Campaigning in an Electoral Authoritarian Regime

The Case of Mexico

Joy Langston and Scott Morgenstern

“The PRI was a true party only during political campaigns, but there were many campaigns in Mexico.”

A Former PRI Federal Deputy

Recent trends in Latin American politics have generated a renewed interest in electoral authoritarian regimes, systems in which autocratic leaders allow independent political parties to organize and win seats in the legislature but do not afford the opposition the possibility of taking control of government. Electoral authoritarian regimes run elections that fall well short of the ideal “instruments of democracy.” Despite this interest in the role that elections play in autocratic regime maintenance, almost no one has studied campaigning under these conditions. This article examines congressional campaigns run by Mexico’s Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) under hegemonic party rule to understand how electioneering helped one of the world’s longest lasting electoral authoritarian regimes (1929 to 1997) to survive. It finds that campaigning provides autocratic regimes information about their constituents and also generates linkages between local and national leaders that facilitate voter mobilization.

In the 1960s and 1970s many authors concentrated on why autocratic and totalitarian regimes invested so much money, organizational skills, and time in noncompetitive elections. Even the most closed regimes organized elaborate electoral rituals involving poll watchers, vote counters, and vote mobilizers, as well as complicated electoral rules. While renewed interest has been shown in noncompetitive elections, almost nothing has been written on campaigning in an electoral authoritarian context. But if winning votes is fundamental to autocratic regimes that hold elections, then campaigning to win these votes should be a topic of research as well. Research on campaigning under noncompetitive conditions has implications for modern comparative studies of electoral authoritarian regimes around the world because it elucidates how ambitious regime candidates and leaders must reach out to, organize, and mobilize voters and local leaders, even when electoral outcomes seem to be a foregone conclusion.
The organization of elections can be understood as devising electoral rules and institutions, registering voters, printing ballots, setting up polling stations, and transporting and counting votes. Campaigning for these votes constitutes a different aspect of the overall election process. It involves communicating with, making promises to, and mobilizing potential voters. The vast majority of voters in autocratic regimes must be convinced to come to the polling station on election day and vote for one option over another, as they cannot be forced to do so at gun point. Many of the functions attributed to elections under autocratic regimes, especially information gathering and voter mobilization, were in fact carried out during the course of campaigning.

Specific works on the more general topic of electoral management under noncompetitive conditions offer tantalizing glimpses of what constituted campaigning under totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. However, they do not study explicitly how parties organize and run their quests to win voter support. But if totalitarian and authoritarian regimes spend millions of dollars and man-hours on what can be considered elections with little to no choice, then it is fundamental to study how exactly they canvass for votes and how they convince citizens to come to the polls.

This article examines the question of autocratic campaigning through congressional electioneering tactics under one of the most successful autocratic regimes in recent history, led by the PRI in Mexico. By examining how the PRI canvassed under autocratic conditions, one can better understand how the party searched out support from voters, how it linked together local and national leaders, how the regime mobilized voters, and what role patronage and clientelism played in regime maintenance.

Congressional campaigning under PRI hegemony served two interrelated goals, information gathering and voter mobilization. The PRI deputy candidates were sent out to campaign in their districts to gather information on the needs of the local leaders and voters, so they could distribute scarce resources more effectively. Campaigning also provided information to national party leaders on the mobilizational and organizational capacity of their politicians. The hegemonic party needed this information for different reasons. Because electoral results were manipulated by lower level politicians and because public opinion polling did not exist for congressional races, there was no independent picture of the party’s standing in any given district. Furthermore, getting voters to the polls in a system in which elections did not determine the winner was not automatic; rather, it involved the participation of local leaders who could control blocks of voters. The PRI’s federal deputy candidates had to renew or construct links between local and national elites through the distribution of selective goods.

To meet the goals of voter mobilization and information gathering, PRI deputy candidates did not make promises of how they would try to influence national policymaking. Rather, during the campaign they renewed alliances with local leaders by acting as brokers between community leaders and government officials, distributing scarce public resources in a selective manner to local notables and voters before the election. In addition to this activity, called gestoria, the candidates organized mass rallies, which were a crucial signalling device for party leaders. If the candidates were actively campaigning, then it was expected that they would be able to draw hundreds of supporters to their events.
and thus pull voters to the polls on election day. The candidates were also responsible for communication and advertising: painting walls, hanging posters, and speaking to the local newspapers. Finally, the deputy hopefuls took care of mobilizing voters and poll watchers on election day. They hired buses, fed voters, and monitored those in charge of the polling stations. The different aspects of noncompetitive campaigning in Mexico helped meet the different goals of the hegemonic regime. They allowed the national leadership to glean information on local leaders, voters, and the abilities of their politicians. This information was used to distribute selectively resources that renewed alliances with local leaders and to bring voters to the polling stations.

