

Consolidating Mexico's Democracy

*The 2006 Presidential Campaign
in Comparative Perspective*

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Conclusion

The Choices of Voters during the 2006 Presidential Election in Mexico

Jorge I. Domínguez

Mexico has experienced several close presidential elections in its history, but a veil of fraud had shielded those outcomes from the public view.¹ Never, before 2006, had electoral authorities published election results that showed the election to be almost a tie. In the final count announced by the Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación (TEPFJ), or Federal Electoral Court, Felipe Calderón, candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), won 14,916,927 votes and was elected president of Mexico. He defeated Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), by a margin of 233,831 votes; López Obrador garnered 14,683,096 votes. Calderón also prevailed over Roberto Madrazo, candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), who received 9,237,000 votes. Small parties and null votes account for the remainder of the 41,557,430 total votes cast, which formed the basis of the court's official tally (Instituto Federal Electoral 2006, 72; see also table 1.1 in this volume).

The 2006 presidential election was also distinctive in another sense. For the first time in the country's history, the vote recount and postelectoral dispute over the conduct of the election were carried out under the public glare of the state's newly transparent electoral institutions, the mass media, and the international community, confirming that, yes, the voters had chosen Felipe Calderón to become Mexico's next president.

A comparison between the aggregate votes cast for president and those cast for the Chamber of Deputies² shows that López Obrador ran well ahead of his partisan coalition, getting over 2.7 million more votes than the PRD coalition's federal deputy candidates, who garnered 12,013,360 votes. Calderón, too, ran

over one million votes ahead of the 13,845,122 ballots cast for the PAN's candidates for these posts. In contrast, Madrazo lagged over 2.4 million votes behind his partisan base, as measured by the 11,676,598 votes that PRI-led federal deputy coalition candidates won (Instituto Federal Electoral 2006). The PRI's showing in the simultaneous legislative election demonstrated that it remained a powerful party, notwithstanding its bad choice of Madrazo as its presidential candidate or its past as the "party of the state" in a long-lasting authoritarian regime. López Obrador's and Calderón's vote counts, outperforming their respective parties, also demonstrate the salience of candidate traits in the choices made by Mexican voters.

In this chapter, I compare aspects of the 2000 and 2006 presidential elections and present them, in some detail, as an approach to thinking about how Mexican voters made their electoral decisions in 2006. I highlight some salient findings from the Mexico 2006 Panel Study³ and argue that the 2006 presidential election edged Mexico closer to the patterns of public opinion and voting behavior that are familiar in well-established democracies. Partisanship, attitudes toward the incumbent, economic voting, the leading candidates and their campaign strategies, valence issue voting, mass-media reporting, and negative advertising were quite consequential. Clientelist practices, and the kind of strategic voting that mattered as part of Mexico's transition from authoritarian to democratic politics between the late 1980s and 2000, declined in prominence; positional issue voting and the demographic characteristics of voters have never mattered much in Mexican elections (for past electoral behavior, see Domínguez and Lawson 2004; Domínguez and McCann 1996). The outcome of Mexico's election, moreover, bore some important similarities to trends elsewhere in the larger Latin American countries.

From the 2000 to the 2006 Presidential Elections in Mexico

The 2006 election campaign showed several similarities with the Mexican presidential elections of 1988, 1994, and 2000. In these elections, the three big parties, and only these three—the PAN, the PRI, and the PRD—could put up credible candidates for the presidency. This structured Mexican party system arose from the 1988 election and has proven resilient (Greene 2002; Klesner 2005). In neither the 2000 nor the 2006 elections did a single party win an outright majority in either the Senate or Chamber of Deputies. Since 1997, democratic

Mexico has experienced a divided government, where the president lacks a governing majority in Congress.

The 2006 election was the second consecutive Mexican presidential contest during which the candidate who led in the early public opinion polls came in second on election day. In the 2000 election, Francisco Labastida, the candidate of the ruling PRI, had been ahead in the campaign's early stages but, in the end, lost to Vicente Fox, the PAN candidate. In 2006, the PRD's López Obrador was similarly in front in the early part of the campaign but, in the end, was defeated by the PAN's Calderón.

In the *poll of polls* (an average of surveys conducted by different firms) in January 2000, Labastida held a lead of about ten percentage points over Fox (Lawson 2004b). In December 2005, López Obrador's lead over Calderón exceeded that margin, and it held, with little change, through February 2006 (see both chapter 10 and figure 1.1 in this volume). The reasons for each outcome differed, however. In 2000, Labastida, the candidate with strong structural advantages that underpinned his front-runner status at the start of the campaign, turned out to be the loser on election day. In 2006, López Obrador, although holding an early lead as the campaign started, had this same array of structural circumstances stacked against him, thus making the prospects of his victory on election day even less certain.

