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Lessons to Build On: The 1994 Mexican Presidential Election

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Abstract
Examines the 1994 presidential election as a way to comprehend the scope and pace of Mexican democratization and to derive general lessons about democratic reforms. Brief review of the reforms and accords reached in 1994 and an analysis of their impact; Difference of the 1994 presidential election from its predecessors; Implications of the 1994 presidential election on the debate over Mexican democratization.

Article

The 1994 presidential election presents a paradox for students of Mexican politics in particular and democratization in general. The year witnessed many numerous and far-reaching changes, both planned and unplanned. An uprising in the state of Chiapas; the assassination of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio; a sweeping electoral reform; and a hotly contested presidential race marked the unprecedented year in Mexican politics. The election results, however, were the same as in every previous presidential election for more than sixty years: a victory by the PRI candidate, in this case Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon. How to explain this? What significance does the outcome have for understanding the process of regime democratization?

This article examines the 1994 presidential election as a way to comprehend the scope and pace of Mexican democratization and to derive general lessons about democratic reforms. It begins with brief review of the reforms and accords reached in 1994 and an analysis of their impact. Then it turns to the question of who voted for Zedillo and why. Was the outcome a result of massive fraud? Did voters turn to the PRI out of fear or conservatism? Even more important is the question of fundamental change: how different was the presidential election of 1994 from its most recent predecessor, that of 1988? Was this latest round of electoral competition merely more of the same campaign practices and voter behavior, or were Mexican politics transformed? If important distinctions between 1988 and 1994 are to be made, what do they signify for the future of Mexico and the prospects for democratization there? Finally, does Mexico's experience offer any insight into the process of democratization in general?

Often it is hard to assimilate the case of Mexico into the literature on democratic transitions and consolidations. Mexico's status as an exception to the hemisphere's prevailing bureaucratic authoritarianism of the 1960s and 1970s caused its continuing deviation from the democratic trends of the 1980s and 1990s. Single, transformative events, such as the 1989 Chilean plebiscite, are missing from the Mexican experience. Early academic work in the area of democratic transitions (such as Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986) primarily focused on the transformation from military to civilian regimes. For Mexico, however, democratization has not meant replacing military leaders with civilians; rather, efforts have centered on limiting the power of the PRI and creating a genuine multiparty, competi- tive political system. Given this distinction, much of the scholarly work based on Southern Cone experiences is not applicable to Mexico.

Later research (such as Tulchin 1995 and Camp 1996) examines democratic consolidation, the deepening of elected civilian rule, and the travails of avoiding an authoritarian backslide. Given the PRI's continued dominance and persistent concerns about the validity of the electoral process in Mexico, discussions about creating political organizations, power sharing with the military, and other commonplace issues for many Latin American countries do not concern Mexico to the same degree. Thus the case of Mexico must continue to be treated as a type of "outlier" to the overall pattern of Latin American democratization.

In Mexico, limits on the power of the PRI have come from challenges at the state level. Opposition victories-first in municipalities, then in statewide contests-have come slowly but steadily. For example, before the July 1997 elections, approximately 37 percent of Mexico was governed by the Partido de Accion Nacional (PAN). Party members controlled four governorships and 247 municipalities (Christian Science Monitor 1996). Members of the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) also governed various cities. If democratization in Mexico is signaled by electoral competition and opposition control over power, then that process has occurred at the local rather than the national level.

This essay contends that the 1994 presidential election had profound implications for the debate over Mexican democratization. That election offers three important lessons. First and foremost, the election and its results destroyed certain basic assumptions about Mexico and Mexican democratization; closely held "truths" about Mexican electoral politics were proven false. For example, a high voter turnout-often thought to be detrimental to the PRI-did not lead to an opposition victory. Similarly, the 1994 elections proved that electoral credibility could be achieved without a loss by the PRI and that the PRI could win without resorting to widespread ballot box tampering.

Second, the 1994 election reaffirms the lesson that commonly adhered-to concepts about political transitions do not really apply in the case of Mexico. Scholars usually look for sudden, dramatic change in regime type, normally signaled by change at the national executive level, as evidence of a political transition. Political change in Mexico has been- and will most likely continue to be-a protracted process taking place on the state rather than the national level. Even though the PRI continued its monopoly on the presidency, important political changes in terms of electoral reforms and results did take place. The evolutionary process of Mexican democratization

continued.

The third lesson of the 1994 presidential election is especially significant. The election-particularly in light of what occurred in the subsequent year-revealed that the context of elections is as important as the vote count. Efforts at democratization cannot concentrate exclusively on limiting fraud. Other elements, such as the political environment, access to media coverage, and financial resources, are equally vital for successful democratization.