Both institutional and Mexico-specific studies provide overwhelming expectations for party-centered campaigns during the long period of PRI hegemony. However, interviews and electoral data suggest that many candidates organized and managed their local campaign efforts themselves and in many instances could not rely on party resources to support their district-level campaigns, either because the party was weak or because the local notables were not satisfied with the candidate the national leadership had imposed. Yet clearly this type of campaigning was not candidate-centered. The candidates’ personal image did not matter much to voters; the candidates could not self-nominate; and they did not finance their campaigns. These hybrid alternatives to party or candidate-centered efforts can be called candidate-managed campaigns. This type of candidate-managed campaigns is a logical strategy given the goals of the hegemonic regime and the party’s structure.

Two factors explain why the theoretical expectations about centralized campaigning were not met in Mexico, at least during the last two decades of PRI hegemony (from the 1970s to the early 1990s). First, while the PRI ran elections at all levels of government and won them with huge margins, district-level vote return data from the 1970s through the end of the 1980s still show large variations in the PRI’s support both among districts across the nation during a given election and across time in a given district. This vote pattern meant that local politics mattered in Mexico, despite the PRI’s overwhelming power to win elections. Mexico was a complex, regionalized nation, whose citizens had different local concerns and reacted to national political and economic trends in different ways, and so the PRI obligated deputy candidates to campaign in order to discover and meet some of the demands of the widely differing regions.

Second, while the party’s three sectors, the workers’ (dominated by the CTM), the peasants’ (CNC), and the popular (CNOP), were important in organizing campaigns in many areas, these sectors were not as strong in mobilizing voters as generally portrayed in academic studies or PRI propaganda. Biographical and interview data on PRI deputy candidates show that the sectors did not dominate candidate selection and were not influential in mobilizing voters across many of Mexico’s single member districts. Because of this sectoral weakness on the ground, deputy candidates were obligated to pick up the slack.

Much has been made of the importance of clientelism and patronage in maintaining the autocratic PRI regime in power. The PRI used several forms of spending to maintain its hold over executive and legislative offices: manipulation of the federal budget; large-
scale social spending projects; poverty relief programs; and the particularistic exchange of excludable goods, such as public lighting, paved roads, water mains, schools, and more police. This article complements these works on the party’s ability to spend and manipulate public programs for electoral gains, by focusing on how campaigning was an important method of delivering many of these particularistic benefits, given the spotty sectoral coverage across the nation’s districts and variable local electoral results.

Theoretical Expectations and Observable Implications

Scholars have distinguished two campaign archetypes: party-centered and candidate-centered campaigns. In party-centered campaigns the party is responsible for basic electoral tasks, using its workers to communicate with and mobilize the electorate, select the candidates, and pay for their campaigns. The candidates and their images are largely unimportant to voters, who respond more to the party’s ability to deliver selective benefits or the party’s label. In candidate-centered campaigns the individual politicians run their races based on their images. They are responsible for their electoral strategy (and success). They hire their own election staff, largely raise their own campaign funds, hire opinion-polling experts, conduct direct mailings, and decide how they will approach the voters.

Carey and Shugart lay out many of the institutional variables that they believe can help predict whether one should see more party- or candidate-based campaigns, such as control over candidate selection, campaign financing, ballot structure, and the form of representation. Using the variables presented by Carey and Shugart, together with studies of the PRI, one should expect party-based campaigning under Mexico’s authoritarian regime. The PRI national party leadership controlled the selection of all deputy candidates, both for single member districts and list seats, and it financed campaigns (together with the governors and the sectors in certain districts), while the Mexican constitution prohibits consecutive reelection of legislators. If the party controls candidate nominations in a no-reelection context, then federal deputies cannot appeal to their voters personally to continue their political careers in the same post. Because PRI politicians were forced to rotate posts every three to six years, and because the party controlled which politician won the right to compete for which post, the individual politicians were dependent on the party.

Most studies of the PRI’s organization also suggest that elections should have been party-centered. The PRI was organized around mass organizations that mobilized their members at election time. These organizations, however, were coopted by the party and thus operated with limited autonomy. The PRI, in sum, had a very centrally organized party structure.

This combination of institutions and organizational structure has two testable implications. First, there should have been a sectoral affiliate in every district working to mobilize voters. Second, deputy candidates from the time period should report that the party structures were primarily responsible for the organization of campaign events and voter mobilization.
The evidence, however, does not bear out these implications. A puzzle then arises: given the party’s centralization, why did the PRI leaders allow their legislative candidates autonomy to run local campaigns? Localized, candidate-managed campaigns were important to the PRI for two main reasons. First, the party did not earn consistent support in all districts and thus needed visible campaigns with a local focus to learn about constituent demands and assure solid electoral returns. Further, the corporatist sectors did not enjoy coverage across the 300 majority districts, nor did they control all candidacies. Many candidates, therefore, could not depend on help from the sectors. Thus, in order to glean information on voters and local politicians and to maintain the local-national links that foster voter mobilization, the party sent deputy candidates to canvass.

