

Contemporary Mexican Politics

Second Edition

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1990s (e.g., empowerment of the Supreme Court and the constitutional clause that prohibits any party from holding more than 60 percent of the seats in the legislature). As noted above, much of the reform of the Mexican political system has occurred thanks to the multipartisan composition of the legislature and the strong presence of the PAN and the PRD at the state and local levels. And while it is theoretically possible for a single party to capture the presidency and a majority in both legislative bodies, the current political environment in Mexico would appear to make that development unlikely without a preelectoral coalition. Indeed, it is much more likely that the country will continue to experience greater shared governance, with all the benefits and drawbacks that this entails.

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Political Parties and Elections in Mexico

Before 1988, any discussion of political parties and elections in Mexico inevitably centered on the PRI. During most of that period, Mexico's official party was much like the powerful parties found in other non-communist, hegemonic party systems. Like the KMT in Taiwan, the People's Action Party in Singapore, the People's Democratic Party in Nigeria, and even the Democratic Party in New York's Tammany Hall era, the PRI maintained power through a combination of genuine popular support, electoral fraud, institutional manipulation, and careful coordination of organized political interests. This formula made it possible for the PRI to achieve a relatively high degree of political stability and control. In this context, political opposition was tolerated but it was largely futile, because the PRI was the only party with a realistic chance of winning elections: those who spoke out against the regime were effectively marginalized, and those who truly threatened PRI power were severely repressed. However, as discussed in chapter 5, support for the opposition grew dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in the eventual defeat of the ruling party in the 2000 presidential election.

To understand contemporary Mexican politics in the period after PRI hegemony, it is necessary to be familiar with all of the country's political parties and what they seek to achieve in government. Also, because electoral rules greatly influence the number and behavior of political parties, it is essential to examine how the design—and frequent redesign—of Mexican electoral institutions has shaped the country's unique multiparty system. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter provides a detailed examination of Mexico's three major parties (the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD), as well as other minor parties that currently play a role in Mexican electoral politics

and in government. Next we focus on the electoral process and the specific electoral institutions that contributed to the making and eventual unmaking of PRI hegemony. Finally, we close this chapter with a discussion of the key trends in Mexican elections today, with particular attention to the dynamics of the 2012 presidential election.

MEXICAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Like most countries in Latin America today, Mexico has a multiparty system, in which more than two significant parties compete for power. However, because of the PRI's longtime dominance, Mexico's multiparty system did not become truly competitive until the 1980s, when the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) began to obtain a much greater share of the vote in elections. Likewise, even the relative importance of Mexico's minor parties has grown as elections have become more competitive; minor parties like the Mexican Green Ecological Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, PVEM) and the Labor Party (Partido del Trabajo, PT) have increasingly served as vital coalition partners in electoral campaigns and legislative negotiations. Table 6.1 provides a snapshot of the main political parties in the contemporary Mexican political arena.

In this section we discuss the origins, ideological orientation, organizational structure, and support base of the three major parties, though we give relatively less attention to the PRI because it has been covered substantially in previous chapters. We then turn to briefly examine the role of minor parties in the Mexican political system, focusing primarily on those that currently have representation in the federal legislature. While each of Mexico's political parties has evolved considerably from the era of single-party hegemony, some degree of uncertainty remains about the future direction of Mexico's party system.

The PRI

As we saw in previous chapters, the party that governed Mexico for most of the twentieth century originated from the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), which was founded in 1929 by President Plutarco Elías Calles in order to forge a revolutionary family from the disparate political and military elements that emerged victorious from the 1910–1917 conflict. By 1937, to more formally incorporate peasants, urban laborers, and middle-class professionals, President Lázaro Cárdenas and his followers reorganized the ruling party as the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM), a corporatist entity that integrated Cárdenas's agenda to defend national economic interests. In 1946 under Manuel Ávila Camacho, the party was reborn as

Table 6.1. Mexican Political Parties, 2000–Present

Convergence	National Action Party (PAN)	New Alliance Party (PANAL)	Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)	Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)	Labor Party (PT)	Mexican Green Ecological Party (PVEM)
Spanish Name: Partido Convergencia por la Democracia	Partido Acción Nacional	Partido Nueva Alianza	Partido de la Revolución Democrática	Partido Revolucionario Institucional	Partido del Trabajo	Partido Verde Ecologista de México
Year Formed/Official Registration: 1999 2005	1939	2005	1989	1929 as PNR 1938 as PRM 1946 as PRI	1993	1993
Platform/Ideology: Social democracy. Favors free market economics but argues for some state role in order to ensure equality, social justice, and respect for basic human rights.	Conservative with a strong Catholic base. Committed to free markets, low government spending, transparency, decentralization to subnational governments, and conservative on social issues.	Emphasizes education as a key element in economic development, as well as moderate state intervention in the market economy.	Leftist. Skeptical of neoliberalism, emphasizes need for attention to the plight of the poor. Calls for wider social welfare programs and poverty alleviation.	Flexible: rhetoric centers on revolutionary nationalism but since early 1980s, has used free market policies to "modernize" the country. Still occasionally appeals to economic nationalism.	Socialist roots. Advocates mass participation, economic nationalism, increased redistributive spending, and decreased economic dependence on the United States.	No clear ideology beyond environmental protection. Some emphasis on sustainable development, protection of human rights, and "just distribution of resources to guarantee the consolidation of democracy."

