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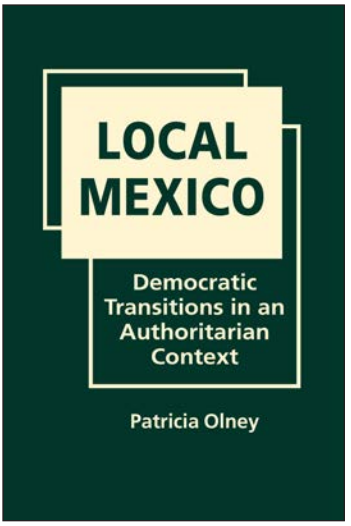
Local Mexico: Democratic Transitions in an Authoritarian Context



Patricia Olney

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LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Suite 314
Boulder, CO 80301 USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

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Introduction

The saying "fuera de México, todo es Cuautitlán" (outside Mexico City, everything is Cuautitlán) has become somewhat of a metaphor for the complex relationship between local Mexico and Mexico the country, often synonymous with its capital, Mexico City. Coined by the legendary beauty nicknamed la Güera Rodríguez, known mostly for her A-list lovers, like Simón Bolívar, Alexander von Humboldt, and particularly Mexico's liberator-emperor Agustín Iturbide, the phrase embodies the arrogance of the elitist, centralist culture associated with Mexico City. Not only did everyone who was anyone live in the capital, but any place outside it was a worthless outpost by comparison, with inferior, uncultured, inconsequential residents. Any attempt to distinguish between one part of this nothingness and another or to assign any of it some importance was a waste of time.

Yet Mexican states, municipalities, and the myriad of communities that comprise them not only have their own unique histories and cultures but also host events that can be very consequential to the nation, as demonstrated by the 1994 outbreak of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) guerrillas in a few municipalities of Chiapas. Each is a font of diversity. In some, blue and green eyes almost outnumber the dominant brown ones, as migrant enclaves of Russians, Italians, Armenians, Israelis, Chinese, Palestinians, Lebanese, Japanese, French, and Germans, among many others, dot the country. Most municipalities have hidden natural treasures within their often hundreds of far flung "localities:" waterfalls, caves, springs, forests, lakes, and butterfly sanctuaries, to name a few. Many are the birthplaces of famous national heroes, including two from Cuautitlán: the quasi-mythical peasant Juan Diego, who allegedly witnessed an appearance by the Virgin of

Guadalupe, and Luis Nishizawa, a famous Japanese Mexican painter captivated by the beauty of both local Mexico and places like Japan, Belgium, and the United States.

Cuautitlán is to some degree a microcosm of the diversity of local Mexico, as its communities include farms, old haciendas, agrarian cooperatives (*ejidos*), and cities. It has a rich precolonial and colonial history and, like many municipalities, has suffered from divisions and border disputes. It lost much of its territory with the creation of Cuautitlán Izcalli, now the scene of violent disputes among four major drug cartels. The greatest irony, however, is that Cuautitlán has not only rendered the old saying obsolete but reversed it—now *dentro de Cuautitlán, todo es México* (inside Cuautitlán everything is Mexico). Mexico City's explosive growth, due in great part to in-migration from the rest of Mexico, led to Cuautitlán's absorption into greater Mexico City. It is also a main site of housing developments where middle-class Mexico City employees, the new "somebodies" of Mexico, return to their homes in an attempt to mimic a suburban lifestyle. Meanwhile, Mexico City's demographics increasingly reflect a mass influx from thousands of communities nationwide.

Local Mexico remains relatively unknown in much of urban Mexico, however, partly because that elitist mind-set persists, but also because the difficult geography and ethnic diversity have made difficult completing the task of national integration, undertaken with considerable success by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime. Anyone from Mexico City is effectively a stranger in much of local Mexico, which, despite Mexico's dramatic urban transformation, still has many rural pockets. As one of the first opposition mayors of Zamora, Ignacio Peña García, said about a 1994 trip to Chiapas, after the EZLN put indigenous Mexico on the map for the first time for most urban Mexicans, "I was surprised at the poverty in poor communities I never knew existed within my native Zamora, but the four municipalities I visited in Chiapas were like another planet. I felt like a space invader."