How Did They Do It? Local Candidate-Managed Campaigning in Mexico

This study of campaigning under the PRI’s hegemonic rule is based on over thirty interviews with former PRI deputy candidates and party leaders who served from the early 1970s until the early 1990s. PRI candidates who had won and lost their districts were contacted, as well as those from urban and rural districts, and from all regions of the nation. Candidate interviews were complemented with discussions with party leaders because of the natural tendency of candidates to exaggerate their role in electoral races. It is important to delineate here the temporal boundaries of this study. Most of those interviewed were candidates in the 1980s, because of generational turnover. Furthermore, the biographical data on deputies are available only from the 1980s, while electoral returns data are available from the early 1970s. Therefore, this article speaks of campaigning in late hegemony (the 1970s to the early 1990s) because of the lack of data on prior decades. The interviews uncovered a number of tendencies. First, almost all chamber candidates reported that the national leadership forced them to stay in the districts for as long as two months. The candidates also explained that they were responsible for organizing campaign events, making alliances with local leaders, connecting with mayors and governors, and, most important, brokering between the local, state, and national government offices and the local community leaders. Many of the candidates’ duties were organized in conjunction with mayors and sectoral groups, but in many areas, the sectors were not strong or were unwilling to support the candidate. Moreover, even where the sectors were present, the candidates were ultimately responsible for organizing the campaign.

The interviews did make clear that these candidates had not competed in U.S.-style candidate-based campaigns. The candidates’ personal qualities did not translate directly into votes, but the candidates’ skills were important in identifying district residents’ needs and making alliances with local leaders who were capable of delivering votes. Thus, rather than party or candidate centered campaigns, there were localized candidate-managed campaigns. These candidates did not generally offer issue platforms to differentiate themselves with regard to economic conditions or social issues. Almost all candidates interviewed stated that district voters were not interested in national issues in congressional elections but rather in securing selective government goods to remedy
neighborhood deficiencies before the election.

Rather than offer programmatic platforms, the deputy candidates acted as brokers between the community leaders who could deliver votes and the decision-making or resource rich agencies at all levels of government, from local and state governments to the national bureaucracy. That is, they provided *gestoría*. The keys to the legislative campaigns were small meetings with community leaders and mass rallies around the district. Small meetings were organized to renew the alliances between local leaders and the PRI regime in Mexico City, using the deputy candidate as a go-between. Local leaders included those with money, such as business owners, and those with neighborhood influence, such as leaders of the markets and, in certain districts, local corporatist leaders. A former CEN member, Hector Hugo Olivares, explained that candidates used these local leaders to construct what he called “a network of agreements.” The candidate’s team found “natural leaders” in the community such as doctors, priests, pharmacists, and teachers, who were on good terms with many of the residents, and recruited them to work for their campaigns. These local notables were also vital communication lifelines in that no one knew the problems of the neighborhood better and the regime was able to uncover any political problems through them.

These local community leaders were also crucial because they were in charge of the demand side of *gestoría*. They asked for a paved road, sewage pipes, or public lighting and would mobilize voters in return. One deputy stated that women in working class or poorer neighborhoods could guarantee up to 100 voters each and were responsible for setting up meetings and distributing the goods that the federal candidate could procure.

Most of these services were supposed to be provided by either the municipal or state government, but the federal congress, yet these offices were often unwilling or unable to deliver public goods, except during campaign season. The deputy candidates had to push elected leaders at the municipal and state levels to distribute some of these goods before the elections in a selective fashion, that is, to prospective voting blocks in return for votes. Another former leader of the CEN and former deputy stated “there was little brokering done once the deputy took office.” A former federal deputy put it simply: campaigns were important in the construction of alliances between local and national leaders of the regime. “The PRI would not have been as hegemonic without these alliances. It would have been simply a regime built on acts of force.”

Gestoría before elections was only one way the PRI regime primed the electoral pump. Others included increased spending on public works by both governors and the federal government, the distribution of subsidized goods, such as seeds, credits, and other materials, and large-scale social programs such as PRONASOL.

To supplement the small meetings with local leaders, PRI candidates relied on mass rallies to publicize the elections. These rallies were important for several reasons. First, they showed public enthusiasm for the candidate and the party. Second, they demonstrated organizational abilities to more senior party leaders. Finally, they constituted a trial run for the mobilization efforts on election day. The rallies involved busing hundreds of poorer citizens to the site and making them sit through the speeches. In districts where a corporatist sector was involved, the candidate could rely on these organizations to plan
the rally. But where a sector was absent, the candidate’s team of friends, family, or hired students helped organize the rallies, often working with the mayor of the locality.

