first presidential debate used the word "change" or a variant thereof more often than all the other candidates combined. Yet if change was so necessary, an opposition candidate seemed more likely to bring it about.

The PRI and the Labastida campaign could have embraced President Zedillo's record and personal popularity, which was high and rising steadily in the year before the election, as the introductory chapter shows. Labastida could have run on the government's very good macroeconomic performance of the second half of the 1990s. Gross domestic product grew at a rate from 5 to 6 percent per year, double the economy's growth rate in the first half of the 1990s and nearly triple the growth rate during the 1980s.35 After so many economic crises under the PRI's stewardship over decades past, jaded voters, Bruhn notes, might have resisted a PRI message of renewed prosperity, but it was even harder to persuade most Mexicans that the PRI stood for change. Labastida and the PRI kept their distance from Zedillo and kept insisting that major economic changes had to be enacted. Labastida endorsed the framing of the election as being about change, and thus kept the PRI's potentially winning issues-Zedillo's and the economy's good performance—off the minds of voters.

A second important strategic decision shaped Mexico's 2000 election: who would be the standard-bearer for the opposition? The Canadian comparison is helpful again. At the start of Canada's 1988 national election, voter assessments of the three principal candidates for prime minister—from the Liberal Party, the Conservatives, and the New Democratic Party (NDP)—were fairly close. On the election's key issue, the FTA, the positions of the Liberals and the NDP were very close. Voters had to decide, however, whether to split their votes between the opposition parties, voting sincerely but ensuring a Conservative victory, or to vote strategically, that is, "to vote for one's second choice the better to defeat one's last choice." As the campaign progressed, apostate Liberals who might have supported the NDP "came home"; support for the NDP waned.36

Since the 1988 national election, Mexican opposition voters had faced the same dilemma, giving the edge to Cárdenas and the PRD in 1988 and 1997, and to various PAN candidates in 1991 and 1994. Bruhn's chapter shows that nominating Cárdenas for the presidency for the third consecutive time in 2000 was a poor decision. Cárdenas had not proven an effective presidential candidate in the past, and his stewardship as mayor of Mexico City since 1997 had not gone well. A key battle within the opposition became how to cast a so-called useful vote, namely, the vote that would ensure the PRI's eviction from the presidency. Fox won that fight handily in the televised presidential debates, as Bruhn and Lawson note.

Were the voters strategic in their behavior? Magaloni and Poiré examine this question. They reconfirm the significance of partisanship, prospective economic assessments, valence issues, and candidate effects as key explanations for voting behavior in Mexico's 2000 presidential election. Most votes could be predicted without reference to strategic behavior. Magaloni and Poiré then focus on the relatively few but crucial voters who behaved strategically. The strategic and ideological choices facing Mexican voters in a multicandidate presidential context were complex. Strategic opposition voting required a preference rank ordering whereby any outcome was preferable to PRI victory; strategic voters had to value the PRI's defeat above their own ideological preferences. Voters also had to assess the probability of victory of the different alternatives. The logic of the "useful vote" implies that voters defect from the trailing candidate—as they had defected from the NDP in Canada's 1988 national election-in favor of the opposition front-runner. Strategic voting implies that there are two elections under way simultaneously, one between opposition candidates and another between the opposition and the ruling party. Strategic voting became thinkable in Mexico only during the 1988 presidential election, in which the PRI first became vulnerable to defeat.37

After 1988, campaigns became vehicles to inform the voters about the likely outcome. Thus strategic voters swung to support the PAN or the PRD in different elections and for various national and subnational offices. Likely strategic voters are also somewhat volatile during a campaign, as they were in 2000, because they need to inform themselves. Magaloni and Poiré conclude that strategic voting in Mexico's 2000 election was significant for Fox's election, nearly equaling his margin of victory over Labastida. Strong partisans were least likely to

be strategic voters, consistent with other findings in this book. Weaker partisans and unaffiliated voters made up the pool for strategic voters.

#### CONCLUSION

Mexico's 2000 presidential election campaign mattered. It closed the breach between Fox and old-line *panistas*, somewhat distrustful of his candidacy. It stimulated PAN voters to turn out at rates higher than those of PRI supporters on election day. It solidified the Cárdenas base in the PRD. It demoralized the PRI machinery. It detached voters from Labastida, leading them to vote for another candidate or to stay home on election day. It informed opposition strategic voters to support Fox. The proportion of voters influenced by the campaign to change their voting preference was at least two to three times greater than in U.S. presidential campaigns and at least twice Fox's margin of victory. In fact, the proportion of strategic voters alone gave Fox nearly all of his margin of victory.