This "otherness" of local Mexico, common to much of the developing world, persuaded me that I could overcome my biases and fears about the country where I was born and raised, when prudence advised avoiding politics. Perhaps the most emphasized value in my formative years was *aguante*, a combination of resignation and endurance that contributed greatly to the Mexican resilience but may have impeded its transformative potential. I had avoided studying Mexico, undertaking research in Peru, Colombia, and the Southern Cone, and even comparative studies that never bore fruit in places like Brazil and far away Azerbaijan and

Turkey. Nostalgia and the inevitable attraction of what had been forbidden when I was younger meant that Mexico always beckoned to me. I may have inherited another attraction from my father, who seemed to find refuge from the dark eastern European roots he would not discuss, in the honesty, warmth, and simplicity of small-town Mexico. Quite charismatic, he was greeted with enthusiasm by local residents when we left the city on day trips. Although cancer tragically cut his life short when I was eleven, I still remember his lamenting on our way home from these excursions that Mexico needed a revolution every fifty years. Yet I remembered these towns as devoid of politics, without the constant chatter about imminent devaluations, relentless complaining, and the presidential jokes that were a favorite pastime in Mexico City. They were places where time seemed to stop, where my sister and I chased sheep, and where we were taught (unsuccessfully) to make tortillas from scratch. Even the shah of Iran's mansion in Tepotzlán, with its seemingly impossibly high walls, seemed an example not of the presence of politics but of its ability to hide from view, away from the city's bright lights.

When I started traveling to small towns in the 1990s, despite the increasing competitiveness of elections reflected in statistics, interest in politics was not widespread. However, interviewing the protagonists of political struggles revealed that Mexican local politics was fascinating, partly because each municipal case was simultaneously unique and fractal-like. As common threads emerged from the broad diversity of political stories in towns and cities that had experienced competitive elections since the PRI's formation, a limited variety of patterns started to take shape and seemed to repeat themselves at every level of government—as they probably do throughout the developing world.

I first learned about the power of local research to reveal the inner workings of the still hermetic PRI system when I met with high-level PRI representatives in Chiapas and Tabasco in 1992 and 1993, while studying opposition to the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a graduate student. Most were members of the "1968 Generation," a left-leaning PRI group that defected spiritually from the PRI system after the Tlatelolco student massacre at the hands of the Gustavo Díaz Ordáz government that year. They were critical of the regime's authoritarianism and particularly at odds with then president Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration and policies. Through them I learned about the Zapatista guerrillas over a year before they burst onto the national scene and caught a glimpse of the still shrouded divisions in the PRI. It also became evident that the state-level PRI in the south had far more power over that region than the federal government.

I started this study soon after the spectacular rise of the National Action Party (PAN) in the 1994 presidential elections. Diego Fernández de Cevallos had surprised everyone by beating both Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the PRI's Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León in the first televised national presidential debate. He had mysteriously vanished from the public scene during the rest of the campaign period but even so managed an impressive 24 percent of the vote at the time of the election. Many had their eyes on Cárdenas, hoping he would finally triumph after allegedly being cheated of his victory in 1988, when a five-day "system failure" reversed voting tendencies that were, until then, strongly in his favor. The PAN had often been dismissed as the "loyal opposition," the party that seemed to exist mainly to give the PRI some democratic legitimacy. I remembered seeing the same workers painting slogans and distributing propaganda for both the PAN and the PRI when I was growing up. Yet Clement Moore (1970, 51) had predicted that if the state ever stopped embodying the Mexican Revolution in the eyes of citizens, a multiparty system would inevitably result. He further predicted that the PAN, based on its two significant victories in 1967 (Mérida and Hermosillo), could break the PRI's monopoly on power. Its potential seemed worth exploring.

After several more security-oriented research trips to the Colombian jungle, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay, I finally went home to Mexico in March 1995 to study Mexico's democratization, partly because, after I had faced several close calls in conflict-ridden regions, studying the emergence of local Mexican party systems seemed safer. I started with preliminary research in Mexico City. At the PAN offices in Coyoacán, I had a long conversation with Humberto Aguilar Coronado, then PAN organization secretary and Felipe Calderón Hinojosa's personal assistant and later a member of President Vicente Fox's cabinet and a senator for his native Puebla. I asked to see a thick list of municipal PAN victories on his desk. As I flipped through the more than fifty pages, I was amazed not only by the number of PAN victories but also by the time span they covered. There had been at least a dozen victories in the 1940s, and both the pace of PRI defeats and their numbers increased dramatically in the three most recent decades at the time. It won 120 elected posts between 1939 and 1979 but won posts at over six times that rate between 1982 and 1991, when it chalked up 187 more, and increased its pace tenfold from there to win 222 municipalities between 1994 and 1995 (Loaeza 1997, 105). I was fascinated not only by the pattern of PAN victories but also by the refreshing honesty of

some of the party's exponents, like Humberto, and especially Juan Luis Calderón Hinojosa, former president Felipe Calderón's brother, who helped me in Morelia as I did research over the years in Michoacán. They made me aware that local victories did not necessarily mean political modernization or democratization. Juan Luis noted in 1995 that much of what looked like progress in statistics was misleading as PRI defeats often represented the perpetuation of *caciquismo* (strongman rule), and in many areas drug traffickers controlled local affairs.