The advertising campaign consisted of painted walls (bardas), flyers and posters with the candidate’s name and picture, and interviews with both radio stations and newspapers. The PRI candidates had enormous advantages in terms of communication. Because the PRI candidate had more money than his opposition rival, he could pay for low cost advertising such as posters and billboards, while the newspapers and radio by and large covered only PRI candidates, ignoring opposition rivals. The legendary bardas were an important element of the struggle to reach voters in the absence of more modern forms of communication, and they were painted by the candidate’s personal team or sectoral volunteers. Because opposition parties often had no other form of reaching voters with the names and colors of their parties, conflicts erupted constantly over who had the right to paint where, with roving bands of local PRI workers painting over opposition bardas.

An important trait of the campaigns under noncompetitive conditions was the lack of television appeals, thus rendering the campaigns relatively inexpensive. The costs of the actual campaign were comprised of flyers, trucks for the campaign team, and the food and drink for those who assisted the mass rallies, but candidates did not have to pay for most radio or newspaper advertisements. Instead, PRI deputies were interviewed by the local media outlets (either radio or newspapers) that were usually government supported and simply spoke of their commitment to the district’s voters. According to interviews, the PRI’s National Executive Committee (CEN) did not pay all the costs of local campaigning because the governors paid for a large share, while in sectoral districts the corporatist organizations supported the candidate with campaign resources and manpower.

The PRI deputy candidates were also responsible for voter mobilization in nonsectoral districts, hiring buses and cars to transport voters to the polling stations and feeding both the voters and the poll watchers on election day. The candidate had to assure that the local leaders lived up to their end of the bargain. According to former legislator José María Ramón, local leaders got resources from the deputies using the mayors as go-betweens and then herded their people into houses early on election day in order to assure that they voted. If these leaders won their precinct handily, they might be offered more benefits. In addition, the candidate was in charge of finding and placing party representatives for the voting stations. All parties had the right to have a representative present at the polling booths. However, only the PRI was able to provide this coverage, an enormous advantage in terms of the capacity to “protect” their votes. This was an important consideration because ballot boxes were often stuffed while in transit to the district counting center.

It is important to note that massive fraud was costly to commit. Vote stealing did not just occur naturally: someone had to both organize and pay for the famous party mapaches (raccoons) to steal an election (change the outcome) or pad the totals. It was much cheaper and easier for the candidate to win the election without the use of the party’s fraud experts. Moreover, the mapaches could actually commit fraud against their own party’s candidates before the age of opinion polling. The PRI fraud specialist would go to a district, inform the PRI candidate that he was about to lose the election, and demand money to mobilize enough voters or steal enough votes to carry the election. Because
there was no independent picture of voter preferences, many times the PRI candidates were forced to pay for the services of the party mapache. Furthermore, if the fraud was too egregious, opposition parties, in particular the PAN, could organize in protest and did so even before the more famous cases in Chihuahua and other northern cities in the 1980s. These opposition protests caused the national leadership time and trouble to resolve. However, if the candidate had been doing his job and criss-crossing the district and successfully offering his services as a broker, then he could be more assured that his campaign efforts were enough to avoid needing massive electoral fraud.

Evidence for Localism in District-Level Electoral Data

To substantiate the theory that these candidate-managed campaigns were the result of electoral and informational exigencies, two sorts of evidence are presented. First, the volatility in district-level electoral returns was analyzed, and a high degree of inconsistency was uncovered across both time and districts. Second, it is demonstrated that corporatist coverage across districts was spotty at best.

The role of local factors in determining the PRI’s vote totals is first evident in an analysis of district swings, which are defined as the change in returns from one election to the next in a given district. Table 1 details the swing for the PRI plus its satellites for the years 1970–1994. The first three rows of the table detail the great number of districts in which the PRI’s support varied substantially from one election to the next. Between 1979 and 1982, for example, the PRI’s vote total changed by at least 10 percent in sixty-five districts, and in six districts it saw a movement of at least 20 percent. Between 1988 and 1991 the statistics suggest an even more pronounced importance of local politics.

Table 1 PRI Swing Vote, 1970–91*

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<tr>
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<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swing &gt; [20]</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Average]</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
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<td>St. Dev</td>
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<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>-31.9</td>
<td>-18.2</td>
<td>-41.1</td>
<td>-29.0</td>
<td>-34.8</td>
<td>-31.1</td>
<td>-40.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Districts</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>300</td>
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*Includes PRI, the PPS, and the PARM, except in the 1988 elections, when these two parties were independent of the PRI. Some data are missing from the 1970-76 data so the total number of districts included in the analysis is slightly below the 197 total districts. The row of averages is calculated as the average of the absolute values, while the Standard Deviation is calculated on the raw figures.
The marked increase in the swing (and the local vote, explained below) connected with the 1988 election is clearly related to the challenge to Carlos Salinas’s presidential candidacy from within the PRI. The fact that the district voters reacted to this national issue in dissimilar ways, however, is evidence in support of the role of local political forces.