A review of the 1994 Mexican presidential election uncovers aspects of both change and continuity. Reforms were put into place that changed the procedures governing elections. The context in which elections took place, however-of which the most important element was the merging of the PRI and the government-did not change. The 1994 elections saw little overt fraud; this was a dramatic change from the election of 1988. Yet the PRI candidate won, an outcome that has not changed since 1930. The 1994 elections witnessed the growth of the PAN as a national opposition force, a notable change from previous years. But the 1994 elections also evidenced the continued dominance of the PRI. While many elements in Mexico changed, many stayed the same. This combination of change and continuity, though, fits the evolutionary pattern of Mexican democratization.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE: THE REFORMS OF 1994

The two official electoral reforms of 1994 marked the third and fourth times during the sexenio of Carlos Salinas de Gortari that the rules and procedures governing elections were changed. The Salinas government, entering office in 1988 under a cloud of accusations about massive electoral fraud, had pledged to reform the process.

Several aspects of the pre-1994 electoral reforms are noteworthy. In 1990, the government created a new method to prevent repeated electoral voting by developing a voter identification card with a photo. The same reform legislation adopted a new Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) and established a Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal de Elecciones, IFE) to oversee federal elections. Among the tasks assigned to the IFE were to develop a new voter registration list and to issue the new voter identification cards. In 1993, again under pressure to improve the quality of Mexican elections, the government adopted a number of additional measures. The Senate was expanded to include proportional representation seats; the Chamber of Deputies was relieved of the duty of verifying its own election returns; the IFE was expanded to include a Federal Electoral Tribunal to decide election controversies; reforms of political parties' finances were introduced; and limits on campaign spending were established. By the end of 1993, as the presidential campaigns were set to begin, no one anticipated any further changes in the federal election code. Before the August 21,1994 elections, though, two subsequent reforms of electoral rules and procedures would appear.

The unanticipated changes in 1994 came in response to unantici- pated events. The January 1, 1994 uprising by the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) and the March 23, 1994 assassination of Colosio sparked renewed concerns about

peaceful mechanisms for political change, primarily the scheduled presidential elections. In the words of Jorge Carpizo, secretary of gobemaci6n (government) and president of the General Council of the IFE, it was necessary that "the federal elections of 1994 be impartial, credible, objective, and acceptable for the society and political organizations" (LaJornada 1994b, 1).

This concern was echoed by civil society in Mexico. Shortly after the rebellion in Chiapas began, "20 Compromisos por la democracia," a document signed by 675 prominent citizens, appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines. A spokesman for the group,Jose Agustin Ortiz Pincheti, said that the document was a call for the government and political parties to respond to the unraveling situation in the nation.

> The oldest justification of the authoritarian system was its capacity for maintaining peace; today ... that certainty has been destroyed. The rebellion in Los Altos de Chiapas, with strong local, agrarian, and radical characteristics, is a sign of advanced social decomposition and the fraying of national politics ... it is the lack of liberty and democracy, electoral abuses and manipulation that may provoke the extension of the Chiapas rebellion to the entire country. (LaJornada 1994a, 1)

Thus the EZLN uprising provided strong motives for a reformulation of election rules and procedures: belief that the 1994 presidential elections would be free and fair was essential to halt the spread of political violence and antisystem responses to political adversity.

Concern about world opinion also spurred change. President Salinas was engaged in a campaign to win the presidency of the World Trade Organization, the recently created successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. In an effort to secure for himself an important post- Mexican presidency job, Salinas had to present the picture of a successful, trustworthy, modern administrator. Transparent presidential elections without any controversy were a key ingredient in maintaining this image.

The "20 Compromisos por la democracia" provided the basis for the "Acuerdo por la paz, la democracia y la justicia," signed by the main political parties. The accord called for certain measures to ensure an impartial election:

* Impartiality of election authorities
* An external audit of the voter registration list to ensure public confidence
* Guarantees of equal coverage in the mass media
* An end to the use of resources and public programs to favor a political party or campaign
* A revision of political party funding
* A review of recent changes to the penal code that could infringe on political rights
* An exploration by the attorney general of the possibility of naming a special prosecutor for electoral crimes
* The consideration and adoption of these measures by a special session of the Congress before the 1994 elections (Cited in Mendez and Bolivar 1995,

table 9, p. 40)

The last two electoral reforms of Salinas's administration began with a special session of the Mexican congress, initiated in March. The need for increased credibility and the pressure to pursue peaceful means of political change became more urgent with the assassination of Colosio on March 23. The political adversity Mexico was facing required the establishment of "stability resting on a new basis: foundations that ... are democratic, civilized, civic, and completely legal" (Aguilar Camin et al. 1994, 39). More than ever, transparent elections were essential.

The third electoral reform contained three key points. Following suggestions set forth in the Acuerdo, it allowed, for the first time, accredited national observers and foreign visitors to review and report on the elections. It also authorized a special prosecutor for electoral crimes and funded an external audit of the voter registration list. All these actions, it was hoped, would strengthen the impartiality of the elections and limit the opportunity for electoral fraud.