It also became evident that the fault lines in Mexican politics still fell along political camarillas (and families) that cut across parties, ideologies, and economic sectors, blind to any legal distinctions in the activities of their members. Michel Antochiw, a French anthropologist working on an encyclopedia of Yucatán, was presciently pessimistic that alternation in power could change anything in less industrialized states because of the inseparability of economic, political, and familial authoritarian strands in the political fabric. Others often echoed his skepticism, suggesting that Andrade Bojorges's (1999, 36–39, 65) revelation that drug traffickers had ties not only to the PRI's 1968 Generation faction (part of which defected to the PRD) but also to the 1930s PAN-associated Acción Católica groups meant that organized crime was a problem to be managed, not eradicated.

Juan Luis spent hours answering my questions about why the PRI lost over the years in specific municipalities, revealing how deceptive the electoral records could be. I noted that Zacapu had an interesting voting pattern with a PAN victory, then a PRD victory, followed by a Worker's Party (PT) victory. Juan Luis nodded knowingly and said, "That is a curious case. Lencho [Lorenzo Martínez] is a car salesman who became an opposition leader. He first won with the PAN and then switched party affiliations to the PRD, and then to the PT. The voters support his group unconditionally." When I asked why opposition leaders switched party affiliations so easily, he suggested they did so partly out of aversion to government in general but also due to party infighting, bribery, and other less philosophical motivations.

Some of Juan Luis's other valuable insights had to do with the pace of change, the importance of political culture, and the unlikelihood (as Antochiw also stressed) that alternation in power would result in major changes: "Change is slow. It takes much more patience than most people imagine. I do not mind. I am a *panista* by heredity and remember how much worse things were for my father. Alternation in power is a major victory, but it changes very little *porque somos los mismos mexicanos* [because we are all the same Mexicans]. But it is a beginning."

He also admitted, to my surprise, that the water agency he headed on my second visit in 1996 operated at a 20 percent efficiency rate, implying that good leadership and commitment to rule of law could not overcome bureaucratic inertia, except in the very long term. These interviews suggested that the advent of subnational alternation in power and its contribution to the national-level political transition then unfolding formed only part of the story. The spread of organized crime, the resilience of authoritarianism, and the glacial pace of change seemed of far greater importance. To better see the balance between continuity and change, one had not only to distinguish the different pathways to alternation in power but follow their trajectories over time.

By the mid-1990s drug trafficking had become embedded in many provincial contexts. Federal and state-level politicians were guarded about the subject, but at the municipal level most of my questions about municipal politics were answered with references to drug trafficking. It was a fact of life throughout much of the country. When I asked someone to recommend a hotel costing between ten and twenty dollars a night in Juárez, Chihuahua, a woman directed me up a hill to a group of three hotels and said they were exceptional. "They are owned by drug traffickers," she explained. "They are clean, have an outstanding *comida corrida* (three course meal), and are very safe." My hotel room featured a large, dark, soundproof window through which I could witness package exchanges in the early-dawn hours as I cautiously glanced at small planes and trucks around an improvised landing strip. Throughout the country I was reminded of the power of drug traffickers. They financed political campaigns, chose municipal presidents, served as important local employers, helped with (and sometimes controlled) public works projects, financed beauty pageants and soccer matches, and sponsored local bands, among many other activities that gave them more legitimacy than the state in the 1990s. Ten to fifteen years later much of this admiration had turned to fear as a new generation adopted terrorist tactics, cultivated local drug markets, engaged in extortion, kidnapping, and rape, and fueled the growth of gangs.

While I interviewed key political actors in most Mexican states, I confined my in-depth research to Chihuahua, Michoacán, and Yucatán. The PRI was underrepresented in the initial phase of my research except in Yucatán, mostly because *priístas* were less available for interviews. (Local PRI infrastructure only sprang to life during campaign periods.) Conversely, PRI members were overrepresented in the 2006 phase, when obtaining interviews with the PAN-state became difficult. I spent a great deal of time with the PRD in Mexico City, Michoacán,