To analyze further the electoral data a “components of variance model” developed by Morgenstern and Potthoff was also utilized. Like the swing analysis, this model quantifies the degree to which a party’s success is consistent across districts, which Morgenstern and Swindle label the local vote. The model has an important advantage over the swing, however, in that it separates out the variance in a party’s support across districts as well as change in the party’s average support across time, factors that bias the simpler measure. Mathematically, the local vote is the residual variance of electoral returns once accounting for the average support of a party across districts and the party’s average movement across time (see Appendix for details). The rationale behind the model is that, if the change in a party’s returns in all districts is similar, then national forces must be driving the results. By contrast, when a party’s fortunes vary widely across districts, local forces must play a role in the elections. In sum, the local vote provides a measure of a party’s support that is attributable to local factors.

It is possible to run this model on any set of two or more elections where district boundaries are consistent. Thus, analyses are provided for each pair of elections (excluding years when district boundaries changed, such as 1979) between 1967 and 1991, as well as larger groups of elections. Breaking the elections into pairs allows a consideration of time trends, while the grouping provides better statistical accuracy because it analyzes a larger database.

The components of variance analysis confirms the evidence from the swing analysis, again showing that local politics were an important aspect of elections, at least between 1967 and 1991 (a trend that has continued through the 1990s and 2000s). In spite of the limited nature of competition overall, the analysis portrays a PRI confronted with wide variance in electoral support across districts and across time. Hence the PRI should have had a strong interest in district-level campaigns.

Specifically the analysis returned local vote scores of between 4.8 and 11.8 points for the years of the analysis (see Table 2). Since these numbers are standard deviations, they imply that in about two-thirds of the districts the part of the PRI’s vote attributable to local forces was within a range between 9.6 and 23.6 points. This range is substantial in comparative terms, and the significance is even more notable because the statistics also imply that for about one-sixth of the districts (around thirty-five districts before 1979 and fifty after that year) the vote attributable to local factors was at least ten points in most years.

Magaloni argues convincingly that the PRI regime fought to maintain large margins across the nation’s districts in order to deter elite ruptures, as ambitious politicians would not leave the PRI to run for other parties if the probability of winning a race was close to zero. If Magaloni is correct that authoritarian regime leaders wanted to secure more than a plurality victory in elections, these surprisingly high figures for the local vote during
the late part of the hegemonic period must have been recognized by and worrisome to the PRI. Clearly, one important way to confront these local vote counts was to obligate PRI deputy hopefuls to go to the constituents and local leaders and deliver state resources in a selective manner.

Evidence for Limited Sectoral Coverage

Traditional research on PRI hegemony focuses on the role of the three mass popular organizations or sectors as the crucial elements of the party’s mobilization capacity. The party used the sectors’ organizational capacity, sheer numbers, and coverage across the nation’s districts to mobilize voters and conduct campaigns in exchange for formal representation in the Labor Congress, Peasant, and Popular corporatist sectors (or in return for special favors for corporatist leaders). These studies, however, ignored an important issue: the PRI’s corporatist sectors could not provide electoral support in all areas. This limitation again supports the notion that the PRI needed to rely on candidate-managed campaigns.

While the organized mass associations might have been extremely important in wage negotiations and other areas, two pieces of evidence suggest that their weight in elections and mobilization was limited to specific districts and did not extend to the entire nation. First, multiple interviewees remarked that the sectors in their districts were either very weak or that they refused to aid the candidate if he or she were not a representative of that sector. Second, biographical data suggest that the sectors controlled only a limited number of candidacies. As a part of the deal with the party, sector leaders were supposedly allowed to name their members as candidates for federal deputies, as well as for municipal and state assemblymen posts. One of the testable hypotheses that can be derived from a model of strong corporatist authoritarianism is that sectoral candidates—those who were actually leaders or members of a sector—should have won most if not all of the federal congressional candidacies. If, on the other hand, most districts did not have candidates from one of the three mass-based groups tied to the PRI, then perhaps the role of the unions tied to the PRI in elections and campaigns has been exaggerated.

The sectoral affiliation numbers presented by Pacheco (1991) and Reyes del Campillo

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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<td>PAN</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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*Standard deviations from components of variance analysis
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(1992) are derived from official PRI documents and imply that all federal deputy candidates were members or leaders of one of the PRI’s three peak associations, because the party reported that each candidate (and winning deputy) sported a sectoral affiliation. However, in examining the professional backgrounds and trajectories of the federal deputies from three electoral cycles from the 1980s (1982, 1985, and 1988, the years for which information is available) one finds a different picture. El Diccionario Biográfico del Gobierno Mexicano provides information on professional background posts for federal deputies and clearly shows that the corporatist sectors were not the only winners in the federal deputy distribution. The figures presented in Table 3 show that, despite the reported affiliations of the deputies, many federal candidates did not come from sectoral groups, but rather were members of a state party faction or a group tied to a powerful federal bureaucrat or politician. The average of sectoral candidates across these three elections is only about 45 percent, far lower than the almost 100 percent reported by the PRI.