Significant campaign effects were possible for various reasons. Institutional and legal changes made free and fair elections at long last possible. The PRI's presidential primary even imparted a measure of change to this ancient political party. The voting behavior of Mexicans is, for the most part, not wedded to social cleavages, rendering voters more susceptible to campaign persuasion. Mexicans long ago stopped focusing on a bad economy, which they resented but had come to consider typical. Thus retrospective voting lost some explanatory punch. Mexicans paid greater attention to the future of the economy and were thus open to politicians who framed this issue most convincingly. Prospective economic voting increased the likelihood of campaign effects.

Mexican parties retain a remarkable hold on citizen voting behavior. Partisanship conditions and mediates nearly all campaign effects. Nonetheless, the explanatory impact of partisanship weakened somewhat in advance of the 2000 election, making more room for candidate and valence issue effects on voting behavior. (Specific policy issues mattered little, however.) Mass media news reporting, negative political advertising, and televised debates all affected electoral outcomes, though always mediated by partisan affiliation. The campaign mattered.

Campaigns may matter more in emerging democracies. In many of these countries, partisanship may be even weaker than in Mexico or in the advanced industrial democracies. Fair and abundant television coverage of opposition election campaigns becomes possible only upon democratization. Moreover, in poor countries, widespread access to television is a relatively recent phenomenon. Thus our research may help bridge the interests of scholars in the long-established and the new democracies.

Many of the changes evident in Mexico are, of course, good. Mexico has become a freer, more open country. Its citizens express their opinions, contest views, and choose their rulers, giving at last concrete meaning to "the consent of the governed." Voter intimidation and vote buying have ended in most parts of Mexico, though pockets of abuse remain. Yet citizens and analysts should worry that candidate-centered campaigns focused on vague themes, reliant on negative advertising and on unelected media barons, do not make for healthy democratic politics. Weak social attachments, weakened partisanship, and greater attention to prospective economic fantasies rather than actual evidence about the economy are also not attractive elements for the quality of Mexico's democracy. Moreover, Mexico's 2000 election also led Mexican politics to "gridlock," where the president's party lacks a majority in both houses of Congress.

The hero of Mexico's democratic transition has been the voter. Prudently, cautiously, during the 1990s, voters put the PRI on notice that it had better improve or lose power. In the 2000 presidential election, voters gave Fox a decisive victory, but they also chose a Congress in which the president's party was a minority in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The PRI outperformed Labastida in the congressional elections. As Alesina and Rosenthal have argued for the United States, "divided government is not an accident, but the result of the voters' desire for policy moderation."38 Mexican citizens were ready to try out a new president from a different party, but they also bought a double insurance policy-against renewed authoritarian lordship and against wild policy implementation. The 2000 election deepened Mexico's slowly evolving democracy, but it may also have persuaded politicians that unsavory campaign practices are effective. It surely enshrined policy gridlock between president and Congress. Mexicans gave birth to their political democracy. Now they must improve its quality.

#### Notes

<sup>1.</sup> Book I, chapter 7.

<sup>2.</sup> For a general discussion, see Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

- 3. This is not a freestanding chapter. Instead, it highlights themes from preceding chapters. I rely on occasional textual references to other chapters, but the debt to my co-authors is much greater. These are solely my views, however. The book's authors are free to claim that all the errors in this chapter are mine and that all the insights are theirs. All mistakes are mine alone. Versions of this chapter have been presented at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, the MIT Political Science Department, the University of Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute, and the Political Science Department of the New School University. I am grateful for the comments and suggestions made at these sessions. My general research has been supported by Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.
- 4. Steven E. Finkel, "Reexamining the 'Minimal Effects' Model in Recent Presidential Campaigns," *Journal of Politics* 55, no. 1 (February 1993): 2-3, 11; quote, p. 2.
- 5. Gregory B. Markus, "The Impact of Personal and National Economic Conditions on the Presidential Vote: A Pooled Cross-Sectional Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 1 (1988): 137–54.
- 6. Michael Lewis-Beck, Economics and Elections: The Major Western Democracies (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988): 58-59.
- 7. It is possible, though hard to prove, that opposition candidates may have won more votes in 1929, 1940, and 1988. The ruling party claimed victory in these three elections.
- 8. Beatriz Magaloni, "Is the PRI Fading? Economic Performance, Electoral Accountability, and Voting Behavior in the 1994 and 1997 Elections," in Jorge I. Domínguez and Alejandro Poiré, eds., Toward Mexico's Democratization: Parties, Campaigns, Elections, and Public Opinion (New York: Routledge, 1999): 233.
- 9. For a similar view from a different context, see Pippa Norris, John Curtice, David Sanders, Margaret Scammell, and Holli Semetko, *On Message: Communicating the Campaign* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), especially chapter 11.
- 10. For the classic study, see Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments," in Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives (New York: The Free Press, 1967). See also Richard Rose and Derek Unwin, "Persistence and Change in Western Party Systems since 1945," Political Studies 18, no. 3 (1970): 287–319.
- 11. For the United States, the classic is Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960). Party identification weakened markedly in the United States in the 1960s. Yet even after the 1960s, "one of the stable anchor points for the American public remains party identification" (Norman Nie, Sidney Verba, and John Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976]: 350). See also Eric Shickler and Donald P. Green, "The Stability of Party Identification in Western Democracies: Results from Eight Panel Surveys," *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no. 4 (August 1997): 450–83.
- 12. See Alberto Alesina and Howard Rosenthal, Partisan Politics, Divided Government, and the Economy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) for discussions of "rational partisan" economic voting. See also Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., The