Zacatecas, Chiapas, and other PRD strongholds. In Michoacán, the PRD was characteristically divided in two. The Cristóbal Arias Solís faction had abandoned Cárdenas and agreed to cooperate with the Salinas regime. It controlled its local clientele of PRD mayors through the Institute for Municipal Training and Support (ICAM), led by lawyer Jorge Luis Tinajero. Jorge Luis invited me to a meeting of the mayors in that faction, at which they shared their problems with local and state-level PRI groups. They brought pictures showing the PRI distributing bags of cement to supporters, sabotaging PRD projects, or beating up PRD supporters. Jorge Luis, who was in close touch with his *panista* friends from Guanajuato, patiently told them what legal steps to follow, knowing that many of them had just a couple of years of formal education. While the traditional leftist PRD leaders were mostly concerned with distributional not procedural issues, Jorge Luis emphasized the legal approach of the PAN. "Our strategy is to exhaust all legal resources," he said. "We write letters, ask for meetings, and go on up the chain of legal steps we can take to get our problem addressed." (Many of the groups within this more modern faction of the PRD were eclipsed by tradition-bound groups, like those supporting 2018 presidential front runner Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who broke away in 2011 to later found his own party vehicle, Morena.) Several mayors in attendance invited me to their municipalities.

I ended up accepting several invitations. Parácuaro mayor and successful agri-businessman Ramón Álvarez Soto extended the most generous of these, as he let me stay at his home and accompany him through a week of administrative duties. There still were no paved roads to many of the *ejido* communities and no indoor plumbing (even Don Ramón had no toilet). Drug-trafficking activity was completely out in the open. In Morelia, both the PRI and the PRD either denied or underplayed its role, but the *ejido* communities considered it a completely legitimate and even an honorable enterprise. The drug industry was "hip" among young people, to the extent that many had stopped attending school, and many older people respected the traffickers. Its illegality was as irrelevant in Parácuaro as was the fact that official statistics did not reflect Don Ramón's victorious bid for mayor. When I asked why no statistics reflected his 1992 PRD win, he said, "Lo que cuenta está en el terreno de los hechos" (What counts are the facts on the ground.) He drove that lesson home to me every time my maps did not coincide with the towns he said we were in. Law, associated with the federal government, had a poor reputation in that region. Many people saw drug trafficking as the embodiment of revolutionary promise—the activity that

permitted the poor to surmount the obstacles to getting rich and fulfilled many of the development functions that the state had never come through on: employment, maintenance of order (in those days), and access to services.

Despite being a PRD bastion, Michoacán also had historical PAN strongholds. The PAN had governed all of its largest cities. The 1983 opposition victory in Zamora was at least as dramatic as those of the well-studied cases in Chihuahua. During August 1996, then former mayor Peña was tending to one of his small businesses, Baños y Recubrimientos Peña, a bathroom fixtures store. I had never met anyone more anxious to tell me his story. For almost seven hours I leaned over a sink in his shop to take advantage of the only available writing surface while he recounted the PRI's very first defeat. At several points he broke into tears, and not sure what to do, I stayed propped against the sink, notebook in hand, waiting for him to regain his composure. Neither of us moved from about 11:00 a.m. until dusk. On my two subsequent trips in 1996 and 2006, I had similarly fruitful meetings with his successor as mayor, Arnulfo Vázquez, and with others whose accounts revealed much about PRI key figures and how the party operated.

In Yucatán, thanks to a well-connected former classmate, I had the broadest access to state elites. I was even introduced to iconic strongman Governor Víctor Cervera Pacheco, but I did not exploit this association to avoid creating problems for my contacts when I did not adopt the PRI worldview. Except for PRI lynchpin José Luis Sierra Villarreal (a former 1970s guerrilla and husband of former governor and PRI president Dulce Maria Sauri), who was warm and generous, the Yucatecan PRI was very guarded, and obtaining help required persistence. Months of efforts to obtain 1989–1992 internal PRI municipal-level surveys finally paid off when the architect of the surveys, Guadalupe Huchím Koyoc—who canceled eight appointments and originally would only let me take notes on the more than fifty volumes of internal surveys—told me at the end of one day of my frantic scribbling, "Go ahead and take them. You are the only one who has ever had access to these." Among their interesting revelations was that while an average of 16 to 25 percent of people in many towns said they intended to vote for the PAN, the final statistics recorded 5 to 8 percent PAN voting in these same towns, suggesting an active effort to divert PAN votes (by any method) to either the PRI or a PRI-controlled party.