Table 3  True Group or Sectoral Affiliation of PRI Federal Deputies, (Average of 1982, 1985, and 1988)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group or Sector</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>National Party</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governor or State Faction</td>
<td>34.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Sectoral Total</td>
<td><strong>54.7</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peasant Sector</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Sector</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workers’ Sector</td>
<td>22.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sectoral Total</td>
<td><strong>45.3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Information or Opposition</td>
<td>7.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
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Table 4 is constructed around the idea of ownership of plurality single member districts across three congressional elections during the 1980s (1982, 1985, and 1988). If a sectoral leader, gubernatorial ally, or federal agency won the candidacy for a specific single member district in at least two of these three elections, then that sector or group is considered the “owner” of the district. That is, if a group could place one of its own in a district as a candidate over time, then it is assumed to hold a great deal of authority over this district, both in terms of candidate selection and in terms of responsibility for supporting the campaigns. The candidacies within the PRI were decided through a vertical, hierarchical decision-making process that included the secretary of the Gobernación, the president of the CEN, and, of course, the president of Mexico. So district ownership was an accepted practice in the highest reaches of the PRI.
According to Table 4, only 32 percent of the districts in the 1980s were “owned” by one of the three sectors of the PRI, while the governors or state party factions were able to win candidacies for their personal supporters in the lower house in 25 percent of the 300 districts across electoral cycles, a political reality that tends to be ignored by the corporatist studies cited above. High level bureaucrats and politicians from the federal government were able to place candidates consistently in over 11 percent of the districts, and 29 percent of the districts were distributed to different groups across the three electoral cycles.

Because over 32 percent of the districts were owned by corporatist sectors, it is important to understand how campaigning worked in them. According to interviews with both candidates and party leaders, candidates belonging to a sectoral district could rely on members of the mass organization in the area to carry out such tasks as organizing rallies and finding poll watchers. These candidates, however, were still responsible for winning votes. That is, they had to make sure alliances with local leaders of all sorts were renewed and voters were mobilized.

Table prepared by authors using the professional profiles taken from *El diccionario biográfico del gobierno mexicano*, eds. 1, 2, and 3 (Mexico City: Presidencia de la República, 1984, 1987, 1989). *If a sector held a district for at least two of the three elections, it is considered “owned.” Un-owned districts refer to districts in which there was a different sector or groups winning the candidacy for each of the three elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector or group</th>
<th>Owned Districts</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers’ Sector</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant Sector</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Sector</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total: Sector-owned districts</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State faction or governor ally</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal government owned districts</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total: Non-Sector Owned districts</strong></td>
<td><strong>110</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Un-owned districts*</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing observations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Districts (won 2/3 times)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of districts</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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If, however, the district was not owned by a sector, candidates that were either from a state faction or sent down by a federal bureaucrat could expect little help from the sectors in that district, assuming they had any real presence. In interview after interview, candidates and party leaders stressed that they received help from sectors only if they belonged to that sector or if they in effect paid for the work. Some politicians from other groups would receive help from corporatist allies, but this was often the exception, not the rule. These figures do not speak of a centralized, hierarchical party.
in which all of the partisan members work hand in hand for the collective good of party victory. Rather, sectors worked for their people in certain districts and did little to nothing in other areas. These figures also strengthen the claim that the three sectors and their local affiliates did not have blanket coverage across the nation’s districts.

The Weakness of the Territorial Structure of the PRI

If the corporatist bases of the party were weaker and less extensive than previously believed, then one should have expected the territorial base of the party’s organization to take up the slack. The PRI defines the territorial base as the precinct, district, municipal, and state committees, each with its own hierarchy and executive leadership team. However, the territorial structure of the party was often too weak to fill the gaps left by the corporatist structures. Many of those interviewed stressed how the district and precinct committees in many districts and municipalities were abandoned between elections. In sum, while no other party could come close to competing with the official party’s geographical coverage of its organization, the PRI’s presence between elections was surprisingly sparse, especially in more rural areas. Because the federal deputies were obligated to campaign every three years regardless of the electoral situation in their district, they played the role of party maintenance, communicating with local leaders and delivering scarce goods.

The difference in the territorial strength of the PRI seems to lie in whether governors were politically powerful or effective in their states, in which case they funneled funds through the municipal committees and kept them working politically, or whether they supported the candidate the CEN had sent down, in which case they allowed the PRI mayors to support the federal deputy campaigns with resources and manpower. The PRI’s governors were crucial players in the congressional campaigns and used their influence over mayors and the local party organization to assure local logistical support for PRI legislative candidates. Again, as in the sectoral districts, while the governor could help the deputy candidate with resources, it was the candidate himself who had to organize and manage his electioneering effort.

Conclusions: “While Elections Were a Farce, the Campaigns Were Not.”