In 2000, there were four good reasons to expect a victory by the ruling party's candidate. First, both the PAN and the PRD had fielded presidential candidates, thus dividing the opposition vote. Second, the PRI retained a strong partisan base, so the party itself was one of Labastida's assets. However, in 2000, the PRI would win more votes for its congressional candidates than Labastida did in his presidential run. Third, in the late 1990s, the economy had performed well in each year but the first of President Ernesto Zedillo's six-year term. The PRI had won past elections by drawing support from voters who were averse to turning the government over to less-experienced parties, even if they had held negative short-term retrospective assessments of its economic stewardship (Magaloni 1999). And fourth, in the months preceding the election, the public had a positive assessment of Zedillo's performance as president. All four factors should have helped Labastida to win.

In 2006, López Obrador's early lead was a tribute to his personal skill and ability to overcome obstacles. First, voters had a higher opinion of the presidential candidate than they did of his party; in the first wave (October 2005) of the 2006 panel study, 49 percent of the voters thought favorably of López

Obrador, but only 41 percent responded similarly to the PRD. Hence the party was one of López Obrador's liabilities, and it would remain so on election day. Second, the Mexican economy had grown slowly during the first three years of the Fox presidency, but it made much quicker strides during the second three years. Unemployment, which reached a peak in the third quarter of 2004, fell steadily through the eve of the July 2006 election, and in 2006 gross domestic product per capita grew 4.8 percent (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2007). These trends were not helpful to a challenger seeking to unseat the PAN from the presidency. Third, throughout the campaign, a substantial majority of the voters held the PAN's Vicente Fox in high regard—making him more popular than any of the presidential candidates seeking to replace him (Loaeza 2006; Rottinghaus and Alberro 2005). All three factors helped Calderón, the PAN's presidential candidate, and would make it more difficult for López Obrador to win.

In 2006, as in past presidential elections, partisanship mattered, a point Francisco Flores-Macías brings out forcefully in chapter 10 of this volume. Approximately half of the respondents in the panel survey's three waves were standpaters, that is, they kept their same choice for president in all three waves—October 2005 and May and July 2006—of the panel's public opinion polling of the views of the same individuals. Party identification was thus a powerful explanation for these unvarying decisions. This finding also means that half of the respondents changed their minds at least once during the course of the presidential election campaign. The campaign thus mattered significantly, thanks in large measure to the roles that the candidates and the mass media played. In this way, the 2006 presidential election resembled the 2000 contest and amplified the factors that had been crucial to the outcome of that race.

Campaign strategies played a role, therefore, in both elections. In 2000, Labastida made several important decisions that had adverse consequences. Although he was the establishment candidate, his campaign chose to emphasize his commitment to enacting change—an issue that a party in power for seventy-one years surely did not own. Labastida maintained some distance from Zedillo and did not utilize the solid performance of the economy at the end of the 1990s as a reason to vote for the PRI yet again in a presidential race. Instead of choosing a stance favorable to his party, Labastida felt compelled to operate under an agenda established and owned by his opponents, which placed him at a disadvantage—as U.S. elections also show (Damore 2004)—and contributed to his failure.

Calderón, in contrast to Labastida, ultimately rode to victory on an issue that he owned, but he had to experiment with different issues until he found the winning one. As Alejandro Moreno shows in chapter 11, Calderón won the PAN presidential primary election in 2006 by running as an honest man with “values and passion for Mexico.” In the primary, he beat President Fox's preferred candidate, former minister of government Santiago Creel. At first, Calderón could not have capitalized on positive reactions to President Fox and the economy's performance because he was opposing Fox's choice for a successor. In the weeks that followed his primary victory, Calderón, a Roman Catholic, stuck with his “values” campaign and, in February 2006, took a socially conservative stance on issues such as abortion and contraception. His campaign failed to advance, so he changed his message. He moved ahead in the polls only after he had changed to another issue to which he could potentially lay claim, namely, a sound economy.

During the closing months of the campaign, Calderón at last embraced the Fox presidency's record of recent economic growth and promised to continue it. Calderón also crafted a strong negative campaign toward the opposition, labeling López Obrador a “danger to Mexico.” Thus Calderón's second-stage campaign was the opposite of Labastida's in 2000. Calderón recognized, albeit belatedly, his three key assets: the popularity of an incumbent president from his own party, an economy that was performing well recently, and his party's strong base in the electorate. This candidate's message was not change, but continuity.

What about the utility of the PAN for Calderón? In the October 2005 panel survey, favorable opinions of the PAN exceeded favorable opinions of Calderón by 47 to 28 percent. By the April/May and July 2006 polls of the study, Calderón's popularity had risen to become essentially the same as the PAN's. On election day, Calderón outpolled his party's congressional candidates by over a million votes. Calderón thus won the election because he made a midcourse campaign strategy correction to align his message with the political environment encountered during the campaign.