The PRI offices in Yucatán were at the time housed in La Casa del Pueblo, a colonial building that previously served as a resting place for poor people traveling to the capital. It took weeks to find my contacts

"in," but when I did, I was rushed past at least fifty people waiting in the halls and taken to a room where my hosts were laughing and eating as they watched a soccer match, unperturbed by the crowd waiting patiently outside to see them. The president of the Yucatecan PRI at the time, the talented PRI stalwart Jorge Carlos Ramírez Marín, became visibly worried, locking glances with others in the room, when I said I wanted to study municipal electoral contests. He finally commanded, "¡Toma dictado!"—an order to write down what he was about to say that he probably intended me to remember from grade school. I obediently took down the letter he dictated. He instructed me to submit it typed and to write my full name and *all* of my addresses. Then he said his office would assign me an *acompañante* (traveling companion) who would take me to a total of seven municipalities *in one day*, during which I could "easily complete all interviews in Yucatán." My PRI hosts offered to expedite the issuance of an official badge to "facilitate access to public officials." Later I learned that these PRI representatives were well known in the rural areas I visited because they would personally hand out gifts at election time to secure the PRI vote—though they reportedly never left their trucks while doing so. My PRI hosts scheduled our trip to depart the following day, but I canceled due to "illness" and modified my choice of municipalities to exclude those I had mentioned.

I selected Cacalchén because of its fascinating electoral patterns, which boasted an opposition split between the Cardenista Front of National Reconstruction (PFCRN), a small Cárdenas-associated socialist party, and the classic liberal PAN, the main vehicle in Yucatán for regionalist and anticenter, antisystem sentiment. Cacalchén also had four opposition victories by the late 1990s. It was indeed difficult to meet public officials in Cacalchén, but not because I lacked an official badge. When I stepped off the bus at the central plaza at about 10:00 a.m., I asked a woman where I could find the municipal president. She responded that he was at work and would be at the municipal palace at around 7:00 p.m. In those days, in keeping with the aspirational nature of Mexico's "revolutionary" legal system, municipal officials did not get paid. (By 2006 they had voted themselves salaries of over US$8,000 per month, about 100 times the average income for residents.) She asked a young boy to take me to the municipal president's home in case he was still there. My young guide and I waded through almost knee-deep mud until we arrived, but after a twenty-minute conversation with his wife, who said they belonged to the PRI, which had never lost there, I discovered I was not even in Cacalchén but in a neighboring municipality incorrectly designated on my map.

When I finally reached Cacalchén, then a similarly desolate and poor municipality (although slightly less muddy), I was taken to the home of an individual who had a post in the municipal administration. The male residents of Cacalchén had left, I was told, probably for Mérida. A woman busy weaving a hammock told me I could wait. I asked her why the town seemed so empty, and she said everyone was in Mérida either working or looking for work. There were no jobs in Cacalchén. I asked whether unemployment helped explain why the opposition had won in Cacalchén, and she said the two were unrelated, as few people could afford to care about politics because they were too busy trying to make a living. As I interviewed more people I realized that Cacalchén's official statistics were no evidence of liberal democracy.

Another memorable moment occurred when I first arrived with my host, Medardo Uc Chimal, in the Mayan municipality of Chemax in July 1996. The political atmosphere was charged to a far greater degree than it had been anywhere else. Over 300 *chemaítas* gathered around me, apparently hoping I had come to encourage the opposition. I asked them whether they were going to win the 1998 elections. The crowd answered with a resounding no. They told me they would never win again. Ever. I immediately assumed that they must be so isolated that they did not realize municipal victories had become the norm throughout the country, that the opposition was winning governorships at the rate it used to win municipalities and even had a shot at the presidency. The moment I tried to explain, a leader stopped me. As it turned out, he knew what was going on not only elsewhere in the country but also in Albania! Still, I insisted. I had studied around 100 opposition victories, and from countless hours of reading and listening I believed I knew the infallible least common denominator for a victory. "If you have the numbers, you can win," I told them. "Just make sure everyone goes out to vote, guard every polling booth and ballot box, get press coverage and outside observers, meticulously report anomalies, supervise every facet of the contest, and defend the victory."

The crowd of *chemaítas* was silent, seemingly bewildered (though they were probably not surprised, given my Mexico City accent) by how poorly I understood their situation. Their leaders were experts in campaign and election strategy. I decided that perhaps their pessimism was standing in the way of victory, but statistics showed that the opposition vote had skyrocketed since the opposition's only recognized victory in 1980 and continued to increase even after years of repression. These methods had eventually worked everywhere else, but their "otherness" seemed to prevent it from working for them, until after the 2000

transition at the national level. The limits of agency were evident in Chemax, where no amount of effort could break the power of the state. The intra-elite nature of Chemax's battle was also evident, as it became somewhat of a proxy war between the state- and national-level PAN and PRI. Former president Felipe Calderón had participated in the *chemaítas* struggle, as he had done with far more success in nearby Valladolid. There I met a woman who had been arrested and jailed in another fraudulently repressed opposition movement. Felipe Calderón had come to her rescue with a couple of other *panistas* back in the 1980s.