Campaigns play different roles under electoral authoritarian conditions than they do in democratic regimes. Instead of dispersing information to rationally ignorant voters who will then choose between or among different electoral options, local, deputy-managed campaigning under PRI hegemony was designed so that the regime’s leaders could collect information on its far-flung citizenry and so that the candidates could renew local alliances through clientelistic exchange. Despite impressive electoral margins, variable district returns and a desire to inflate the difference between the first and second place finisher created incentives to maintain contacts, collect information, and distribute
selective resources in the nation’s hundreds of single member districts. The PRI’s sectoral and territorial structures, while far stronger than those of any other Mexican party, were not as all-encompassing as most scholars of Mexican politics believed. As a result, legislative campaigns were not fully party-based, but instead took a hybrid form. Under this candidate-managed system, the candidates had significant autonomy in running their campaigns, but their role was more to renew important contacts and generate information than to build a valuable personal image.

This discussion of Mexico may be applicable to many other systems. Leaders in other authoritarian regimes hold legitimating elections with little intention of using the results to determine who will govern. Rather, these elections contain much information and can allow government elites to deliver selective benefits to voters in exchange for support. This study thus sheds light on at least one organizational scheme for electoral authoritarian regimes.

Appendix: The Components of Variance Model

Morgenstern and Potthoff present a model that decomposes the variance of the vote of a particular party \( y \) in a particular district into three components: the nationwide level of a party’s vote at time \( k \) \( (A_k) \), the dispersion of a party’s support across districts \( (B_i) \), and a residual \( C_{ik} \), which they interpret as the local vote. The model also incorporates a fixed effect \( \mu \) that represents an unweighted mean of the party’s vote across districts and time. The resulting model is thus: 

\[
y_{ik} = \mu + A_k + B_i + C_{ik}
\]

where the subscripts \( i \) and \( k \) refer to districts and time, respectively. In their cross-national study, the authors argue that larger residual values imply more influence of local factors in determining shifts in a party’s vote.

NOTES

The authors would like to thank Allyson Benton, Todd Eisenstadt, Matthew Shugart, Jeffrey Weldon, and the anonymous reviewers of *Comparative Politics* for their comments.


3. Hill.

4. Kenneth Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico’s Democratization in Comparative Perspective*
7. This article will use the term *gestoria* to denote clientelistic practices because, while many of the deputy candidates who were interviewed denied involvement in a clientelistic network, all openly admitted and were proud of their efforts to provide *gestoria*.

8. Under hegemonic PRI rule, there was no independent electoral agency with a self-sustained bureaucratic body that could organize and monitor elections. Much of this work was done by the candidate, the local sectoral leadership, or the governor (who was also a member of the PRI).

9. The PRI had a mass base that was made up of peasant, teacher, and labor unions grouped into large-scale national organizations. Millions of Mexicans were incorporated into one of these corporatist organizations that were tied politically to the hegemonic party, including teachers and government bureaucrats.


15. Candidate-centered campaigns must sell the candidates to a wide group of potential supporters who are not necessarily loyal members of the party, with television being the most important component of selling this image. See Ronald J. Hrebenar, Matthew J. Burbank, and Robert C. Benedict, *Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Political Campaigns* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), p. 6.


19. Interview with Humberto Roque Villanueva, former member of the CEN and former federal deputy, Mexico City, November 17, 2003.

20. Interviews with Fausto Zapata, former federal deputy, April 11, 2000, and with Ruth Blanca Espinda, Mexico City, February, 2000. Luis Medina, a former PRI deputy, also reports that neighborhood leaders were the true organizational base of the party in the district. *Interview, Mexico City, September 26, 2001.*

22. Luis Maldonado, a former deputy undersecretary of the powerful Secretary of the Interior (Gobernación) stated that “the PRI had the monopoly over the gestión social” because people could not get anything done going through their local government agencies. Lower level PRI affiliates had access to the government resources, which gave the party enormous influence. Interview, Mexico City, July 1, 1996.

23. A former Secretary of Finance of the CEN stated that during electoral periods money was given out at every level to make the clockwork of the PRI function. In exchange for this money, the winner of the seat had to “pledge himself to the party and get the votes.” Interview with Eduardo Guerrero Del Castillo, Mexico City, August 9, 1996.

24. Interview with Fausto Zapata.

25. Interview with Luis Medina. Dulce María Sauri, former federal deputy and president of the CEN reports that the sectors were an important element in getting people to the mass rallies in her district. Interview, Mexico City, September 10, 2003.

26. Interview with Dulce María Sauri.

27. Interview with Teofilo Arreola, a congressional candidate for the PAN in Jalisco in the 1970s, Mexico City, February 18, 2005.

28. One federal campaigner did state that it was necessary to pay bribes to newspapers to insure positive campaign coverage.