In the latter stages of the campaign, Calderón staked his claim as the owner of the economic growth issue, doing so in a manner quite similar to that of successful presidential candidates in U.S. elections (Petrocik 1996). By aligning himself with the Fox presidency and its recent record of economic growth, Calderón gained credibility in his promise to enact no change that would put Mexico's prosperity at risk. Yet while he campaigned on behalf of the same set of policies

that Fox and his team had pursued, Calderón now implied that they would be implemented more effectively. The government would work. He proceeded to emphasize the salience of this issue in order to activate those voters who agreed with him, as Moreno rightly argues in chapter 11. Calderón convinced these voters to turn out to vote for him on election day.

Kenneth Greene, in chapter 13 and jointly with Kathleen Bruhn in chapter 6, deepen our understanding of the Calderón campaign. They tell us that Calderón ran two simultaneous campaign strategies, one with his party's congressional candidates and another by himself.

In what I will call campaign 1, Calderón joined in the PAN's congressional strategy to focus on center-right positional issues. This campaign, Bruhn and Greene demonstrate, found little favor with Mexican voters. On issues such as abortion, the privatization of the electricity sector, the state's responsibility for the welfare of its citizens, and relations with the United States, Mexican voters were systematically centrist, in contrast to the highly polarized candidates from the PAN and the PRD. Calderón's choice of positional issues did not get him elected president of Mexico. On July 2, the PAN's candidates for federal deputies ran on campaign 1 and garnered over a million fewer votes than Calderón.

In campaign 2, Calderón emphasized valence issues—salient problems for the voters on which he could claim superior competence, a long-standing practice in U.S. elections (D. Stokes 1963). Calderón embraced the Fox administration's record of economic growth and painted López Obrador as economically incompetent, even dangerous. The PAN candidate primed the issue that electing López Obrador would lead to an economic crisis. Priming encourages voters to attach greater importance to a particular issue as they choose for whom to vote (Bartels 2006). In the 2006 Mexican elections, priming did not entail persuading more voters to fear López Obrador's economic management. Rather, it made those voters who were already somewhat concerned about this valence issue put more weight on it as a factor in their vote choice, and it possibly also increased their likelihood of turning out on election day. Greene shows that this campaign 2, valence-issue strategy worked well for Calderón. His voters were not particularly right-wing in positional terms, so campaign 1 had much less utility for Calderón as a potentially winning platform. However, as time went on, Calderón came to be considered more effective on economic issues, combating corruption, and enhancing public security. Campaign 2, "I'm more competent," helped to elect Calderón president of Mexico.

López Obrador responded to the challenge to his fiscal skills by priming

economic policy issues, but these were not the reason why voters had once preferred him. Thus his strategy of priming positional issues failed, as Greene points out. In the end, López Obrador came to rely disproportionately on support from PRD backers and on agreement generated over only one of the prospective positional issues that he emphasized successfully, namely, the reduction of poverty. Yet, even on election day, the PRD dragged down his vote.

What might López Obrador have done differently? Bruhn provides clues in chapter 9. One basis for López Obrador's early and ongoing popularity had been his political moderation, relative to both his own party and the positions of the other candidates and parties. López Obrador's views were well to the right of the PRD, Bruhn shows, and not that different from those of the average citizen. She also demonstrates that other factors in López Obrador's popularity were his skillful management of his public image and, as mayor of Mexico City, his construction of a cross-class coalition, notwithstanding the fact that he thwarted attempts to introduce greater transparency into the governance of the capital city (Wirth 2006). Some of the popular features of López Obrador's city government, for example, were the monthly stipends provided to all city residents above the age of seventy, as well as loans for small businesses and scholarships for all public school children.

Yet part of López Obrador's instinct in managing political crises had been to stay quiet until the furor died down. When the Calderón campaign's advertising turned sharply negative in mid-March 2006, López Obrador did little to counter its charges of populism and radicalism. When an opportunity to respond came up via the first televised presidential debate, held on April 25, López Obrador chose to skip the debate altogether. The PAN and the PRI highlighted his absence, displaying a vacant chair for the missing candidate. Most Mexicans did not watch the debate, but they did learn that the PRD candidate was absent. As Bruhn concludes, López Obrador's overconfident reaction to the negative campaign gave Calderón an uncontested field, and Calderón surged ahead.

Issue ownership and negative advertising worked to help elect both Vicente Fox in 2000 and Felipe Calderón in 2006 as presidents of Mexico. In 2000, this approach enabled Fox to undermine Labastida's important strengths at the start of the campaign. In 2006, it allowed Calderón to capitalize on the underlying strengths that any PAN candidate would have had going into the election—a big-party partisan base, Fox's popularity, and an economy that had begun to grow.

Candidates and their campaigns matter. Roberto Madrazo is a good example; he brought to his presidential campaign a reputation for abuse of power that

was too difficult to surmount. Yet static candidate traits do not suffice to explain outcomes. López Obrador started the 2006 campaign with higher personal approval ratings than his party. Calderón might have lost the 2006 election had he not ended what this chapter calls his campaign 1. Thus the candidates themselves matter, especially because of the strategic choices that they make during their campaigns. Fox in 2000, and Calderón in 2006, demonstrated how to be effective candidates, while Labastida in 2000, and López Obrador in 2006, showed how to run a campaign badly enough to ensure defeat.⁴

The Mexican Voter Prepares to Choose in 2006

In research for this and previous studies of public opinion and voting behavior, the authors of the various chapters in this book have come to believe that Mexicans are much less unique, esoteric, or labyrinthine in their political beliefs and choices than some older scholarly or journalistic writings had implied. There is analytical and descriptive value in emphasizing that Mexicans share traits with citizens of other democratic countries. The following stylized account of voter choice in the 2006 election highlights the common features between Mexico's and other democracies' polities.