In May 1994, continuing concern about legality and credibility provoked the enactment of a fourth electoral reform. This legislation focused on the IFE. Responding to the request for impartial election authorities, the congress reorganized the central electoral institution, the IFE, by increasing the presence and importance of citizens unaffiliated with the government or political parties. This reorganization affected not only the highest levels of the IFE but the entire apparatus. As table 1 outlines, the main organ of the IFE, the General Council, was completely transformed.

The General Council previously had 21 voting members, most of whom-because of PRI domination of Congress and the executive branch-were members of the PRI. They enjoyed not only a guarantee of two members of the legislative contingent and the presidency of the IFE itself but also a majority vote in the political party contingent. Under its old organization, the General Council only had minority participation by unaffiliated citizens. The reorganization, by decreasing the number of voting participants, resulted in the domination of unaffiliated participants, who now enjoyed a 54.5 percent voting majority.

This reorganization and "citizenization" also occurred at the state and district levels. The IFE includes 32 "local" councils (one per state) and 300 "district" councils (one per Chamber of Deputies district). Local councils were composed of two members of the state IFE organization, six citizens (designated by the IFE General Council), and equal participation (voice but no vote) for each registered political party. District councils had two members from the district IFE, six citizens (designated by the appropriate IFE local council), and equal participation (voice but no vote) for each registered political party.

The precinct organization was also changed. Mexico has 96,000 voting precincts (casillas); each precinct has four officials, with alternates. These officials are in charge of setting up the voting area, supervising the casting of votes, counting precinct votes, and sending results (and ballots) to the district offices. The four officials (president, secretary, first and second examiners) were randomly selected by lottery. To qualify, one had to be a resident of the precinct, be a registered voter,

have a voter identification card, "have an honest mode of living," take a series of courses given by the district IFE, not be a public official or an official of any political party, know how to read and write, and be less than 70 years old the day of the election (IFE 1994).

Table 1. Reform of the IFE General Council, 1994

Participant	Before	After
Political parties	Proportional representation based on Congressional seats: voice and vote (10 votes/47.6%)	One representative per party: voice but no vote (0 votes/0%)
Citizens	6 "magisterial advisers," lawyers, selected by Congress: voice and vote (6 votes/28.6%)	6 elected citizens, no prerequisites, elected by 2/3 vote of Congress: voice and vote(6 votes/54.5%)
Legislature	2 deputies (majority and minority parties) 2 senators (majority and minority parties): voice and vote (4 votes/19%)	2 deputies (majority and minority parties) 2 senators (majority and minority parties): voice and vote (4 votes/19%)
Executive	President of IFE/ Sec. of Gobernación: voice and tie-breaking vote (1 vote/4.8%)	President of IFE/ Sec. of Gobernación:[a] voice and vote (1 vote/9.1%)

[a]Later changed to elected position.

Source: Méndez and Bolívar 1995.

A whole network of people and mechanisms was installed to ensure that electoral fraud was not committed in the voting precincts. By law, precinct officials were observed by political party representatives, citizen observers, and foreign visitors. The 1994 elections also saw the introduction of transparent ballot boxes to guarantee that there would be no (presumedly PRI) prestuffing of the containers. An indelible ink was distributed for precinct officials to place on people's fingers after voting (Alcaraz Sanguino 1994).

To counteract concern about pre-election day activities, steps were taken, sometimes outside the government, to create a more equitable environment during the campaign. For example, on June 18, 1994, responding to complaints from influential citizens, political parties, and the IFE General Council, the major television channels offered free air time to all nine political parties with registered presidential candidates. With rotating time slots, each of the nine parties had an opportunity to air three messages (without commercial interruption). This was intended to counter the

perceived pro-PRI coverage by the mass media, particularly the major television networks. It was, however, a voluntary move on their part, not necessitated by any law or reform.

It is intriguing, though, that most of the Acuerdo's suggested reforms relating to the electoral climate were not formally codified into either of the two legislative electoral reforms. The calls for legally mandated equal media access, a revision of party funding, and more stringent controls over public resources were not heeded. Overall, the 1994 reforms, though extensive, concentrated almost exclusively on "electoral transparency" and the prevention of ballot box fraud.

EVALUATION OF THE REFORMS

While the number of changes and their scope are impressive, a key concern is how well they worked in actuality. Were the electoral reform measures truly enacted, and did the government follow through? Of particular interest are four areas: the role of citizens on the General Council, citizen control at the state and district levels, the impartiality of the professional IFE staff, and citizen observation of election day activity.

In terms of the "citizenization" of the highest level of IFE, the General Council, results were mixed. The citizens selected were universally praised for their impartiality and concern for free and fair elections. The citizen advisers, however, joined the General Council on June 3, 1994, only 11 weeks before the election. This clearly limited their influence because a number of decisions were taken before they joined the organization.

