



Courting Democracy in Mexico

Party Strategies and Electoral Institutions

TODD A. EISENSTADT

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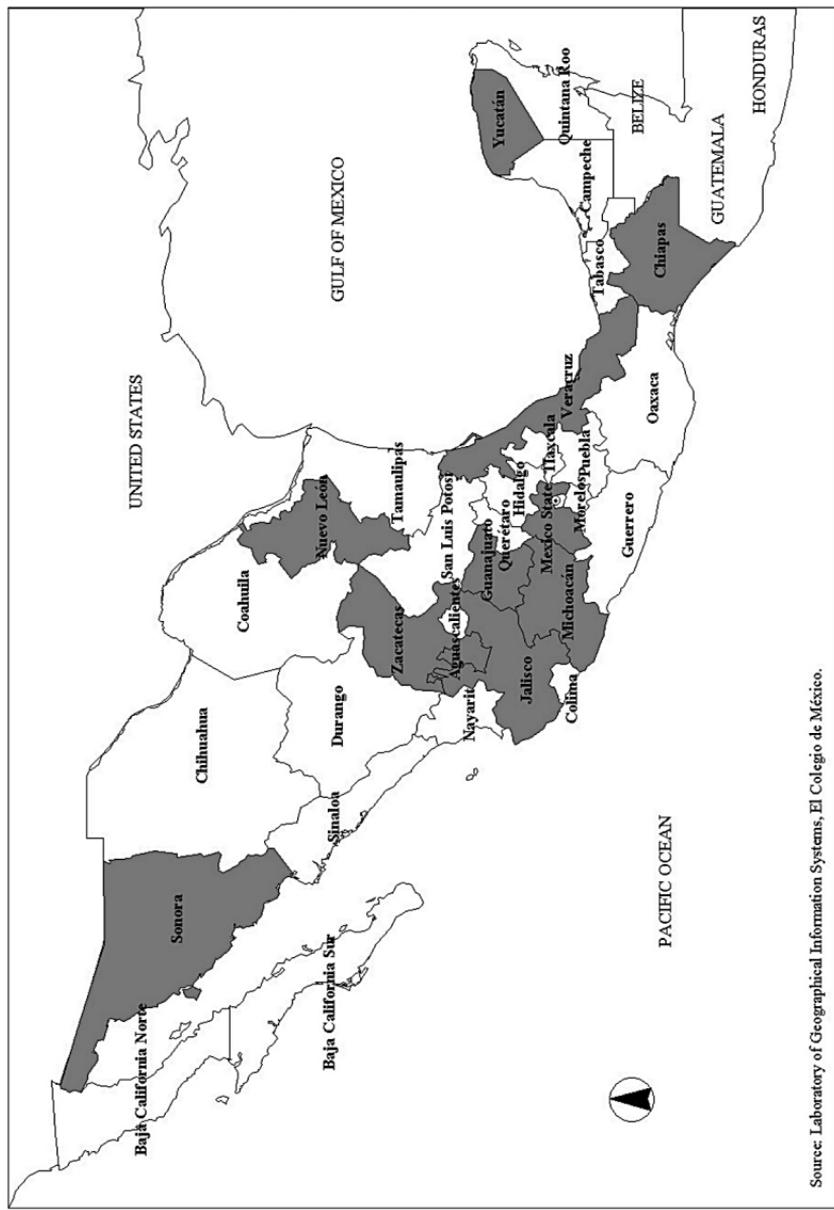
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This book is perhaps the most comprehensive explanation to date of Mexico's gradual transition to democracy, written from a novel perspective that pits opposition activists' postelectoral conflicts against their usage of regime-constructed electoral courts at the center of the democratization process. It addresses the puzzle of why, during key moments of Mexico's twenty-seven-year democratic transition, opposition parties failed to use autonomous electoral courts established to mitigate the country's often violent postelectoral disputes, despite formal guarantees of court independence from the Party of the Institutional Revolution, Mexico's ruling party for seventy-one years preceding the watershed 2000 presidential elections. Drawing on hundreds of author interviews throughout Mexico over a five-year period and extensive original archival research, the author explores choices by the rightist National Action Party and the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution between postelectoral conflict resolution through electoral courts and traditional routes – mobilization and bargaining with the Party of the Institutional Revolution authoritarians. He argues that these mobilizations divided the ruling party and facilitated the National Action Party's watershed presidential victory in 2000.