The invisible hand of the past weighed on the process of choice for Mexican voters, and in this respect Mexico had long differed from the North Atlantic democracies. As recently as 1960, half of all Mexicans lived in communities that housed fewer than 2,500 people; many other Mexicans resided in towns and small cities. Yet the second half of the twentieth century witnessed an ecological realignment in Mexico. In 2000, only one-quarter of all Mexicans inhabited communities with fewer than 2,500 people. Between 1970 and 2000, the number of cities with a population above one million jumped from three to eight (Aguayo 2000). The PRI's power as a ruling party had long depended on its control of rural Mexico. However, rural Mexico was vanishing, and so was much of the PRI vote.

In terms originally used to explain conservative party declines in Italy and Japan, there were "changes in the relative size of one or more social groups or economic strata. In this case, the bases of party support do not necessarily undergo marked changes. Rather, the relative size of various demographic or attitudinal groups changes" (Dalton et al. 1984, 96). Wayne Cornelius and Ann Craig (1991) were among the first to call attention to the long-term impact of the decline of the rural sector on the PRI's capacity to prevail.

Urbanization, economic development, and education all weakened the power of the PRI (Klesner 1993, 2001, 2005; Magaloni 2006). In chapters 2 and 3, Roderic Ai Camp and Joseph Klesner demonstrate that in the 2006 election, PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo performed better in rural areas, among less-well-educated voters, and among older Mexicans. One need not hypothesize that rural voters were sincerely pro-PRI, though many may have been. The PRI had prevailed in poor rural areas by fair means or foul.

Mexico's demographic transformation in the recent past is, therefore, the first step in understanding how voters made their choices in the 2006 election. The PRI's "green vote" reservoir had been drained. Many hitherto rural Mexicans migrated to cities or to the United States. For some who had never chosen to vote for the PRI but whose votes had been counted as if they had, urbanization enabled them to exercise a real choice for the first time. Others who had genuinely favored the PRI simply declined in number. The invisible hand of urbanization contributed to make Mexican politics freer and the PRI weaker in a fair election.

Yet this large-scale social change should be kept in perspective. In this book, urbanism/ruralism explains little with regard to Mexican public opinion or voter behavior (once standard statistical controls are included), because the PRI lost support in both urban and rural areas. Mexico's ecological realignment (i.e., the transition from rural to urban) was supplemented with an electoral repositioning as voters, regardless of their place of residence, flocked to parties other than the PRI. This fact does not render these environmental changes unreal or unimportant. On the contrary, migration from the countryside altered the face of Mexico and made it less likely that the old political regime could be sustained. The key point is that ecological realignment is only the start of an analysis of the process of electoral choice.

Mexicans approach presidential campaigns in ways that are not unlike those that scholars have observed for U.S. campaigns (Gelman and King 1993; Holbrook 1996). Mexicans have experiences, preferences, networks of friends, and hopes for the future. Many of these sentiments and views congeal in their preferences for a political party and are activated during campaigns. As already noted, half of all respondents in the panel surveys had made their choice for the July 2006 presidential election as early as October 2005, before the interparty presidential campaign got under way. Partisan identification—itsself the synthesis of many other long-term factors—was a key explanation both for that very early choice and for sticking with that choice. Partisanship has been a powerful

explanation for every Mexican election since the start of Mexico's democratic transition in 1988, and its significance has been well documented in other works (Domínguez and Lawson 2004; Domínguez and McCann 1996).

A second important explanation for Mexicans' voting choices was political knowledge and campaign attentiveness. Highly politically aware voters in the United States "resist information that is inconsistent with [their] basic values or partisanship" (Zaller 1992, 266). So, too, in Mexico in 2006; the better-informed voters sought more political information, but they did so in order to confirm their prior beliefs. In chapter 10, Flores-Macías posits that more knowledgeable voters are less likely to switch electoral preferences. Something similar had happened in Mexico in the 2000 presidential election; high-exposure voters who watched the televised campaign debates strengthened their pre-existing electoral preferences as a result of this newly obtained information (Lawson 2004c). In Mexico, as in other countries, this dynamic makes better-educated and more knowledgeable voters less open to persuasion and increasingly prone to discuss politics with those who are like-minded.