Impartial citizen participation at state and district levels proved to be even more questionable. An investigation by Alianza Civica-Observacion 94, a nongovernmental organization, showed domination by PRIistas and public officials at these lower levels, thereby continuing the domination of the governing party and the government at the most immediate levels of voting and ballot tallying (Alianza Civica-Observaci6n 1994a, 5).

Likewise, the trustworthiness of members of the IFE Secretariat was questioned. Given the long and close association between the government and the PRI, IFE staff members' avowals of nonbias were viewed with suspicion. Commentators who favored transparent elections noted that IFE personnel, as well as PRI party members, had to be considered partisans of the governing party (Grobet and Alvarado 1994).

Of course, citizen observers were viewed as an additional guarantee against electoral fraud, and they were present in 285 of the 300 electoral districts. Coverage was therefore widespread but not complete. In terms of political party representatives, of the 96,000 precincts, 44 percent did not have any political party observers; 5 percent had representatives from one political party; and 51 percent had representatives from two or more (Mercado Gasca and Zuckermann Behar 1994, 24-25). Therefore, at the lowest level of electoral organization, barely a majority of precincts enjoyed scrutiny by at least one opposition party.

While the reforms passed by the government may not have been implemented as completely or fully as could be hoped, most assessments of the election day itself were positive. Overall, in urban zones, the elections were relatively clean. Because the majority of Mexican citizens live in urban areas, this was welcome news. About 44 percent of the voting public lives in rural and semirural districts, however. In rural zones, especially in the south, "there were grave violations during the election" (Alianza Civica-Observacion 1994a), such as voter intimidation and repeated voting. Nevertheless, "it is probable that [these violations] did not alter the final results of the presidential election" (Alianza Civica-Observacion 1994a, 4).

Such an assessment of election day contrasts greatly with that of the previous presidential election. Numerous irregularities were reported during the 1988 electoral process, such as multiple voting by the same person, stuffing the ballot boxes with extra ballots, and lost ballot boxes. The most notorious example was that the entire computer system run by the Ministry of Gobernacion to tally the votes "crashed" as Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the opposition candidate, appeared to take the lead in the returns. When the system went back online, new data indicated a victory by PRI candidate Salinas (Barberan et al. 1988; Reding 1988). Thus, in comparison to 1988, voting in the 1994 presidential election was remark- ably transparent and without widespread problems.

Still, evaluations of the overall 1994 election campaign are not so sanguine. Many commentators noted problems with the context or environment in which the elections were conducted. Two problematic areas often cited are media coverage and use of government resources. Neither of these was the subject of electoral reform before the 1994 presidential contest, and they are a different kind of issue than those that preoccupied most reformers. Yet the context of electoral competition clearly influenced the election results.

An evaluation of media coverage depends on the individual medium considered. In terms of television, unequal coverage was more or less continuous. Positive coverage of the PRI was the norm. Complaints from opposition parties about coverage reported for the months of January through May prompted the IFE to request (but not legally require) more equitable television news reports. In June and July, television coverage improved. But in August-the time closest to the election-observers noted a return to unbalanced television coverage (Alianza Civica-Observaci6n 1994b, 2).

Table 2. Newspaper Coverage of Political Parties (percentage of stories)

	1988	1994
PRI	59.4	40.8
PAN	8.4	11.6
PRD	19.6	17.8
Other	12.6	29.9

Source: Trejo Delarbre 1994. Newspapers examined: *Excelsior, La Jornada, El Nacional, Reforma, El Universal* (all Mexico City).

Newspaper coverage of the presidential campaign differed slightly from that of television. As table 2 demonstrates, newspapers devoted significantly more space to the PRI than to the other political parties. Compared to the 1988 campaign, however, treatment was more equitable. Unlike television, furthermore, newspapers often included negative as well as positive reports on the PRI.

It is important that newspaper coverage was better than in 1988, although still unequal. Television coverage, however, must be considered more significant, especially in a nation with high illiteracy or limited literacy rates. As is true for most nations in this modern age, television is often the single source of information for most citizens.

Like media coverage, use of government resources by the "official party" during the 1994 campaign season poisoned the competition between the political parties. In particular, use of public monies and services, such as those of Pronasol (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad) and Procampo (Programa para Apoyos Directos al Campo), created an unfair advantage for the PRI.1 Many stories circulated after the election about the use of these funds to inprove PRI electoral fortunes. For example, monitors from the organization Global Exchange in Tlapa, Guerrero, reported that the day before the 1994 presidential election, "the government agency, Procampo, was handing out checks for from [US]$100 to $200 to the local campesinos at the city hall. The campesinos were told that these subsidies would only continue if the PRI stayed in power" (BorderLines, 1994).