Note: The Social Democratic Party (Partido Socialdemócrata, PSD) a progressive social democratic party, with emphasis on agrarian issues, lost its registration after polling less than 2% of the vote in the 2009 midterm election.

the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). This rechristening proved to be remarkably apt, since the PRI truly became a lasting and institutionalized legacy of the revolution. From its founding until its decline in the 1990s, the ruling party was an indomitable political force in Mexico.¹

Guided directly by the hand of the Mexican president, the ruling party provided a forum for elite power sharing and political negotiation among hierarchically organized factions (*camarillas*) and interest groups. The PRI also served as a political machine that mobilized voters in support of the regime during electoral campaigns, and with the help of fraud, ensured that electoral results reflected overwhelming popular support for the regime. So successful was this combination of functions that for nearly three-quarters of a century, the PRI was essentially fused with the government, and the two were often considered one and the same.

By the late 1990s, however, the PRI confronted a much more competitive electoral environment. The reality of the situation hit the party hard and fueled its preexisting internal divisions. The reformers who believed that the party's future depended on its ability to adopt more democratic practices (internally and externally) found themselves at odds with the more retrograde "dinosaurs," or *prinosaurios*, who favored traditional PRI practices such as electoral alchemy. Such divisions contributed to the PRI's defeat in the 2000 and 2006 presidential elections, but they did not prevent the party from flourishing at the state and local level. Even in the immediate aftermath of the 2000 presidential elections, the PRI continued to control the largest portion of seats in the federal legislature, half of the country's governorships, and the overwhelming majority of city governments. However, in the absence of a single dominant figure calling the shots from Los Pinos, the presidential residence, political power became more decentralized among the party leaders and prominent federal and state *priista* officials. In many states, the PRI even opened itself to greater internal competition, producing candidates who proved that the party could win without the need for patronage, electoral fraud, or illicit government assistance.

Moreover, after its disastrous electoral performance in 2006, the PRI also began working to renew its national leadership by selecting Beatriz Paredes as its party chairwoman. Paredes was the first woman ever elected as governor of her home state of Tlaxcala, in 1987, and she was the third woman to head the PRI. Under Paredes's leadership in the July 2009 federal midterm elections, the PRI succeeded in winning 37 percent of the vote overall and capturing 240 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (48 percent). In the six states where elections took place that year, the PRI held on to three governorships and took away two from the PAN in Querétaro and San Luis Potosí. The PRI's only major loss was in the state of Sonora, where the PAN gubernatorial candidate won after he capitalized on a daycare fire in which more than forty small children died as a result of poor government regulation of the facility.

Thus, while support for the PRI declined significantly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, by 2009 the party had rebounded, and it looked poised to recapture the presidency in 2012. Strong national support from organized labor, rural voters, and party loyalists, together with a young, handsome politically savvy candidate, may simply be too much for the other parties to defeat. Indeed, in public opinion polls leading up to the elections, Enrique Peña Nieto, the former governor of the state of Mexico and the PRI's heir apparent, consistently emerged as the party's frontrunner. The only other viable candidate within the PRI, Manlio Fabio Beltrones, had less than 10 percent party support and garnered only 7 percent of the independent vote, while Peña Nieto captured nearly 70 percent of independents.²

The PAN

Without a doubt, the strongest opposition party during the twentieth century was the National Action Party (PAN).³ Formed in 1939 by a group of disenchanted entrepreneurs, professionals, and activist Catholics, the PAN was meant to provide a conservative and institutionalized alternative to the official party. Its founder, Manuel Gómez Morin, represented a group that believed that the PRI's hierarchical organization and corporatist practices violated the democratic ideals of the revolution and the principle of separation of powers set forth in the constitution. Instead PAN members, or *panistas*, favored a government that promoted the common good through democracy, compassion, and protection of private property. Moreover, the left-leaning economic policies enacted by Lázaro Cárdenas in the mid-1930s were objectionable to many in the PAN because they required a high level of state intervention in the economy. For example, *panistas* objected to the creation of *ejidos*, or collective farms, which were anathema to private property and economic efficiency, and served to dampen entrepreneurial drive in the countryside.

Another important group within the PAN was made up of Catholic activists who staunchly opposed the regime's secular character and its enforcement of the constitutional provisions that prohibited Church involvement in politics. Their mentor was Efraín González Luna, an ardent Catholic and an advocate of political humanism, a doctrine advanced by Catholic thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and Thomas More, which articulated the belief that a perfect society is possible if humans are able to maximize their true potential. The social doctrine of the Catholic Church served as the moral foundation for many of the party's social policies, chief among them the importance of family and compassion for the poor. In practice this meant that the state should not intervene in areas best left to the individual, family, or local community—or rather, "As much society as possible, as much government as necessary."⁴ According to *panistas*, the role of government

was to help people help themselves by providing educational and economic opportunities for self-realization.

From 1940 until the mid-1970s, the party organization's primary preoccupation was not so much ideology as it was what strategy would provide the most effective challenge to the regime. While all *panistas* opposed the PRI's methods and ideology, they disagreed on whether to participate in the electoral process. Some believed that it was necessary for the party to field candidates in order to openly challenge the PRI. Others favored non-participation rather than tacit approval of what were invariably fraudulent electoral contests. Disagreement on the issue together with small size and lack of resources meant that the PAN was either unable or disinclined to field candidates in all elections. Yet by the mid-1940s, the PAN consistently won a handful of federal deputy positions and at least one mayoral post.⁵ Nevertheless, these electoral victories did not resolve the party's internal dispute over electoral participation. Disagreement over the issue was so severe that it prevented the party from agreeing on a candidate for the 1976 presidential election and pushed the party to the brink of extinction.