Belief formation is not an asocial process, nor does it begin with an election campaign. One's family, school, occupation, and friendships help to create, refine, and sharpen individual beliefs. In chapter 4, Andy Baker's innovative research examines a powerful mechanism for belief formation, namely, discussion networks. He observes, as have many others, that region seems to describe the salient features in the outcome of the 2006 Mexican presidential election. Calderón swept the northern Mexican states, while López Obrador won those in southern Mexico; only in central Mexico was there a more mixed outcome. Madrazo, it should be noted, failed to win a single state.

And yet, Baker rightly asks, what accounts for such regional effects? He shows that variance in the arena in which one engages in interpersonal conversations explains why individuals with identical traits and beliefs exhibit different voting behavior patterns, ones that correspond to their region of residence. People discuss politics and deliberate over their choices with family and friends. Their beliefs are constructed and consolidated in embedded social networks. Therefore, PAN supporters in a region full of PAN adherents mutually reinforce each other. An identically profiled PAN supporter in a region full of PRD partisans may, however, switch.

Baker finds that discussion networks explain the regional effects in 2006; that is, regional effects stop being statistically significant explanations of the vote once the ramifications of discussions are taken into account. Flores-Macías

(chapter 10) further discovered that voters who switched away from their initial candidate preferences in 2006 had more individuals in their discussion networks that disagreed with them; standpatters were more likely to participate in discussion networks with like-minded individuals.

Discussion effects build upon partisanship and individual traits and explain a voter's choice for president. Not only do these discussions have an impact prior to the start of an election campaign, but, as the campaign unfolds, they also serve as a filter for voters. Homogeneous networks strengthen the beliefs that its members share. Heterogeneous networks, in contrast, facilitate the possibility that some of its members will switch their choices. Discussion effects, as an explanation for region, reinforce Klesner's point in chapter 3, that contemporary patterns of political competition are built on past patterns of opposition party development, thus rooting the lasting effects of discussion networks in the past and empowering them for the future.

Opinions about the president's performance were another salient variable in the 2006 presidential election, just as they had been in the past. These impressions are generally formed prior to the start of the campaign, although they can also be affected by events as the campaign progresses. In chapter 13, Greene brings out the importance of presidential approval, which he uses, along with partisanship, as control variables to enable him to study the impact of issues during the election. Views of a president's performance develop during the course of a presidential term, and Vicente Fox spent a great deal of time during his presidency shoring up his personal presidential popularity. Therefore, voters who thought well of Fox were much more likely to prefer Calderón; voters who thought badly of Fox were the least likely to support the PAN's candidate.

Ecological realignment, partisanship, opinions of President Fox's performance, levels of education as they affect one's degree of political knowledge, and discussion networks all set the stage for the 2006 election prior to the start of the campaign. They identified the core supporters of each candidate as well as those voters most susceptible to persuasion. During the campaign itself, partisanship, levels of political knowledge, and discussion networks would continue to filter information, consolidate and activate core voters, and allow other voters to make initial judgments or modify the opinions that they may have formed at first.

The 2006 Campaign

The settled political habits that voters carry in their hearts and minds may be unsettled at the start of a campaign, when parties choose their candidates; this disruption happened for about half of the voters in the 2006 election. Yet at the start of the process it seemed as if these exogenous shocks would hardly matter. López Obrador had been the long-time favorite in the polls for several years, well ahead of all other potential presidential contenders. Thus Bruhn rightly describes the start of the campaign as the "prelude to a coronation" (see chapter 9), that is, the process whereby the PRD would ratify López Obrador as its candidate and the voters would confirm him as president.

Similarly, Madrazo seemed well positioned to become the PRI's presidential candidate. David Shirk (in chapter 7) and Joy Langston (in chapter 8) document how Madrazo, following the end of the last PRI presidency in 2000, became the PRI's leader, seized control of the party machinery, and prepped the PRI for an impressive round of victories in the 2003 nationwide congressional election and in the majority of gubernatorial elections. A coalition of PRI governors, led by state of México Governor Arturo Montiel, challenged Madrazo for the PRI's nomination but, through negative advertising, cunning, and luck, Madrazo prevailed when Montiel withdrew his scandal-plagued candidacy.

The PAN had a more complex process for their choice, because several internal candidates were viable presidential contenders. As Shirk shows in chapter 7, former minister of government Santiago Creel, President Fox's favorite, appeared well placed to win the PAN internal primary election. Yet Felipe Calderón, the former PAN president, turned out to have greater popularity within a party that credited him with its growth in the 1990s and still felt somewhat ignored during the Fox presidency.

After these three presidential candidates were selected, Madrazo fell to third place in public opinion polls, never to do any better. Starting in March 2006, Calderón's campaign strategy outmaneuvered López Obrador's. In what way, however, did voters respond to the strategies sketched out earlier in this chapter? Ideology, the activation of views about the economy, the construction of candidate issue ownership, and the support generated by specific government policies help formulate answers to that question.