I wrote up a draft of the study at the Center for US-Mexican Studies in 1997 but had to rework the entire project when my mentor at the University of Miami, a man beloved by all who knew him, Enrique Baloyra, suffered a fatal brain aneurysm. Two weeks before I was to defend my dissertation in 1999, another dear mentor, Alexander McIntire, also suffered a tragic and premature death. Within less than a year, I had a tenure track position at my current university and endured a baptism by fire: a four-course-per-semester teaching load. Soon after the 2000 PAN victory, I wrote a book prospectus based on the study but was uneasy about having been unable to obtain surveys permitting me to draw conclusions over a long enough period to reliably discuss changing values. Since almost no surveys existed of the decades before I conducted my study and the cost of tailor-made ones was prohibitive, I decided to follow the cases into the future.

The second and third research phases took place between 2001 and 2009, with most interviews collected between 2006 and 2008, permitting the study to include between five and ten elections in each of the five municipalities since the achievement of alternation in power, always including the return of the PRI. By then all three of the main political parties were run by a new generation of political leaders. The PRI had changed significantly, at least in terms of the frankness and openness of many of its new young leaders, the administrative savvy and dynamism (although definitely not incorruptibility) of a new set of governors, improvements in the candidate-selection process, and the ability in some cases to orchestrate unified support for PRI candidates among the party's many rival currents. A high-level member of the Chiapas PRI gave the PAN a lot of credit for its three administrations in the capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez (1995–2003):

> The PAN fired 400 aviadores [those who "fly by" to collect pay but do not work], but the parties are still weak, there is no transparency, and we need to get rid of the unions. Section 7 of the teacher's union [SNTE]

> supports the PRI and section 40 supports the PRD—they are political tools used only to topple governors—they have no representative role and keep education levels low so we can never have the cultural changes needed. The media, chambers of commerce, all organizations have links to the government. Our public officials also have higher salaries than those at the federal level and keep them secret, which is legal here. The PRD is a puppet that sells itself to the highest bidder, and its base is so poor that it can be mobilized with handouts of 20–30 pesos [then US$2–US$3]. There is competition, but it is expensive—we have one million pesos—half goes to payroll and most of the remainder goes to corporative sectors and only covers very low salaries. We had four million before—we cannot operate without much more money (Grajales 2006).

Conversations with PRI members were never this candid in 1996. There were rumors that the PRI had fielded electable "unity" candidates because it had money again (not in Chiapas, which may be why the PAN and PRD candidates were all from the PRI), some of it from dubious sources. The PRI selectively applied traditional (authoritarian) and modern (closed primaries) candidate-selection methods depending on location and the composition of local groups. It was guided by the search for effective solutions, not movement toward rule of law. Now riven by factionalism and plagued by corruption scandals, the PAN had become as unavailable and distant from society in many places (as in Aguascalientes, where it had a long run of consecutive victories) as the PRI had been. Though still divided and ineffective, the PRD benefited in some locales from some key defections from both the PRI and the PAN.

The pace of modernization was startling.[1] Places that had taken four days to reach (like Guadalupe y Calvo, Chihuahua, only accessible from relatively nearby Parral by slowly descending a deep ravine over the course of several days) took only a few hours on the new highways and paved roads. There were Internet cafés, and the Oxxo convenience stores and Elektra's rent-to-buy chain had brought the comforts of civilization to even the most faraway places. While I mostly had to rely on the fourth-class buses serving small municipalities and often boarded by the army and less often by bands of robbers, there were new luxurious, reasonably affordable overnight buses from Mexico City to Chiapas and Oaxaca. Government programs had improved life in many locations, and in some areas the PAN had made good on its promise not to link benefits to political support, which opened the door for other parties (usually the PRI) to do so. By 2006 the PAN had reproduced in most municipalities, probably inevitably, the same clientelist practices of the PRI. The bureaucratic presence of the government had also increased substantially, reinforcing corporatism and clientelism.