Clearly, a fundamental obstacle to completely free and fair elections remained. Indeed, the problem of campaign financing persisted after the 1994 elections. For instance, the scandal that erupted in 1995 concerning the state elections in Tabasco highlights the central role played by unequal access to monetary resources.2 Furthermore, revelations in 1995 about the use of foreign reserves to prop up the peso until after the 1994 presidential election also emphasize the importance of these more complex forms of manipulation and fraud that influence electoral results, albeit indirectly.3 In retrospect, the greatest and most telling flaws in the conduct of the 1994 presidential election were those surrounding the context of the election, not the vote counting. These are problems of a fundamentally different nature than the fraud attacked by the electoral reforms. Yet the importance of these types of electoral flaws becomes even more obvious after an examination of who voted for which candidate and why.

WHO VOTED FOR ZEDILLO, AND WHY?

The official results of the 1994 presidential election show that about 70 percent of the Mexican electorate participated in the voting on August 21. PRI candidate Ernesto Zedillo won 50.18 percent of the vote, followed by Diego Fernandez of the PAN with 26.69 percent and Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the PRD with 17.08 percent. These results somewhat parallel the percentages obtained in several pre-election polls. It is interesting that most of these surveys predicted a slightly smaller margin of victory for the PRI, with percentages in the 40s. Many commentators before the election discounted the opinion poll results, predicting that the public would not feel comfortable openly voicing an anticipated vote against the PRI. Contrary to the common belief, however, election day proved the surveys correct in their prediction

of a PRI victory. This marked a new trend in Mexican politics: discounting the public opinion polls was no longer appropriate.

This somewhat unanticipated electoral outcome focused new interest on the pro-PRI vote. If the reforms leading up to the August 1994 election were truly implemented, then why did Zedillo win? This query goes to the heart of a basic assumption that underlay much of the scholarly thinking about Mexican elections: PRI victories depended on ballot box fraud. Yet the evidence suggested that Zedillo's election could not be attributed to ballot box alchemy. Just who voted for Zedillo and why? Table 3 examines the party affiliation of presidential voters.

As might be anticipated, voting patterns in the previous election well match those of the 1994 election. Thus, those who voted for Salinas were most likely to vote for Zedillo. Indeed, it appears that party loyalty was slightly stronger in the PRI than in the other two major parties. These findings are reinforced by additional data showing that PRI voters, by a large majority (65 percent), decided at the beginning of the campaign to vote for the same party as they had in the previous election. In contrast, only 35 percent of the PAN voters and 39 percent of the PRD voters decided on their vote at the very beginning of the electoral campaign (Mercado Gasca and Zuckermann Behar, 1994, 23). These figures indicate that party affiliation-and subsequent voting behavior-was a powerful force that worked in favor of the PRI. Thus the 1994 election data reinforced observations from the 1988 and 1991 elections concerning party affiliation (Dominguez 1995). Given the preeminence of the PRI for more than 65 years, this represented a tremendously strong-and nonfraudulent- barrier to opposition victories.

Table 3. Party Affiliation and Presidential Voting (by percent of voters)

	1988		
1994	PRI	PAN	PRD/FDN
PRI	75	15	6
PAN	15	73	7
PRD	9	7	64

Source: Mercado Gasca and Zuckermann Behar 1994.

Most analysts have attributed the surprisingly large PRI vote to fear or basic conservatism. These two ascribed motives share some similarities, but also show important distinctions. The fear vote in 1994 was equated with a rejection of violence, disorder, postelectoral conflict, radicalism, and the guerrilla war in Chiapas. In contrast, the conservative vote was seen as an embrace of the status quo and a desire to maintain Salinas's policies.

The analyst Mauricio Merino provides a more detailed schema of Zedillo votes (Merino 1994, 17-19). In addition to those motives, Merino believes that a number of votes were influenced by the mass media: voters with little education or political

knowledge who were swayed by the pro- PRI media. Furthermore, he identifies a corporate vote: those who, through their membership in organizations with PRI affiliation, were persuaded to vote for Zedillo for promised rewards or punishments. A final category is the fraudulent votes: votes that corresponded not to particular voters but to "electoral alchemy" by PRI officials. While Merino asserts that electoral reforms probably limited the last category of votes, he maintains that the relative distribution of the other categories is difficult to ascertain. This is significant because mass media-influenced votes and corporate votes clearly reflect an unfair advantage enjoyed by the PRI over the other political parties.

Specific information concerning voters' motives-as opposed to opinions about why people voted for Zedillo-must come from the voters themselves. Exit polls provide some insight into voter preferences. Table 4 offers information about the presidential candidates' perceived attributes. Voters were shown a list of characteristics and asked which ones corresponded to their perceptions about the candidate for whom they had just voted. Overall, PRI voters tended to ascribe more qualities to their candidate than non-PRI voters ascribed to theirs. Furthermore, the main attribute that the PRI voters associated with Zedillo apparently was experience. Such perceptions would have been likely to contribute to a conservative vote for Zedillo; those who approved of the status quo would, of course, be more inclined to vote for a candidate with perceived experience in the execution of desired policies.