Ideology mattered, although that point has been difficult to study in Mexico. Earlier efforts suggested that Mexican voters operated at a relatively modest to low level of ideological thinking (Domínguez and McCann 1996). Here,

the chapter by Bruhn and Greene shows that Mexican voters were much less polarized across an array of issues than federal deputy candidates. However, James McCann, in chapter 14, gives us a tool to unlock the possible role of ideology during the campaign. He found that Mexican voters' perceptions of George W. Bush, Fidel Castro, and Hugo Chávez worked as proxies for the electorate's broad perspectives. Ideology became activated during the election campaign, thereby tightening up the connection between latent left-right views and presidential votes—just as the pioneers of such panel studies in the United States would have expected (Berelson et al. 1954). Ideology played both affective and cognitive roles; namely, it enabled the voters to determine whether candidates were likable and whether voters agreed with their general political stances. These findings built a bridge between what I have called Calderón's campaign 1 and campaign 2.

Voters' views of the Mexican economy have mattered in every election since 1988, and the 2006 race was no exception (for a similar analysis in Canada, see Alvarez et al. 2000). In chapter 11, Alejandro Moreno further argues that economic voting counted in 2006 in a way that it had not done before. As in the past, the governing party benefited from favorable views and suffered from negative views about the economy—classic economic voting. The novelty in the 2006 election was Calderón's success, not at persuading an increasing number of voters that the country's economy was doing well, but at convincing those who already thought so to cast a vote for him. His triumph in this arena accounts for the discrepancy between the standings of the candidates in the early polls and the final election results, a dynamic that has also been documented in the United States (Gelman and King 1993).

Calderón's support among economically optimistic voters leapt from 35 percent in October 2005 to 57 percent in July 2006. The key shift was among independents, that is, those voters who did not identify with any party. In October 2005, Calderón trailed López Obrador by fifteen percentage points among independents with positive views of the economy; in July, Calderón was ahead of López Obrador by fourteen points among economically satisfied voters. The change during the campaign was Calderón's success in activating this part of the electorate, resulting in an upswing of votes for himself.

The mechanism for this campaign achievement becomes apparent in chapter 13. Greene controls for pocketbook (or personal) economic evaluations as well as for sociotropic (or national) ones. These general assessments turn out to not be significant in explanations of voting choice. Does that contradict Moreno's

findings in chapter 11? In his analysis, Greene includes variables for partisan identification and presidential approval, which are statistically significant, as is usually the case in Mexican elections. He then tests for the impact of economic voting, both through prospective positional issues (views for or against specific issue decisions) and what he calls "candidate traits." In this latter category, Greene tests for valence issues, which wed perceptions of the candidates to voters' opinions about issues.

Greene demonstrates that among the positional issues, only poverty was a statistically significant explanation of the vote—not the privatization of electricity, trade with the United States, the extent of the social safety net, or views regarding the death penalty or abortion. Greene shows that poverty also worked as a valence issue for López Obrador, that is, voters thought López Obrador more competent to address the scourge of poverty. Yet voters who also thought that Calderón would be best at managing of the economy or who worried that López Obrador would cause an economic crisis were significantly less likely to vote for the PRD candidate. Calderón's ownership of the economic valence issue is the mechanism that helps validate Moreno's argument, namely, that the activation of voters with positive perceptions of the economy worked to Calderón's benefit on election day.

In chapter 12, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros, Federico Estévez, and Beatriz Magaloni provide the last piece of the puzzle. PRI governments, in power for a long time, often appealed to voters on the basis of clientelist favors: jobs for individuals, payments in cash or in-kind, gifts, explicit or implicit threats about loss of benefits, and the like. PRI governments did not emphasize building support for universalistic, social-policy government programs for citizens who would then qualify for them on the basis of public, transparent, and well-specified empirical criteria. Mexico's poor benefited from the shift from politically selective handouts to clearly delineated rules that made them eligible for support and protected them, without regard to political affiliation, from losing benefits.

Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni confirm what Cornelius (2004) had found was already the case for the 2000 election, namely, clientelist strategies (i.e., handouts) had become much less effective at generating voter support. The novelty in the 2006 election was that voters who benefited from the universalistic programs of the developing Mexican welfare state—conditional cash transfers through Oportunidades, and health insurance with Seguro Popular—rewarded the PAN presidential candidate with their support in a clear example

of positive retrospective voting. As happens in other democratic polities, voters backed those who had served them well.

Political Change and Pending Matters

Democratic politics have come slowly to Mexico over the past couple of decades, but they have come. Early in this century, as Camp shows in chapter 2, strong majorities of Mexicans believe that the country's political system is democratic. They worry less now about the nature of the political regime and more about serious public issues, such as the lack of public security or the persistence of unemployment. Mexico's most committed democrats are economic optimists, adherents to some religious faith, young, better-educated, and more likely to be residents of northern Mexico. That leaves a significant minority of Mexicans who do not hold these beliefs. Camp's findings suggest not only that Mexican leaders in government, business, education, and the churches face a challenge in improving the performance of democratic politics, but that the instruments to do so are also evident—economic growth, improvements in personal safety, more and better schooling, and properly functioning democratic institutions. None of these is easy; each is possible.