The PAN could have disappeared, had it not been for several important developments. First, economic instability beginning in the 1970s led to the disenchantment of some businessmen and industrialists, particularly in the north, who perceived the crisis to be the result of the PRI's incompetence and corruption, and they channeled their disgust with the regime into support for the PAN. With a renewed injection of entrepreneurs within the party and expanded support from urban, middle-class voters also suffering from the economic downturn, the PAN was poised to make solid electoral gains throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. The party's success was also a product of its strategy of focusing, at least initially, on local and state elections where the party had a good chance of winning, particularly in major metropolitan areas. To provide an idea of the party's dramatic reversal of fortune, in 1985 there were 26 mayors, 51 state legislators, and no governors from the PAN. By 2000 those numbers had increased to 329, 299, and 9, respectively, and the PAN's governors and mayors together governed almost 42 percent of Mexico's population.

Despite its electoral successes, the PAN continues to have significant internal factions that are sometimes at odds with one another. The PAN is a right-of-center party that advocates social conservatism (e.g., opposes abortion and homosexuality and supports traditional morality and religious education) and free-market economic policies (e.g., supports private property and self-sufficiency and opposes state intervention in the economy). Its socially conservative base is comprised of devout Catholics who, in the spirit of González Luna, believe that the purpose of the party (and government) is to defend society's moral norms and enable individuals to realize their true material and spiritual potential. Its pro-business members are drawn

from businessmen and professionals, often described as *neopanistas*, or new *panistas*, who entered the party during the 1980s and tended to place greater emphasis on winning elections than on strong ideological principles.

Regionally, the PAN enjoys its strongest support in the business-friendly northern states (e.g., Baja California, Chihuahua, Nuevo León) and traditionally conservative central western states (e.g., Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, Querétaro). The party's core base of support comes primarily from those middle- and upper-class urban dwellers who are relatively better educated and more likely to identify themselves as Catholic than most Mexicans. Yet one of the keys to the party's success in 2000 was its ability to reach beyond its traditional base of support and appeal to another type of voter: one who wanted regime change.⁶ In a clear triumph of the *neopanistas* over the traditionalists, the party's strategy was to tap into popular disgust with the corruption and lack of transparency associated with the status quo. This, together with the charisma and colorfulness of Vicente Fox, convinced many voters that the PAN represented the best avenue for change. The party's hard-won gains were relatively short-lived, however. Fox's *sexenio* was characterized by congressional gridlock and few policy successes, and the party bore the brunt of the public's disenchantment with change. In the 2003 midterm elections, the PAN's share of seats in the Chamber of Deputies declined from 207 to 153.

The PAN's prospects for winning the 2006 presidential election did not seem much better. Given disappointment with the Fox administration's limited accomplishments and strong support for the PRD in public opinion polls, many observers expected the PAN to lose the 2006 election. In a competitive primary, the party selected as its candidate a longtime party bureaucrat named Felipe Calderón. While his selection was somewhat of a surprise to outside observers, Calderón's experience in the party established his credentials as an ideologically committed *panista*, and his ties to party leaders and staunch partisans were quite strong. However, his appeal to voters in the general electorate was weaker. Until December 2006, Calderón was a consistent third-place contender behind his PRI and PRD rivals in the general election.

From January through March 2006, Calderón gained sufficient recognition and support to rival PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo, but remained about ten points behind PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Then, in the last several weeks before the election, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón gained significant ground. By election day on July 2, the resulting dead heat contributed to one of the most contentious presidential elections in modern history, and by far the greatest test of Mexico's independent federal electoral authorities to date.

Calderón emerged victorious in the legal challenges that followed the contested election, but he faced the unenviable task of governing with a

fractionalized and significantly polarized legislature. This meant that on issues where the PRI and the PRD chose to unite, they combined their strength in both houses of Congress to hinder the president's program and block PAN legislation. Perhaps it is not surprising then, that a number of Calderón's initiatives fell short of expectations, and his failure to unequivocally improve Mexico's public security situation led disappointed voters to withdraw their support of the party in the 2009 midterm elections.

Ironically, twelve years after Vicente Fox championed the idea of political change in Mexico, the PAN has lost substantial popular support, and many voters now appear to believe that the best path to change is to restore the old ruling party to office. Some of this shift in opinion clearly derives from Fox's and Calderón's mixed records of success, but the party's weak popular support heading into the 2012 election also stems from the fact that the PAN does not have a clearly identified candidate to unify the party membership. One year before the election, the field is wide open, with at least seven possibilities: Santiago Creel, Josefina Vázquez Mota, Ernesto Cordero, Alonso Lujambio, Javier Lozano Alarcón, Emilio González, and Heriberto Félix. Polling data consistently show Creel and Vázquez Mota as the most popular among *panistas*, but neither captured a significant number of independent voters, and both suffered from negative evaluations by the population at large. Early in the summer of 2011, Ernesto Cordero, Calderón's finance minister, announced his interest in running for president and was immediately supported by a group of 134 influential *panistas*.⁷ Up to that point, Cordero was considered a dark horse with limited name recognition. However, his cabinet-level position led many to suspect that he was the president's unspoken choice. Even if this is the case, it remains to be seen how much influence Calderón will be able to wield in a system without a *dedazo*.

The PRD

In many ways the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) is the antithesis of the PAN. It is a relatively young party with a decidedly left-of-center ideology, and it comprises a significant number of *ex-priistas*.⁸ While the PAN has a strong base of support in northern Mexico, the PRD's strength lies in the center and southern part of the country, primarily Mexico City and poorer states like Michoacán, Guerrero, and Chiapas. Unlike the PAN, women in the PRD have held important leadership posts, including Amalia García, who served as PRD party chairperson (2000–2002) and as governor of Zacatecas (2004–2010). Still, one similarity between the PRD and the PAN is that both parties were formed as a result of disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the ways of Mexico's ruling party.