Todd A. Eisenstadt is Assistant Professor of Government at American University, where he directs the four-year "Mexico Elections Project" with the United States Agency for International Development and the University of New Hampshire. Formerly an assistant professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire, Eisenstadt has been a visiting scholar at Harvard University's David A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego. He also spent two years as a Visiting Professor at El Colegio de México, in Mexico City. His current research focuses on comparative electoral reform, on the role of international development assistance in political development, and on public opinion of Mexico's indigenous communities regarding integration with the Mexican state. He is the author of several articles on Mexico's political development in journals such as *Democratization*, the *International Political Science Review*, and *Latin American Politics and Society* and is a past recipient of Fulbright, National Security Education Program, and Rotary International Foundation fellowships. A frequent consultant on democracy and governance matters, Dr. Eisenstadt was an award-winning police-beat reporter for the *Nashville Tennessean* newspaper and a congressional researcher on foreign affairs issues before receiving his Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, San Diego, in 1998.



Source: Laboratory of Geographical Information Systems, El Colegio de México.

Map of Mexico Indicating the Ten States in Statistical Sample.

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To my parents, Melvin and Pauline Eisenstadt

Their love, support, civic spirit, and engagement with ideas have provided a deep well of identity and inspiration that I will draw upon for my entire life.

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Acknowledgments

Prior to the 1990s, the lack of credible data rendered the study of elections in Mexico more of an art than a science. Three reasons were lucidly stated by Bruhn (1997, 333):

First, since one party won every election, many scholars questioned the usefulness of the effort to construct “models” of the vote. Second, most analysts believed that pervasive fraud marked Mexican elections, inflating vote results even when the outcome would have been the same with or without manipulation. . . . Third, the limitations of demographic data made the validity of independent variables questionable. . . .

Each of these reasons made information shortcomings insurmountable for the period prior to the mid-1980s, and created challenges for researching later federal elections and, especially, municipal elections.

Mere imprecision of information occasionally gave way to obfuscation of the facts by officials, as I sought a disaggregated presentation of the 1988 federal electoral results, including opposition poll coverage data, to improve the accuracy of my calculations. The task seemed quite simple, as Baez Rodriguez (1994) asserted that the “close to 55 thousand acts from these elections are available, through a computerized retrieval system, in the National Archive (21).” However, inquiries to more than a dozen high-level officials involved in Salinas’s electoral certification, the Chamber of Deputies’ Electoral College of 1988, and the Baez Rodriguez book project, rendered only a written admission by the director of the Central Historical Archive that “we do not have said items in this institution, and thus cannot provide them for your consultation” (personal communication from Hector Madrid Mulia). Even if copies of these acts had been located, it

is widely believed that they would have been altered from the originals. They remain extremely controversial more than a decade after Carlos Salinas (1988–94) took office under the postelectoral cloud of 1988. The experience taught me that even at the federal level, there would be no gleaning of data from Mexico's pretransition period; that data variance since the late 1980s would have to suffice.

If the politization of electoral data hindered scholars of federal elections, they were even more of a hindrance in studying local races, for which researchers could never get full information. And if it was difficult just to get electoral results, it was even more of a challenge to gather information about postelectoral conflicts and their legal and extralegal resolutions. This by way of apologizing in advance for some of the unavoidable data-collection shortcomings of this work and most others seeking to measure indices of political opening in semiauthoritarian regimes. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for any errors in this text.

I have racked up a huge number of intellectual debts in the course of writing this book, which are easy to acknowledge but hard to repay. First, I thank the advisors of the dissertation from which this book finally emerged. My doctoral advisor and thesis chair, Wayne Cornelius, has offered continuous support and encouragement every step of the way. My image of him during our 1994 observation of Mexico's federal elections is the one that sticks with me; seeking shelter in concrete pipes from pouring rain that had washed out one of the largest slums of the Valley of Mexico, he nonetheless insisted we continue patrolling polling stations for signs of electoral fraud, and gauging voter turnout. A foremost authority on Mexican politics and a true believer in field research, his insistence on rolling up sleeves pervades this work. Co-chair Stephan Haggard impressed upon me the imperative of striving to extend the comparative purchase of my study. A masterful and dedicated theorist, he constantly pushed me to revise. Elisabeth Gerber made statistics accessible, encouraged me to represent problems in quantitative terms, and enthusiastically saw my work through. Her ease in transferring concepts to equations helped me out of several jams. I am also thankful to dissertation committee members James Holston, Matthew Shugart, and Peter H. Smith, who exposed me to a wide range of approaches, but with similarly exacting standards. Robert Pastor generously offered his perspectives as a renowned researcher of electoral institutions and democratic transitions, and as an expert policy practitioner and electoral observer.

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