Table 4. 1994 Presidential Candidates: Perceived Attributes (by percent of voters)

	Experience	Personality	Honesty	Approachability
Ernesto Zedillo (PRI)	62	44	45	46
Diego Fernández (PAN)	22	37	35	24
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD)	13	12	15	23

Source: Mercado Gasca and Zuckermann Behar 1994.

Table 5. Responses to Exit Poll Questions (percent of voters)

	PRI best option	Known evil vs. unknown good	Show discontent	Dislodge PRI
PRI	69	22	5	4
PAN	7	10	40	43
PRD	5	10	42	43

Source: Mercado Gasca and Zuckermann Behar 1994

Table 5 provides information specifically about voters' motives. Persons exiting voting precincts were offered four choices to indicate why they had voted for their

candidate:

* Because the PRI continues to be the best option.
* Better the devil you know than an unknown good.
* I voted for the opposition to manifest my discontent.
* I wanted the opposition to win because the PRI has been in power too long.

This exit poll implies that voters had more of a positive reason to vote for Zedillo (PRI is the best option) than a negative reason (fear of the unknown). This would seem to suggest that many voters had active reasons to vote for the PRI candidate, despite the opinion of many analysts.

A logistic regression of exit poll responses seems to confirm that the Zedillo voters fell more into the conservative group than the fear group. Table 6 provides an evaluation of five different independent variables and measures their importance in determining voting behavior: gender, age, education, perceptions about the economy, and approval of Salinas. Negative figures signify a negative correlation; correspondingly, positive figures indicate a positive correlation.

Table 6. Variables Influencing Voter Choice

	PAN	PRI	PRD
Gender (female)	-0.02	0.05	0.13
Salary			
N$2,300 or less	0.09	0.00	-0.03
More than N$2,300	-0.01	0.04	0.04
Education			
Secondary or higher	0.06	-0.10	0.07
Age			
30 or younger	-0.08	0.04	0.03
Older than 30	-0.05	-0.05	-0.02
Approval of Salinas	-0.15	0.34	-0.09
Assessment of national economy	-0.08	0.19	-0.33
Assessment of family economy	-0.15	0.19	-0.14

N = Nuevo pesos

Source: Madrazo and Owens 1994.

The only statistically significant results were those connected with approval of Salinas and assessment of the economy. For PRI voters, the most important factor influencing their vote was their approval of Salinas. Those who viewed the Salinas administration positively were most likely to vote for Zedillo. Other factors, such as age, education, and socioeco- nomic status, did not seem to play as large a role. Conversely, perceptions about the Salinas administration, the state of the national economy, and personal economic well-being appear to be the best indicators of opposition voting. Of course, as the exit poll did not specifically ask about fear of

violence or disorder, the fear factor cannot be accurately measured.

Thus, the last two tables seem to suggest that the conservative vote might have been quite substantial. That is, many of those who voted (in free and fair elections) for Zedillo did so because of their perceptions about the state of the economy and the success of the Salinas project. As subsequent events revealed, these perceptions were built largely on a false foundation. After the election, the December 1994 devaluation of the peso raised suggestions that the government was manipulating foreign reserves to maintain a false peso-dollar ratio and to stimulate cheap imports. Later investigations unveiled fraud underlying many privatization sales; close friends of the Salinas administration gained unfair advantage in the purchase of national assets, thereby hurting the national economy in the long run (Celarier 1997; Wheat 1996). Unsavory and questionable aspects of the Salinas administration and the state of the economy were unknown to the voters when they made their decision. The lack of equal media access, the absence of financial accountability, and other non-election day elements created a climate favorable to Zedillo. Crude fraud-that which the electoral reforms focused on-did not occur, but complete electoral equality and transparency did not exist, either.

COMPARING THE 1988 AND 1994 RESULTS

Besides understanding who voted for Zedillo and why, a complete analysis of the 1994 elections must also include a comparison with the election results of 1988. Although the ultimate result was the same, the information in table 7 suggests important differences in the two electoral outcomes by comparing the relative success of each party across the nation.

In 1994 the PRI greatly improved its standing over 1988, winning first place in all the states and Mexico City. This result followed electoral trends seen in the 1991 Chamber of Deputies elections, when the PRI gained votes compared to the 1988 election. The PAN was also apparently a gainer in comparison to 1988: its standing as the second political force increased by 14 states. In contrast, the 1994 elections signaled a decline for the PRD. Unlike its tremendous showing in 1988 (under the banner of the Frente Democratica Nacional, FDN), in 1994 the PRD failed to win any state outright; and its position as the strongest opposition party disappeared in 9 states.

State election results reveal that the PRI had a poorer showing (in terms of percentage of votes) in only one state, Chiapas. The PAN increased its percentage of votes in every state and Mexico City, averaging a gain of 289.1 percent over its 1988 votes. In contrast, the PRD lost votes in 15 states and Mexico City (Mendez and Bolivar 1995, 54).