The PRD began as an electoral alliance of former *priistas* with several small leftist parties and nonpartisan social movements for the purpose of

supporting Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in his bid for the presidency in 1988. Until 1987, Cárdenas, son of Lázaro Cárdenas, one of Mexico's most beloved presidents, was a prominent member of the PRI. In 1986, Cárdenas and other members of the party's left flank formed the Democratic Current (Corriente Democrática, CD) and openly criticized the de la Madrid administration's adoption of free-market economic policies as a betrayal of the revolution. The CD also called for the PRI to use democratic primaries, rather than the *dedazo*, to select the party's candidates—a move that presumably would have prevented the selection of another technocrat as the party's presidential candidate. When the party rejected the proposed internal reform, Cárdenas and others in the CD left the PRI and began to forge the National Democratic Front (Frente Democrático Nacional, FDN), a leftist coalition that brought together parastatal parties like the now-defunct Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana, PARM) with popular movements in order to mount what would be the most serious electoral challenge to the PRI to that point.

Garnering 31 percent of the vote, the FDN fared much better than anyone, especially the PRI, expected.⁹ With Cárdenas at the helm, it attracted voters who yearned for a return to a past when the ideals of the revolution were supposedly alive and well. Furthermore, the FDN was able to capitalize on growing dissatisfaction with the PRI. Mexico was just beginning to emerge from its most serious financial crisis, and their recent economic hardship weighed heavily on many voters' minds. The PRI's candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was sure to deepen the technocratic approach introduced by his predecessor, and Cárdenas and the FDN represented an alternative for voters who wanted to send a message to the PRI.

Almost immediately after the election, some members of the FDN, led again by Cárdenas, began the process of transforming the movement into a bona fide political party. But the newly formed PRD did not fare well in subsequent elections. Its vote share in the 1991 midterm elections plummeted to a mere 8 percent, and by 1994, when Cárdenas again ran for president, it recovered only some of its former popularity in garnering 17 percent of the vote. The PRD's decline in the early 1990s was caused by several factors.¹⁰ First, the party comprised a number of disparate groups with different ideals and goals. While this heterogeneity was key to the FDN's success in 1988, it hindered the consolidation of the party as an organization because it complicated tasks that should have been relatively straightforward. So, for example, defining the party's platform and choosing candidates and leaders were hotly contested issues that often created further division rather than uniting competing factions. Moreover, these divisions also had adverse effects on the PRD's internal democracy, because the losers often claimed that the winners had triumphed through fraud. In the end, the real loser was the PRD as a whole, because internal charges of

fraud and corruption damaged the party's external image as a serious proponent of democracy and a viable electoral alternative.

As a young organization the PRD also suffered from a lack of institutionalization. Initially, many of the party's internal rules and procedures were decided on an ad hoc basis, and the arbiter of last resort was the party's leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. This method of operation, while perhaps suitable for a temporary political movement, was inadequate for a consolidated political party because, at the very least, it made enforcing rules difficult and promoted overreliance on a charismatic leader.

The internal weaknesses of the PRD were compounded by external efforts to hinder its success. Most notable of these was the PRI's campaign to undermine its leftist challenger. The PRI's bitterness toward the PRD stemmed from what many *priistas* considered Cárdenas's unforgivable betrayal of leaving, openly criticizing, and then challenging the PRI in the late 1980s. Additionally, the PRI felt threatened by the PRD's popular appeal and its attempts to woo the party's progressive elements and traditional base of support with calls for economic nationalism and attention to the poor. As a result, the PRI used state resources to harass or even harm PRD activists and gleefully publicized the PRD's internal scandals. It also used its control of the media to portray the PRD as a radical party prone to violence. For example, in the 1994 presidential campaign, a PRI television advertisement showed mob violence with burning and looting while a solemn voice suggested that a vote for change would be a vote for insecurity and instability. Finally, the PRI routinely stole elections, forcing *perredistas* to mount postelectoral challenges that further branded the party as confrontational and incapable of playing by democratic rules. Adding to the PRD's negative image was its reputation for intransigence. The party's refusal to negotiate with other parties was as much a result of the PRD's internal divisions as it was a principled stance. Regardless of the reasons, this attitude also reinforced the notion that the PRD was a bunch of wild-eyed radicals more intent on using its power in Congress to stand in the way of, rather than promote, reform and progress.

These difficulties notwithstanding, the PRD enjoyed a revival of sorts in 1997 when Cárdenas was decisively elected mayor of Mexico City with 44 percent of the vote, and it nearly doubled its share of seats in Congress. Undoubtedly, the PRD's gains in the late 1990s were due, at least in part, to the mobilization of its core base of support: the rural poor in the southern states and voters in Mexico City. But this mobilization and the party's appeal to others probably would not have occurred were it not for the fact that the 1997 elections were the first to take place after the calamitous peso devaluation of 1994. Unfortunately for the PRD, it was not able to parlay its 1997 gains into a similar showing in 2000, when Cárdenas was again the party's presidential candidate. His mediocre performance as Mexico City's mayor

and lackluster presidential campaign, together with the party's damaged reputation and the popularity of Vicente Fox, meant that the PRD did not make many inroads with voters; it garnered only 16.6 percent of the national vote.

More notable was the party's showing in 2003, when, in relatively good economic times, its share of seats in the Chamber almost doubled from fifty-two to ninety-five. Indeed, this appeared to be a sign of the party's good political fortunes to come. As early as 2002, political observers had begun to note strong support for Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known by his initials as AMLO. AMLO's ascendancy was remarkable because it marked the first time that someone other than three-time PRD presidential candidate and party founder Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas might represent the party in a presidential election. AMLO was a former member of the PRI who left the party with Cárdenas. He ran unsuccessfully for governor of his home state of Tabasco in 1994, in an election that evidenced widespread electoral fraud favoring the eventual winner, PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo. Thereafter, AMLO went on to become state party president, national party president, and finally mayor of Mexico City, all the while building a reputation for his commitment to the poor and his ability to use popular mobilization as leverage in negotiations.