Political Economy of Industrial Democracies (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), and Lewis-Beck, Economics and Elections.

- 13. David Swanson and Paolo Mancini, "Patterns of Modern Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences," in David Swanson and Paolo Mancini, eds., Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996).
- 14. Lewis-Beck, Economics and Elections, p. 82.
- 15. These findings refer to the chapters in this book, unless otherwise cited. Our principal empirical basis is a four-wave panel study of Mexico's presidential election in 2000.
- 16. See, for example, Jorge I. Domínguez and James A. McCann, Democratizing Mexico: Public Opinion and Electoral Choices (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Jorge I. Domínguez and Alejandro Poiré, Toward Mexico's Democratization.
- 17. For previous elections, see ibid.
- 18. Domínguez and McCann, Democratizing Mexico, chapter 4.
- 19. For the lack of explanatory significance of specific issue variables even in the 1988 election, when presidential candidates posed stark choices, see ibid.
- 20. Political interest and the preference for "strong leaders" over reliance on laws had no statistically significant effect on the voting choice in the 1988 or 1991 national elections. See Domínguez and McCann, *Democratizing Mexico*, tables 4–15 and 5–9.
- 21. Thomas M. Holbrook, Do Campaigns Matter? (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996): 156.
- 22. Magaloni, "Is the PRI Fading?"
- 23. On the conduct of the campaign, see Joseph L. Klesner, The 2000 Mexican Presidential and Congressional Elections: Pre-Election Report (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2000); George W. Grayson, A Guide to the 2000 Mexican Presidential Election (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2000).
- 24. On the role of television in the 2000 election, see also Florence Toussaint Alcaraz, "Las campañas electorales del 2000 en televisión: el caso mexicano," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 44, no. 180 (September–December 2000): 39–56.
- 25. For a general discussion of political advertising in the 2000 election, see Concepción Virriel López, "El problema de la credibilidad de los spots políticos," Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales 44, no. 180 (September–December 2000): 175–90.
- 26. Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick. J. Kenney, "Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship between Negativity and Participation," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (December 1999): 877–89.
- 27. For a scholarly literature survey, see Richard Lau, Lee Sigelman, Caroline Heldman, and Paul Babbitt, "The Effects of Negative Political Advertisements: A Meta-Analytic Assessment," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (December 1999): 851–75.
- 28. See John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 267, 282; quotes, pp. 266 and 31, respectively.

- 29. Andrew Gelman and Gary King, "Why Are American Presidential Election Polls So Variable When Voters Are So Predictable?" *British Journal of Political Science* 23 (1993): 409–51.
- 30. On the vote-depressing effects of fraud, see James McCann and Jorge Domínguez, "Mexicans React to Electoral Fraud and Political Corruption: An Assessment of Public Opinion and Voting Behavior," *Electoral Studies* 17, no. 4 (1998): 499.
- 31. This did not prevent the massive illegal diversion of funds from the state-owned oil firm, Pemex, to support the PRI campaign, however.
- 32. See also Miguel Basáñez, "Polling and the Mexican Transition to Democracy" (Mexico City, 2001, unpublished).
- 33. Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, pp. 311, 313.
- 34. Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry Brady, and Jean Crête, Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992); quotations from pp. 212 and 243. Francophone Quebecois voters did support the Conservatives in part because their government sponsored the Meech Lake agreement.
- 35. Naciones Unidas, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, Balance preliminar de las economías de América Latina y el Caribe, 2000 (Santiago, Chile: CEPAL-Naciones Unidas, 2000): 85.
- 36. Johnson, Blais, Brady, and Crête, Letting the People Decide, pp. 195, 201, 224-25; quote, p. 198.
- 37. Domínguez and McCann, Democratizing Mexico, chapter 4.
- 38. Alesina and Rosenthal, Parties, Politics, Divided Government, and the Economy, p. 2.