More effective remedies to the one remaining major instance of Mexican voter disenfranchisement—the country's wholly flawed procedures to enable its citizens who live outside of Mexico to vote in the presidential election—should also be possible. While Mexico should provide its expatriates with better means for absentee voting, in chapter 5 James McCann, Wayne Cornelius, and David Leal argue for realistic expectations as Mexico approaches such reforms. Contrary to either high hopes or worries that Mexicans outside of Mexico would vote in such large numbers in Mexican elections that they could determine the outcome, these authors provide reasons why voter turnout among expatriate Mexicans would likely remain relatively low even if absentee-balloting procedures were to be improved. Such Mexicans, like people everywhere, care the most about the circumstances of their lives, and those of their families, in the place where they live. For these expatriates, life in the United States matters a great deal, and national elections in Mexico suggest remote solutions, at best. There is room to improve upon the extremely low level of participation among expatriates in 2006, but no one should expect that the turnout rate from abroad would come close to matching that within Mexico proper. Nonetheless, Mexican politicians ought to make it possible for Mexican citizens living outside of

Mexico to vote in their country's elections. Such democratic reforms are worth undertaking, but the results of these efforts may well be modest, as they have been in other countries.

Principal Findings

First, Mexico's 2006 presidential election confirmed some patterns discernable in analyses of Mexican presidential elections ever since the first reasonably competitive one in 1988. In 2006, as in past elections, partisanship, evaluations of the incumbent president's performance, and economic voting helped explain the attitudes and behavior of voters. In these respects, electoral politics in Mexico conformed well to democratic practices common to constitutional democracies worldwide. Yet demographic factors, both in the last as well as previous Mexican elections, had little or no impact on the formation of opinions and on voting behavior. This persistent finding has made Mexican politics somewhat different from European or Asian democracies, where certain social cleavages have resulted in a rather more structured electorate. Nevertheless, ecological realignment—the emigration of rural Mexicans to more urban environments—continued unabated. In addition, attitudes toward positional issues explained little about voter choice; such results vary a good deal between democratic countries.

Second, the research reported in this book has shown that some factors that had counted for less in previous presidential elections mattered considerably more in the 2006 and 2000 elections. In both 2006 and 2000, attitudes toward candidates were quite significant, with campaign strategies, mass-media reporting, and negative advertising helping to explain public opinions and voter choices. Both elections dramatically demonstrated how candidates' campaign decisions might advance or hinder their prospects for election; the "good" candidate is an effective strategist. Cognitive processes common to citizens in other democracies operate in Mexico, too. Campaigns activate the public's preferences and remind cross-pressured citizens where their strongest leanings would lead. The most knowledgeable voters are the least susceptible to being persuaded by campaign messages, even though they are the most likely to listen to those messages. In this indirect sense, education matters—that is, the best-educated voters are the most resistant to acquiring information from the campaigns and changing their views. For good or ill, electoral politics in Mexico resembles its counterparts in democracies elsewhere.

Third, two salient factors in earlier Mexican elections were less so in 2006. Clientelist practices, such as vote-buying or coercion, have been less common and less effective in elections in this decade. Only a few voters cast their ballots "strategically" in past Mexican elections, but they had mattered because their numbers often exceeded the margin of victory between the winner and the first runner-up. Between 1988 and 2000, such voting had been important for some of those opposed to the then-ruling PRI; they privileged defeating the PRI over "sincerely" voting for the opposition party that was their true preference. By the 2006 presidential election, the democratic regime question no longer structured voter choice; we found little evidence of strategic voting.

Fourth, by means of research that had not been carried out in Mexico before, this book explains some elements of public opinion and voting behavior in that country:

1. Broad ideological perspectives help structure public opinion, even if these orientations are not always captured in survey questions that use the words "left" and "right."
2. Priming the salience of an issue and mobilizing voters who care about that issue help explain voter shift during a campaign. In 2006, we called it the economic activation of voters.
3. Valence issues play a significant role in elections, even if positional issues do not. Candidates who own a valence issue—"I am more competent than you at advancing a goal that all citizens share"—will outperform their opponents. Issue ownership is the key mechanism for issue priming and voter activation.
4. Region had seemed to be a demographic factor that mattered, but—at least in part—it turns out to have been a proxy for the effects of discussion networks that reinforced the preferences of citizens in politically homogeneous settings and may lead to a change in preference in more heterogeneous settings.
5. In 2006, voters rewarded the government's universalistic social policy programs. They behaved as democrats should, supporting public servants who performed well.