Until March 2006, AMLO enjoyed a comfortable five- to ten-point lead over his rivals, with a high of nearly 45 percent public support in late 2005. However, a series of negative attacks on AMLO—as well as a number of campaign blunders, such as choosing not to appear at the first of two live televised debates—ultimately changed the course of the election. Thereafter, the candidates were in a dead heat in the race for the presidency.

On election day, Calderón obtained 35.8 percent of the vote, just slightly above AMLO's 35.3 percent. Given the close result, AMLO refused to recognize Calderón's victory and demanded a vote-by-vote recount of all ballots; he alleged that nearly 3 million votes had been deliberately omitted from the count. However, Mexican electoral regulations did not allow for a full recount and instead required that legal challenges be made through specific charges in districts where alleged violations of electoral law had occurred. The IFE did conduct a recount of the more than 11,000 precincts where there was evidence of error or inconsistency, but it ruled against a full recount. In the end, the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE) did not identify sufficient votes to overturn the results of the election.

Rather than accept this decision, AMLO took the unusual step of holding a public vote among supporters assembled at the Zócalo in Mexico City, based upon which he declared himself Mexico's legitimate president. In September, members of the PRD staged dramatic protests in Congress, successfully blocking President Fox from giving his annual report to the legislature. Later, in December 2006, the PRD unsuccessfully tried to prevent Calderón entering the legislature to be sworn in as president. President

Calderón therefore took office in a context of considerable controversy, raising questions about whether, in the eyes of many citizens, he would be able to achieve sufficient legitimacy to lead the country. For several months thereafter, some of AMLO's most dogged supporters set up permanent street demonstrations and encampments in Mexico City.

Still, public attention to and support for AMLO gradually diminished, partly because of the recalcitrant position he adopted after losing the presidential election. Even within his own party, some PRD leaders preferred a more pragmatic stance, and still others overtly criticized him for being a sore loser. Indeed, by 2007, a majority of PRD leaders broke sharply with AMLO by voting to officially recognize Calderón's government and, in 2008, by supporting Jesús Ortega as party chairman in a highly contentious internal election marred by accusations of fraud. As party chairman, Ortega adopted a much more conciliatory policy toward the PAN, including negotiations to consider strategic alliances in state-level elections in Oaxaca, Puebla, and Sinaloa. Ortega's leadership helped the PRD gain newfound political influence and restored the party to a more centrist position. However, Ortega also seriously alienated AMLO and many within the PRD. As a result, he did not emerge as a serious contender for the party's 2012 presidential nomination. Instead it became a contest between AMLO, who still enjoyed considerable support from his party, and Marcelo Ebrard, the highly popular mayor of Mexico City. Both candidates enjoyed high name recognition; however, public opinion surrounding AMLO and his platform tended to be overwhelmingly negative, and polls taken in the summer of 2011 suggested that he was unlikely to win more than 20 percent of the vote in a contest against the PRI's Peña Nieto. While public opinion of Ebrard was more positive, the same polls showed him unlikely to fare any better than AMLO in a national election.¹¹

Other Parties

In addition to Mexico's three major political parties, there are a number of smaller parties that rarely win a majority of votes in district-level contests for executive or legislative office. However, because Mexico's federal and state legislatures and city councils allow for a certain degree of proportional representation, these small parties nevertheless are able to obtain a place in government. Also, because there is substantial public funding available for all registered political parties in Mexico, small parties have access to resources that enable them to attract followers and promote their agendas in the media. As electoral competition has intensified in recent years, the importance of small parties has increased because the larger parties see them as useful strategic partners in building electoral and governmental alliances.

The most successful of Mexico's smaller parties is the Mexican Green Ecological Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, PVEM), also known as the Mexican Green Party. The PVEM has obtained a significant share of the vote—between 3 percent and 7 percent—in federal elections since 1994, and has been an important coalition partner for each of the three major parties in federal and state elections (see textbox 6.1). Most recently, the PVEM has become an important partner of the PRI in elections.

Other parties that have found representation in the federal legislature are the New Alliance Party (Partido Nueva Alianza, PANAL), Convergence for Democracy, now Convergence (Convergencia), and the Labor Party (Partido del Trabajo, PT). The PANAL was founded in 2005 with the support of Mexico's teachers' union, the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE). The PANAL's creation appeared to be the result of the estrangement of SNTE leaders from the PRI. Aside from a general commitment to workers' rights, the PANAL does not have a well-articulated political agenda. In contrast to both the PVEM and the PANAL, the PT and Convergencia do have relatively clear ideological principles and policy agendas. Indeed, both of these parties have a leftist orientation that supports the redistribution of resources to the poorest sectors of society and calls for social justice and the respect of basic human rights. The PT is reminiscent of a Cold War-era socialist party in its commitment to economic nationalism and rejection of free-market economic policies, but it was not founded until 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Convergencia was founded in 1999 and, in contrast to the PT, favors neoliberal economic strategies as long as they are tempered with some government intervention. Their ideological leanings make both Convergencia and the PT "natural" allies of the PRD; in fact, they nominated the PRD's presidential candidates in both the 2000 and 2006 national elections, and they formed alliances with the PAN and the PRD to win the governorship of Oaxaca in 2010. Convergencia also joined the PAN-PRD-PANAL alliance that won in Puebla and the PAN-PRD alliance that won Sinaloa that same year.