All three parties were fielding businessmen as candidates because they were by far the most electable and could finance their own campaigns. Alternation in power did seem to be improving the effectiveness of administrations, at least as measured by public works projects and the proliferation of big box corporations like Walmart that offered new employment and consumer opportunities. However, all three parties had learned that perception was far more important than reality for obtaining votes. They spent millions of pesos promoting real and imagined accomplishments and much less money and effort on the projects themselves. There were numerous reports of incomplete (or barely started) projects that left no trace of the millions of pesos spent on them (as happened in Hunucmá's "toiletgate," involving 300 toilets paid for but never received). These procurement contracts, often involving relatives of new opposition elites, were at the root of corruption scandals surfacing when another party displaced an incumbent and ordered an audit. Worse yet, the auditing agencies (like ORFIS in Veracruz) were allegedly co-opted and traded to parties in political arrangements (Herrera Altamirano 2006), adding to the sense that there had been no definitive progress toward rule of law.

While in 1996 *panistas* in affected states saw organized criminal influence as an inevitable power factor partly produced and used by the PRI-regime, they did not predict the degree to which it would become the dominant power factor by 2006. Nor did they foresee that it would penetrate all parties and corrupt a significant segment of a new generation of binational Mexicans. In 1996 many *panistas* believed that only through democratization could they achieve the honest government required to uproot organized crime. In 2006 they limited themselves to saying democracy did not make it worse. Irene Villaseñor Peña (2006), a *panista* related to a former PRI governor from what the PAN designated as the "responsible PRI," said, "There is no relationship between democratization and drug-related violence. It is a product of the reduced accessibility of US drug markets and of the Mexican government's decision to fight drug trafficking." While perhaps alluding to the futility of the Mexican government's shift from its modus vivendi with drug traffickers to confronting them in the name of an unachievable (at least in the short term) rule of law, due to US drug policies, she never addressed the relationship between instability and fragmentation of power. Nor did the impact of US drug policies explain the role of the endemic corruption of a deeply rooted political system that predated them.

Campeche's PAN asserted that when trying to trace its campaign errors in previous elections it discovered a parallel infrastructure that

drug traffickers were laying throughout the state and probably the country (Gómez 2006; Michaud 2011, 25). Many candidates admitted to accepting campaign contributions from traffickers, or at least explained theoretically why they could never reject them. Representatives of all three parties in most states admitted organized criminals had penetrated their party. It was also common for the main parties to form coalitions with small parties with well-known links to drug traffickers, as if doing so were a way of benefiting from drug financing while isolating risk. One documented example was the Knights Templar drug kingpin Saúl Solís, who was the 2009 candidate of the Mexican Green Ecological Party (PVEM), a party usually partnering with the PRI, for a federal deputyship and Turiscato's (near Parácuaro) director of public security (2003–2005). Most cities I visited had an internal market for drugs, and not a single municipal official thought he or she could do anything to reclaim the municipal territory from the organized criminals. The only state where drug-trafficking influence in politics and on the social fabric was largely invisible was Yucatán, where the PRI-state remained reasonably united, powerful, and authoritarian even in post-transition years, suggesting interesting trade-offs between freedom and order, particularly in less developed states.

Elsewhere the dimensions of the organized crime problem were still far more visible at the local level, although self-censorship prevented important details from surfacing. The industry was still an integral part of local culture in many towns of Michoacán, but the new generation my contacts feared in 1995—the young immigrants who, according to many residents and leaders, had "lost their manners," stopped going to school, and wanted the quick money and fast life of organized crime—seemed to have taken it over. One of my key contacts, a senator who had previously invited me to talk to him in Apatzingán, was listed among those with ties to the drug cartels after a rash of arrests in Michoacán during the Calderón administration, as was Parácuaro's mayor. Several of my other contacts were kidnapped for ransom in YouTube-documented incidents, and a few were assassinated between 2008 and 2012.

The trips in the second series were a stark contrast to the first ones. In 1995 many of the homes on the Parácuaro *ejidos* lacked not only toilets, phones, and electricity but also a rear wall, so they were exposed to the elements. Yet, despite severe underemployment (only small jobs that paid very little were easily available), life on the *ejidos* had some laudable aspects: tranquility and fresh food, for example, including door-to-door "cow service" for fresh milk and homemade cheeses. Scor-

pions were the main security threat, and even they were mainly an issue during the *jícama* harvest. You could see a dramatic starlit sky from your bed, while a breeze softened by its passage through the fruit trees refreshed the air under the mosquito nets. By late 2006 the central square had more amenities (thanks partly to donations by Parácuaro celebrities like the late Juan Gabriel), and most people living near the urban head had toilets and electricity. Yet the peace of 1990s Parácuaro had given way to a palpable tension that would only get worse. This was before President Calderón's visit and establishment of an army presence in 2007, La Familia's 2011 split that created the Knights Templar, and the 2014 incursion of paramilitaries, followed by the allegedly state-financed subgroup Los Viagras.