Mexico's 2006 presidential election, in some respects, resembled that country's presidential election of 1994 more than the one in 2000. In both 1994 and 2006, the candidate with the strongest structural underpinnings for victory won the election. Ernesto Zedillo in 1994, and Felipe Calderón in 2006, had

an advantage in terms of partisan preference, the popularity of an incumbent president from their own party, and public perception of a robust economy. In each of these two elections, opposition to the governing party was split. The purpose of the Zedillo and Calderón presidential campaigns was to activate their underlying structural advantages so as to rally their supporters and ride their ownership of valence issues—prosperity in particular—to a presidential victory. Victory in 2000 went to Vicente Fox, who overcame his candidacy's structural disadvantages by persuading voters to rally strategically for democracy above any of their other attitudinal preferences, rise above partisanship, imagine a better economic future, and vote for change. In 1994, as in 2006, the victory went to Ernesto Zedillo and Felipe Calderón, the candidates who promised not only continuity, but also greater effectiveness in implementing the good policy intentions that they inherited. Only time will tell whether voters were right.

Comparative Perspectives

The victory of the PAN presidential candidate in the 2006 Mexican presidential election was part of a broader trend across large Latin American countries⁵ in the middle years of the first decade of the twenty-first century; parties that had held the presidency won the presidential elections that took place in these years. The victories went to incumbents on the left, such as Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez; the right, like Colombia's President Álvaro Uribe; and the center, such as Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Victories also went to governing parties or coalitions where the incumbent president could not or did not run for re-election, such as the Partido Justicialista in Argentina, the Concertación Democrática in Chile, and the PAN in Mexico. The effect of a growing world economy made it possible for ruling parties to claim credit for economic good times. Impressive as Felipe Calderón's personal achievement was in 2006, his victory was part of a broader Latin American pattern.

Latin America's many electorates were not, moreover, particularly leftist in their political attitudes. Jason Arnold and David Samuels (2008) have shown conclusively that there was no "left turn" in the Latin American public as the twenty-first century began. Few Latin Americans self-consciously identify as leftists, and the proportion of those who do did not increase for the continent as a whole. More importantly, the left-right scale does not distinguish well between the political attitudes of Latin America's Left and non-Left. There is only one dimension on which the Latin American political Left stands out clearly,

namely, opposition to the Bush administration. In all of these respects, our findings for Mexico coincide with the general Latin American pattern. As McCann shows in chapter 14, attitudes toward the United States stand out distinctively in Mexico, but other elements of the left-right divide are not helpful in understanding either the 2006 Mexican electorate or the Latin American electorate in mid-decade.

Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated how Mexican voters are similar in many ways to voters in the United States or other North Atlantic democracies. Comparable factors shape the voting choice in Mexico and in these other democracies—among them, partisanship, economic voting, attitudes toward the incumbent president, discussion networks, and valence issues. The general importance of competence should also be underlined as an effective valence issue. Felipe Calderón won on competence, but so too did the Peronists in Argentina, the Center-Left in Chile, and conservative President Uribe in Colombia. Mexicans behave as democrats do everywhere.

There is one important difference, however, between Mexican elections and those in the longer-established North Atlantic democracies—campaigns matter much more in Mexico. Thus the candidates, mass-media coverage, negative advertising, and general campaign strategies have been essential in explaining the outcome in Mexico's two presidential elections during the current century. This is as should be expected in a country whose party system, though resilient, is young and where the transition to full constitutional democracy dates from the 2000 election. Mexico's democratic consolidation remains, therefore, an ongoing project as citizens argue, contest, change, and seek to shape a better future for themselves and their families.

30. The complete results from these models and the preceding analyses are available from the author upon request (mccannj@purdue.edu). When cross-lag rather than synchronous coefficients are used to assess the causal relationships between ideology and candidate trait impressions, substantively identical findings emerge. The left-right positions significantly shape leadership appraisals for all three contenders, while perceptions of López Obrador, in turn, have an effect on ideology, though this effect is not as significant as the impact of ideology on trait ratings for the PRD's standard-bearer.

31. Mexico's election was, of course, but one of many presidential contests held in Latin America in 2006. Partisan competition was especially fierce in Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Peru, and Ecuador. Given the prominence of Presidents Bush, Chávez, and Castro across the hemisphere, ideological orientations linked to assessments of these figures might well have helped shape voting blocs in other electorates.

FIFTEEN: Conclusion

This chapter draws extensively and explicitly from the chapters in this book. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues. All the good ideas belong to them; all the mistakes are mine alone. I am especially grateful to Roderic Ai Camp, Jason Lakin, Chappell Lawson, and James McCann for comments on previous versions. Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs provided general research support.

1. The presidential elections held in 1940 and 1988 may have been extremely close, but the published election results affirmed the victory of the ruling party by a very wide margin.

2. The Chamber of Deputies has 500 members, of whom 300 are elected by plurality in single-member districts, and 200 are elected by closed-party-list proportional representation in large districts. The election of deputies in single-member districts is likely to be affected by local factors beyond the scope of this chapter. For a discussion of how these deputies behaved, see chapter 6 in this volume.

3. For details, see chapter 1, note 1. Data from the Mexico 2006 Panel Study, and further information about it, are available at <http://web.mit.edu/polisci/research/mexicoc06/>.

4. I am grateful to Nirmala Ravishankar for comments on this paragraph.

5. Peru is the only large Latin American country where the president's party nearly disintegrated, so there was no incumbent party continuity.