Generally speaking, though, small parties in Mexico tend to have limited influence and, in some cases, a relatively short lifespan. For example, despite the prominence of its presidential candidate, Patricia Mercado, the leftist Social Democratic and Agrarian Alternative Party (Partido Alternativa Sociodemócrata y Campesino, PASC) joined the graveyard of party history in Mexico after failing to meet the necessary voter threshold in the 2009 midterm election. If President Calderón's reform proposal to reduce proportional representation and access to public funds gains traction in the coming years, it is possible that other small parties could follow the example of the PASC and other defunct third parties.

Textbox 6.1. MEXICO'S UNUSUAL GREEN PARTY

Despite its origins as a community-based nongovernmental organization and its stated commitment to preserving the environment and promoting sustainable development, the Mexican Green Ecological Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, PVEM) has very weak green credentials. Indeed, the party's greater claim to fame is its involvement in corruption scandals, some of which potentially threaten rather than protect the environment. For example, in 2004, Senator Jorge Emilio González Martínez, president of the PVEM, was caught on videotape negotiating the exchange of \$2 million for government permits to develop land in Cancún. The party also gained notoriety for being fined \$16 million by the IFE for violating campaign spending laws in the 2000 election.

Notwithstanding the PVEM's questionable commitment to environmental causes and its dubious accounting skills, as a party organization it has demonstrated a shrewd ability to obtain power by making itself available as a coalition partner. In 2000, its partnership with PAN candidate Vicente Fox in the Alliance for Change was mutually beneficial in that it provided the PVEM with a springboard to an unprecedented number of legislative offices, and it gave the PAN a 5 percent boost that helped to win the presidency. When the alliance fell apart in 2001, the PVEM wasted no time in pairing up with the PRI for the 2003 midterm and 2006 presidential elections. Again, this strategy paid off for both parties by increasing the former's seat share in the Chamber of Deputies and strengthening the latter's legislative plurality. Currently the party has six senators and twenty-one deputies.

The PVEM's involvement in the scandals mentioned above undoubtedly hurt its credibility as a coalition partner and its popularity among voters. Equally serious is the fact that the party has no discernable platform beyond protecting the environment and supporting the death penalty, and even this lacks clearly articulated goals or strategies. On the one hand, an ideological void no doubt provides important flexibility when it comes to making alliances with larger parties, as it is sure to do again in 2012. On the other hand, the party runs the risk of losing popular support if voters do not feel that it stands for some coherent ideological or policy agenda. So far the party's lack of a coherent ideological platform has not prevented it from achieving some measure of success, but these factors make the PVEM's long-term prospects uncertain.

THE MEXICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

For most of the twentieth century, the PRI achieved a dominant position within Mexico thanks in part to an internal organization that facilitated power sharing among competing groups, the monopolization and clientelistic distribution of state resources, and the occasional use of electoral fraud and political repression. However, equally important was its ability to manipulate the electoral system in its favor, while coopting opposition parties to participate in and legitimate the political process. For several decades, the official party used a combination of biased electoral rules and fraud to ensure that it would win elections.¹² The evolution of laws governing party formation and participation in the electoral arena almost always favored the PRI and ensured that it would be consistently overrepresented in the legislature. This was a key component of *presidencialismo* and essential for the party to single-handedly amend the constitution and stay in power. Yet, at the same time that the manipulation of electoral institutions helped that ruling party maintain its hegemony, it also allowed sufficient competition to encourage the formation and participation of minor opposition parties. Indeed, in hindsight, the evolution of rules such as the requirement that parties demonstrate a national following actually forced opposition parties to broaden their appeal and garner the popular support that eventually undermined PRI dominance and gave way to multiparty democracy. Below we outline the major evolutionary phases of the Mexican electoral system since the revolution, including reforms that established periods with particularly distinctive arrangements in 1946, 1963, 1976, 1990, and 2007.

The Postrevolutionary Electoral System

The foundations of the Mexican electoral system were established by the 1917 Mexican constitution and the 1918 Federal Electoral Law. At the outset, the postrevolutionary electoral system was relatively decentralized, since voter registration processes and district boundaries were determined by state-level councils (*consejos de listas electorales*) and the conducting of elections was overseen by municipal authorities. Moreover, the electoral law of 1918 allowed independent candidates to run for office and created a very low threshold for party registration, since new parties could be registered with the support of just one hundred citizens (see table 6.2).

The 1918 Federal Electoral Law was more restrictive in one important way: the possibility of reelection. As noted in chapter 3, the 1917 constitution included an absolute prohibition on presidential reelection. In January 1927, Plutarco Calles and the supporters of Álvaro Obregón removed this restriction by amending Article 83 of the constitution to

Table 6.2. The 1917 Postrevolutionary Electoral System

Relevant Areas	Key Features
Electoral Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National legislature confirms presidential and congressional elections. Supreme Court resolves electoral disputes. Elections overseen by municipal authorities. State level <i>consejos de listas electorales</i> compile voter registration and determine district boundaries.
Party Formation / Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parties must have support of 100 citizens and publish governing rules. Political parties prohibited from religious affiliations. Independent candidates allowed.
Representation / Terms of Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reelection. Four-year presidential term. Senators are elected by plurality vote from single-member districts for four-year terms. Deputies are elected by plurality from single member districts for two-year terms. One deputy per 60,000 inhabitants, with at least two per state and one per territory/DF. A 1928 constitutional reform later modified the representative formula to be one deputy per 100,000 inhabitants.

permit reelection for up to one nonconsecutive term. In addition, a few days after this reform, the constitution was further amended to increase the presidential term from four to six years. However, although Obregón was reelected in 1928, he was assassinated shortly after his victory, and thereafter no Mexican president was ever again reelected. Indeed, in April 1933, restrictions on presidential reelection were restored by constitutional amendment, and, additionally, new prohibitions were added regarding the reelection of governors and the consecutive reelection of federal legislators (see textbox 6.2).¹³