Thus, while the PRI maintained power, the political landscape did change. The PAN emerged as the dominant opposition party, and the PRD suffered setbacks across the nation. This dramatic transformation in the PRD's role may not be attributable at all to the electoral reforms of 1994; instead it may reflect government propaganda against the PRD, public association of the PRD with the EZLN, poor campaigning by the PRD, or voters' rejection of PRD tactics and policies. Furthermore, the period between 1988 and 1994 saw a number of damaging divisions and quarrels erupt

within the PRD. While the PAN also had its share of internal fragmentation, state-level victories and internal party cohesion helped to strengthen it during Salinas's sexenio.

It would be wrong, however, to look to the election results of 1994 and predict a move toward two-party electoral competition between the PAN and the PRI. As analysts have noted (e.g., Klesner 1995), Mexico is evolving into a more complicated electoral alignment. While the fortunes of the PRD declined relative to its 1988 performance, the PRD is still a strong force in electoral politics. The 1994 election results (and those of subsequent elections) do suggest that the PAN and the PRD offer a strong challenge to the PRI in different regions of the country. The PAN provides the strongest opposition in the north, while the PRD is the major contender in central Mexico (for example, in the State of Mexico).

Table 7. Final Standing of the Three Main Parties, 1988 and 1994 (by number of states won)

	1988	1994
First Place		
PRI	27	32
PAN	0	0
PRD/PFN	5	0
Second Place		
PRI	5	0
PAN	11	25
PRD/FDN	16	7
Third Place		
PRI	0	0
PAN	21	7
PRD	11	25

Source: Méndez and Bolívar 1995.

Assessing the 1994 results offers an opportunity to evaluate the dynamic relationship between electoral reform and election results. Clearly, electoral reform opens the door for opposition party victories. These victories, in turn, can stimulate further electoral reform; as the number and importance of opposition leaders increases, their ability to challenge and change the system increases. The resulting reform then further strengthens the potential for even more dramatic election results and opposition victories. Thus, democratization rests on both electoral reform and election results: Mexico enhances its democratic character as the rules governing elections improve and the opposition victories increase.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1994 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A detailed analysis of the Mexican presidential election of 1994 illuminates many aspects that a simple fixation on the outcome-yet another PRI victory-may hide. As this study has demonstrated, this election teaches three significant lessons. First, the election undermined several myths about the Mexican political system. Second, it highlighted the unconven- tional nature of Mexican democratization (as compared to other countries). And third, it underscored the importance of electoral context as well as election day behavior in the quest for free and fair elections. For years, certain "truths" had underscored assessments about Mexican politics. These assertions guided interpretations about the char- acter of Mexican politics and the possibility of reform; yet the 1994 presidential election challenged these assumptions. Seven of the most important are the following.

***Abstentionism favored the PRI**. About 70 percent of the Mexican electorate voted, and the PRI won.

* **If given a chance, the Mexican public would reject the PRI because they were tired of one-party domination**. While prob- lems remain, the public was given an opportunity to choose. For various reasons, 50.18 percent chose the PRI and a continuation of one-party domination.

* **If given a real alternative, voters would forsake the PRI**. As table 3 demonstrates, the PRI was able to hold on to voters despite genuine electoral choices. This suggests that PRI party affiliation may be meaningful for a number of voters.

* **Electoral credibility in Mexico rests on a PRI loss**. That is, people believe elections are free and fair only when the PRI loses. Most observers, analysts, and the Mexican public agreed that the presidential election of 1994 was-for the most part-fair and free on election day; and the PRI won.

* **The traumatic events of 1994 would lead to a rejection of the PRI.** This "myth" persisted because the party's one sure claim, political stability, had been destroyed. The fear vote suggests that political trauma may have benefited rather than hurt the PRI because voters believed that a continuation of PRI government might signal less upheaval.

* **The strongest national opponent of the PRI was the PRD.** As the comparison between 1988 and 1994 shows, the PRD lost national momentum in the 1994 election. The PAN, mirroring its state-level advances, moved into position as the main national-level opponent of the PRI. Overall assessment of election results reveals, however, that the PRI faced significant opposition from both parties-in different regions of the country.

* **The PRI wins through ballot box fraud**. While some election day irregularities were reported-271 by the Alianza Civica-the con- duct of the election was by all accounts the fairest in contemporary history. The 1994 election proves, though, that the political environ- ment, including restricted media access and the absence of financial accountability, was a key to PRI

victories.

The August 1994 election proved all of these truisms false-on the national level. Yet this does not mean that these assumptions about Mexican politics are entirely invalid. The 1995 state elections in Tabasco and Yucatan suggest that these tenets may continue to apply at the state level.4 There, competition is high, ballot box fraud is not rare, and extralegal electoral activity continues. The traditional fight against election day alchemy, it would appear, persists at the state level. Indeed, one of the key implications of the 1994 election may be that the dynamics of national- level and state-level elections in Mexico differ in important ways.