Many of the 2006 visits took place in the weeks before and after the elections bringing Calderón to power. I was at Andrés Manuel López Obrador's closing event in Morelia while the Cárdenas-controlled PRD quietly boycotted his campaign, possibly costing him the extremely close election. Calderón's victory meant the PAN was ebullient in every state and looking forward to monopolies on power. Yucatecan *panistas* seemed baffled when I asked about their previous advocacy of alternation in power. Most reform-minded (although not necessarily rule-of-law oriented) interviewees were in the PRI, but they had grown frustrated with the weight of the older generations in the bureaucracy impeding change. Zamora's PAN seemed weaker than it had been in 1996, the PRI was no better, and most of the major reformers had left to work for the Fox and Calderón administrations. Still, Zamora had developed into a thriving city, and drug-related problems were superimposed on the political fabric, rather than tightly woven into it as in Parácuaro, which had regressed in terms of quality of life. Yet I found it harder than anticipated to distinguish between municipalities where the PRI lost power to superficial electoral coups and revolts like those of Cacalchén, Parácuaro, and Hunucmá and the electoral revolutions that had been transforming politics in the 1990s in cities like Zamora, Juárez, Chihuahua, León, and Guanajuato, particularly in terms of progress toward rule of law. Ironically, these larger cities attracted more developmental assistance due to their more expensive vote-buying operations (to counteract the strength of those who refused to sell their right to hold elected officials accountable for their performance in power). These social funds increased the power of the constituency supporting traditional authoritarian practices like clientelism and corporatism.

The seeming convergence of cases where alternation came as a result of very superficial changes confined to elites and those resulting

from deep changes in local societies had several possible explanations. The slow pace of change meant the more numerous traditionalists were exerting more influence than reformers in a more democratic Mexico. It was also because the local and national levels are "mutually reinforcing" (Spink et al. 2008, 246). Thus, by 2006 the nationalization of subnational reforms had ironically shifted the balance of power in favor of traditionalist forces.

The 1996 visits captured an initial phase of rapid reform, when twenty years of incubation as the PRI lost power had led PAN-identified reformers to explode onto the scene. The long-repressed modern segment of society suddenly achieved the representation it had been earning over decades. These reformers incorporated themselves into the elites, using authoritarian institutions to impose reform, thus overrepresenting reformers. By 2006 the political rubber band had snapped back. In 1996 the 20 percent or so of reform-minded voters had a disproportionate impact on politics, whereas in 2006, although that number may have increased to 30 to 35 percent, some of these had been partially socialized by the more numerous old guard steeped in the dominant authoritarian culture. Between 2006 and 2008 I captured a period of local stagnation when majoritarian democratic reforms had empowered the traditional class representing at least 60 percent of the political and possibly more of the security bureaucracies (which had not benefited from the redistribution of power). The decentralization/fragmentation of power and resources reinvigorated the informal authoritarian institutions. While I must leave determining the tipping point at which reformers dictate outcomes more than traditionalists to other researchers, the pace of change may perversely be inversely proportional to success at instituting majoritarian democracy. Without mechanisms in place to overrepresent modern reformers and the most productive sectors of the population, achieving the economic growth necessary for redistribution and developing the bureaucratic culture necessary for enforcing the rule of law may take too long to prevent reversals. However, the tension between achieving political equality and rule of law requires further exploration.

There are a few other methodological notes to add to those in the first chapter. All quotes from interviews are my translations, and most of the interviews were unstructured and informal. The deteriorating security situation in Mexico since my last research trips and the complicated political situation in the south led me to leave out some of the names of some sources in the text but still include them in the bibliography.

While the local snapshots of political change in provincial Mexico give an unvarnished version of the symbiotic relationships between the

local and national levels at two critical points in the Mexican political transition, the study covers approximately fifty years of political change. It leaves many matters unresolved, one of the most intriguing of which concerns gauging the pace of change and possibly determining thresholds that might better predict democratic consolidation or reversion to authoritarianism. This research does not decipher where Mexico's transition is leading, although many indicators suggest an increasing sector of society, perhaps as great as one-third of the population, is continuously inching forward, committed to organized and permanent participation in pursuit of rule of law. It does, however, ascertain that at least in Mexico, *dentro y fuera de Cuautitlán, todo es México* (within and beyond Cuautitlán, everything is Mexico).

Note

1. Juan Duch Coleil, a Yucatecan historian interviewed in Mérida on 19 July 1996, emphasized modernization as the primary motor of all observable changes, stressing the way transportation and communication infrastructure had changed life in states on the periphery, like Yucatán. The overall pace of modernization may not be greater since 2000 than it was in the past.