The 1946 Federal Electoral System

After several challenges posed by opposition parties and independent presidential candidates during the 1930s and 1940s, the regime enacted the Federal Electoral Law of 1946 to insulate the ruling party. The reform outlawed independent candidacies and required political parties to demonstrate a minimum level of national support in order to be officially recognized and participate in elections. In 1954, the threshold for party registration was raised from 30,000 to 75,000, with a minimum of 2,500 members in each of two-thirds of the states. In the early 1970s, the

Textbox 6.2. "NO REELECTION"

"Effective suffrage, no reelection," the slogan adopted by Francisco I. Madero in the uprising against Porfirio Díaz, led to the long-term institutionalization of single-term limits in Mexico. Ironically, though, this very commitment to "no reelection" appears to severely hamper the related principle of "effective suffrage." Although votes count more today than in any previous era of Mexican history, the prohibition of reelection limits the effectiveness of voters' decisions by making it impossible for them to either reward or punish the individuals they elect. Yet despite these problems, and the fact that eliminating the ban would almost surely increase the quality and accountability of politicians, attempts to introduce consecutive reelection for national legislative and local offices have not elicited widespread support.

As an institutionalized feature of the Mexican political system, "no reelection" has given rise to powerful beneficiaries with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Chief among its supporters are members of the old guard within the PRI, who argue that introducing reelection would weaken the party by creating incentives for politicians to pay more attention to their constituents, on whom they will depend for career advancement, than to the party organization. These vested interests help explain why it has been difficult to bring about change, even with widespread recognition among scholars and politicians that eliminating the ban would represent a step forward in Mexico's transition to democracy. Therefore, when Calderón introduced the possibility of eliminating the ban on reelection at the subnational level and in the national legislature, it failed to garner widespread support even though it was seen by many to be a progressive measure designed to increase the power of Mexican voters.

requirement was relaxed slightly to 65,000, in an effort to promote greater pluralism and hence legitimacy for the political system.¹⁴ (See table 6.3.) Of course, relatively few parties were able to meet these requirements, and even fewer were able to consistently maintain their financial and political independence and thus behave as a true rather than a loyal opposition.

The 1946 electoral system established the foundations for a system in which the PRI would dominate politics for the rest of the century. In 1954, revisions to the Federal Electoral Law also gave the Federal Electoral Commission (Comisión Federal Electoral, CFE), or its state and district counterparts (formed in 1951), the responsibility of settling electoral disputes. With the 1954 Federal Electoral Law, the National Electoral Registry was created and empowered to define district boundaries and maintain voter lists.

Table 6.3. The 1946 Federal Electoral System Reforms

Relevant Areas	Key Features
Electoral Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established the Federal Electoral Oversight Commission, headed by minister of the interior (<i>gobernación</i>) to organize and oversee elections. Established National Voter Registration Agency to define districts and develop voter lists.
Party Formation / Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates must have support of a political party. Parties must be national with at least 30,000 supporters: 1,000 in each of two-thirds of the states and territories.
Representation / Terms of Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No major changes to the terms of federal electoral system until introduction of party deputies in 1963, and the modification of the electoral threshold for these deputies from 2.5 to 1.5 percent of the national vote in 1973.

The 1963 Party Deputy System

In 1963 President Adolfo López Mateos introduced a form of limited proportional representation (PR) in the Chamber of Deputies, through what were known as party deputies (*diputados plurinominales*). These seats were reserved for parties that received at least 2.5 percent of the national vote. Each party that met this threshold was granted one seat for each .5 percentage of the vote that they received, up to a maximum of 20 seats. Any party that received more than 20 percent of the national vote was ineligible to receive party deputy seats; therefore these seats were essentially off limits to the PRI.

Yet while party deputy seats appeared to be a generous gift to the opposition, the 20 percent limit also represented a glass ceiling for the National Action Party, which was beginning to garner greater national support beginning in the 1960s. Ironically, if the PAN was too successful (gaining more than 20 percent of the vote nationwide), it could lose representation in the legislature by becoming ineligible to receive party deputy seats. Meanwhile, small parties blossomed under this system, since they could get access to legislative positions relatively easily. Thus, the addition of party deputy seats was a novel way to allow the opposition representation, all the while preserving the PRI's majority by fragmenting the opposition into small fringe parties and punishing any opposition parties that managed to receive more than 20 percent of the national vote.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the social unrest of 1968, a new Federal Electoral Law in 1973 lowered the minimum threshold for party deputy seats from 2.5 percent to 1.5 percent, increased the maximum threshold to 25 percent, and increased the maximum number of seats to 25.

The 1976 LFOPPE Reform

The charade of electoral competition was exposed in the 1976 presidential election when the PRI candidate, José López Portillo, ran unopposed and Mexico could not credibly claim to be democratic. As noted in chapter 4, in 1977 López Portillo introduced the Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes (LFOPPE), which sought to increase the access of smaller opposition parties by creating two methods of obtaining official registration. Organizations could apply for conditional registration, and hence participate in national elections, if they could demonstrate four years of continuous political activity. Conditional parties could obtain permanent registration if they received 1.5 percent of the national vote.¹⁶ To accommodate minority parties, one hundred seats in the Chamber of Deputies were set aside specifically for the proportional representation of those parties that met this threshold but won fewer than sixty of the three hundred single-member district seats (see table 6.4).