This leads to the second lesson derived from the 1994 presidential election. Mexican democratization does not appear to follow the pattern observed in other Latin American cases. Scholars must change their understanding (or use) of the concept of political transition in reference to the Mexican case. For the most part, a political transition is perceived as a sudden, dramatic change in regime type. This is normally signaled by change in the executive office at the national level (see, e.g., Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986; Schmitter 1995). Mexico is unique: its transition-if the same word may be used-is proceeding very slowly and is occurring, for the most part, at the state level. Victories by opposition parties continue to take place in municipal and state governments. These victories are fundamentally altering the political terrain of Mexico, enhancing democ- racy and pushing the overall system toward regime democratization. Electoral reform helps ensure that electoral competition is genuine, thereby enhancing the prospects for opposition victory. As opposition leaders win more state offices, the power, prestige, and resources of the opposition parties increase, thereby aiding the parties in their national- level struggle.

Scholarly attention to Mexican democratization has focused on the presidential contest. This largely reflects the importance of the office in Mexico's regime ofpresidencialismo (see, e.g., Cothran 1994). The system will never change, goes the conventional wisdom, until the dominant political office-the presidency-is won by the opposition. Events in Mexico suggest, though, that the presidency may be captured only when- because of state-level victories-the office loses its predominant extralegal role.5 This change, combined with the augmented resources and power gained by state-level victories, means that an opposition victory in the presidency may mark not the beginning of a true transformation of the political system and an end to presidencialismo but rather the end of such a process.

As more attention focuses on the state level, a better understanding of the dynamics of Mexican democratization emerges. The importance of party organization, political resources, campaign financing, and local-level bosses emerges. Furthermore, increased state and local electoral compe- tition has dramatically heightened divisions within the PRI between reformers and old-style politicians, setting the stage for an unraveling of the official party-a key component in the regime's power base. For many political observers, the Zedillo victory implies that Mexican democratization must wait until the year 2000. The process, however, is ongoing. Victories at the state level (confirmed by subsequent PAN victories in Jalisco, Baja California Norte, Chihuahua, and other states, as well as electoral problems in Tabasco and Chiapas) contribute significantly to Mexican democratization. The reforms of 1994, while insufficient, did move Mexico closer to an operational democracy in terms of election

day behavior. The flaws in the reforms, moreover, provide valuable lessons for proponents of democracy as well as students of democratization.

The third and final lesson to be learned from the 1994 Mexican presidential election is that many factors contribute to democratization. Focusing on a single obstacle to democracy-such as ballot box fraud- may obscure the realities underpinning nondemocratic governments. Efforts to further electoral reform in Mexico following the 1994 contest reveal that democratization activists noted this lesson. In 1996, negotiations between the government and opposition forces resulted in an agreement that called for increased television time for opposition parties, tighter controls on campaign spending, and an end to government control over the IFE. When submitted to the legislature, however, the sweeping reform bill was weakened. The use of district-level nongovernmental workers to oversee elections was postponed until 1998, and the sanctions for violating campaign financing laws were reduced. Thus, while attempts were made to reform the electoral context, these important changes were challenged. The battle for democratization shifted-but the fight continues.

This final lesson may be useful to other countries undergoing democratic transitions and consolidations. The experience of Mexico demonstrates that issues such as campaign financing, media access, manipulation of information, and control over public resources must be addressed if progress toward democracy is to take place. Reforms in these areas, though in many ways more complex than ballot box security, mark a deepening of the process of democratization. Creating conditions in which citizens exercise free choice in the democratic selection of leaders demands more than preventing fraud on election day.

Notes

1. Pronasol and Procampo are two government programs that disburse money to citizens. Pronasol grants money to local groups to finance improvement projects, which can range from roads to sewers to schools. Procampo has an agrarian emphasis; it distributes land and money from the national government to campesinos.

2. It was revealed in June 1995 that the PRI candidate for governor, Roberto Madrazo Pintado, spent about US$70 million on his campaign, approximately 60 times the amount allowed by Mexican law. See, e.g., LaJornada 1995b; Juarez 1995.

3. It has been suggested that a needed devaluation of the Mexican peso was postponed until after the 1994 election so as to avoid an economic slowdown that would have hurt the PRI's electoral chances. See Whitt 1996; Ros 1995.

4. Like the charges about overspending in the Tabasco election, complaints about ballot stuffing and voter fraud arose when the PRI defeated the PAN in statewide elections in the Yucatan. See La Jornada 1995a.

5. For instance, pressure is increasing on the executive to release control of tax revenue to the states. This challenge to the fiscal power of the presidency is spearheaded by opposition governors (Black 1997).

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