29. Roque Villanueva reports that the CEN paid approximately 10 percent of the congressional campaigning costs. Dulce María Sauri reports that the sectors helped pay for her campaign, which was inexpensive because of the lack of media appeals. Jorge Sandoval stated that the CEN paid for part of the campaign, with the governor paying the rest. Interview, Mexico City, May 22, 2002. In cases in which the candidate was not supported by the governor, he had to self-finance the campaign, according to Ing. García Leal, a former federal deputy. Interview, Mexico City, April 29, 2002. Claudia Esqueda, a candidate from the CTM, who won one race and lost another, stated she received money from local businesses that had contracts with the CTM. Interview, Mexico City, April 29, 2002.

30. Heladio Ramírez, former federal deputy (also, former governor and leader of the CNC), reports that he even decided where the voting stations would be placed in more remote areas. Interview, Mexico City, May 16, 2002.


34. Mapache or raccoon was the term used for fraud experts within the PRI because, like these small woodland creatures, the mapaches made off with things of value in the night, but it was hard to prove their presence.

35. A comment made by a former member of the CEN who wishes to remain anonymous.

36. These data have several potential problems. First, during this period fraud was common, and the electoral authoritarian regime was in control of vote counts. The data, therefore, should absorb some contamination. Second, while the PRI was the dominant player, it sometimes allowed “satellite” parties to compete and win, largely in order to avoid a two-party system. In terms of fraudulent vote counts, one can do little, and most analysts believe that a great deal of the fraud perpetrated by the PRI up until the mid 1980s was to inflate its results, not necessarily to change electoral outcomes. See Casteñeda and Eisenstadt. However one sees this issue, any fraud at the district level should inflate the PRI's numbers, and so the bias should work against localism. Another problem in testing the data for signs of localism is distinguishing small independent parties from “satellite” parties, that is, those parties dependent on the PRI. Several autonomous, small left parties cropped up during the 1970s and ran deputy campaigns during the late 1970s and 1980s. The PRI's vote aggregates the PRI with the satellite parties, and the small independent parties are excluded from the analysis. (Running the data without the satellite parties has only a marginal effect on the results.)


39. The data for the years 1977 to 1988 was collected from Silvia Gomez Tagle, Las estadisticas electorales de la reforma politica, Cuadernos del CES, no. 34 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1989). Those from the 1970s were taken from the Diario Oficial de la Nación.

40. Morgenstern and Swindle.

41. Magaloni.


45. If the career posts of the deputy were mostly in state government and the state party, he was considered affiliated with a governor or state faction. If he had come up through a union, then he was aligned with a sector. Those whose posts had been mostly in the federal government were assigned that category.

46. The official distribution of PRI deputy affiliation across the three elections from 1979 to 1985 was as follows: Popular sector, 61 percent, Workers, 24 percent, and Peasant, 15 percent. Reyes del Campillo, p. 147. Both Reyes del Campillo and Pacheco recognize that many of the Popular sector’s candidates were made up of local candidates tied to local political leaders.

47. The 1991 elections are not considered because after the 1988 electoral scare the PRI leadership changed the distribution of candidacies more radically.


50. The Popular sector was the most amorphous of the three. In Table 4 only the leaders of the CNOP, or from the FSTSE (bureaucrats), SNTE (teachers), or CNPP (small property owners), were included.

51. This distribution, then, explains the difference between the 42 percent overall score for sectors in Table 3 and the 32 percent of district ownership for sectors in Table 4.

52. Interview with Humberto Cervantes, former federal deputy, Mexico City, June 1, 2004; Claudia Esqueda; María de las Heras, former PRI strategist and public opinion expert, Mexico City, November 22, 2001; Ignacio Marván, former PRI strategist, Mexico City, April 5, 2000; Jesús María Ramón; and Dulce María Sauri.

53. Interviews with Claudia Esqueda, Hector Hugo Olivares, Heladio Ramírez, Humberto Roque Villanueva, and Fausto Zapata. Ing. García Leal states that the cane workers union was strong in his district, but because he was not a member of this group, it refused to work on his campaign. Jesús María Ramón, former federal deputy, states that the CTM was strong only in those districts in which they had a housing project.

54. Interview with Luis Medina.

55. Interview with Fausto Zapata. Also, interview with Miguel Montes, former leader of the PRI in Guanajuato, Guanajuato, April 13, 1999.

56. A leader of the state PRI of Jalisco remarked that in many rural municipalities in the state they had no idea who the militants were, and it was even difficult at times to find the municipal PRI headquarters. Interview with Carlos Sepulvera, April 17, 1997, Guadalajara, Jalisco.

57. There were no opposition governors in Mexico until the PAN won its first governorship in 1989. Interview with Ing. García Leal, Socorro Díaz, a former federal deputy, Mexico City, April 23, 2002; Fausto Zapata; and Francisco Arroyo Veyra, a former local and federal deputy from Guanajuato, Mexico City, April 21, 1999.

58. Interview with Jorge Esteban Sandoval. Tristan Canales, a former member of the CEN, states that, because the governors had to guarantee the electoral outcomes, they were able to place at least a few of the federal deputy candidates. Interview, Mexico City, February 25, 1997.

59. Fausto Zapata.