Table 6.4. 1977 Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes (LFOPPE)

Relevant Areas	Key Features
Electoral Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Composition of Federal Electoral Commission (CFE) changed to include a representative from each party, one senator, one deputy, and a notary public. CFE given the authority to register, deny, or withdraw party registration. CFE responsible for choosing the number and composition of PR districts. Free monthly radio and TV access for all registered parties.
Party Formation / Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any party that fails to take its seats loses its registration and vote. Parties required to have at least 65,000 supporters nationwide, with at least 2,000 residing in two-thirds of states and territories. Established two methods of party registration: 1) <i>Conditional registration</i> given to organizations with four continuous years of political activity. In order to obtain permanent registration, must obtain 1.5% of vote in national election; 2) <i>Definitive registration</i> given to parties that submit party statutes and evidence of 65,000 members: 3,000 in one-half plus one of states, or 300 in one-half plus one of all federal districts.
Representation / Terms of Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of seats in Chamber of Deputies is increased to 400, 300 SMD, 100 PR seats for parties that win fewer than 60 SMD, and at least 1.5% of vote. In 1986, the number of seats in Chamber increased to 500, 300 SMD and 200 PR, and a governability clause gives party with highest vote (even if less than 51%) a majority in Chamber.

A subsequent constitutional amendment in 1986 further increased the size of the Chamber of Deputies to five hundred, with the addition of one hundred more plurinominal seats. While this appeared to create more space for the opposition, in fact changes to the allocation formula gave the PRI access to the proportional representation seats for the first time. Furthermore, the reform was more beneficial to the PRI than to the opposition because the so-called governability clause discussed in chapter 4 also guaranteed the party with the highest vote a majority in the Chamber, even if it won less than 51 percent of the national vote. In fact, this is what occurred in the 1988 congressional elections, when the PRI won only 239 of 500 seats (47.8 percent).

The LFOPPE reform also established new regulations that sought to address long-standing media bias favoring the ruling party. In the past, close connections between government officials and owners of media outlets, combined with the widespread practice of paying kickbacks to reporters, made it next to impossible for the Mexican press to have an objective or independent voice. To be sure, in the aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre and several government crackdowns in the early 1970s, many newspaper journalists began to reexamine their previous complicity and take on a more independent and critical stance vis-à-vis the government.¹⁷ The LFOPPE also facilitated a greater degree of media access by including provisions to grant all registered political parties free monthly television and radio time. Like many reforms of the time, this provision was more symbolic than substantial: the government, in concert with the media outlets, determined which time slots were given to the opposition, and it became common practice to relegate the opposition's ads to times when audiences were smallest.

In short, the 1977 reform and the 1986 constitutional amendment made it easier for smaller parties to participate in elections, gain a nominal level of representation, and even increase their access to voters through mass media outlets. Yet the overall effect of the reform was to enhance the legitimacy of the Mexican political system by making it appear more competitive than it really was. At the same time, the cap on minority representation ensured that opposition parties with larger followings would never pose a serious threat to the PRI. Therefore, at least initially, the primary beneficiary of the 1977 law was the PRI, whose hegemonic position was preserved.

COFIPE and Other Electoral Reforms of the 1990s

In the aftermath of the controversial, fraud-ridden presidential election of 1988, when several opposition parties formed a coalition to support Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas against PRI candidate Carlos Salinas, electoral reform took on renewed urgency in Mexico. In response, the PRI, together with the support of the PAN, passed the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and

Procedures (COFIPE), which dramatically changed the rules for candidate registration, electoral regulation, and seat allocation (see table 6.5). First, in a clear response to Cárdenas's National Democratic Front, COFIPE required that joint candidates be supported by an official coalition, and that coalitions nominate common candidates for more positions than just the presidency. This new law was a specific attempt to prevent another Cárdenas-like figure from challenging the PRI. The PAN agreed to support the measure because it feared that Cárdenas and other leftist candidates would seek to win elections using the FDN's strategy.

The 1990 COFIPE reform also transformed electoral oversight. Before 1990, the government tightly controlled electoral process through a variety of mechanisms. For example, the minister of the interior, who was always closely linked to the president, headed the CFE, the body in charge of organizing and ruling on elections. This arrangement allowed the standing government and the ruling party to intervene directly in electoral matters, including the settlement of electoral disputes and charges of fraud. It is therefore unsurprising that the PRI was able to use fraud with impunity to ensure favorable electoral results. However, in the 1988 presidential election, the crash of the vote-tabulating system on election night severely delegitimized the PRI and gave the opposition greater leverage to negotiate the replacement of the CFE with the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) as the country's chief electoral authority. Initially, the minister of the interior remained head of the IFE, and the PRI was over-represented on the governing board; however, over time, the IFE became an independent institution.

The COFIPE also eliminated the governability clause but replaced it with a similar arrangement in which a majority of Chamber seats was automatically awarded to the party with the most victories in single-member districts.¹⁸ In doing so, the new law established more specific thresholds for seat allocation: if a party won less than 35 percent or between 60 and 70 percent of the national vote, its seat share was proportional to its vote share. If it won more than 70 percent, it would automatically receive 350 seats, or a two-thirds majority. But a party that won between 35 and 60 percent of the national vote was awarded 50 percent plus one, or 251 seats, and two additional seats for each percentage point above 35 percent. This was the scenario most likely to apply to the PRI, and it ensured that the PRI would always have an absolute majority.

In a second round of reforms in 1993 and 1994, the Salinas administration conceded more space to the opposition by doubling the size of the Senate to 128 members, and it made Senate elections concurrent with presidential elections. However, Salinas again altered electoral rules for the Chamber to favor the ruling party.¹⁹ Thus, while the opposition benefited from the addition of 32 Senate seats to be awarded to the second-place

Table 6.5. 1990 Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE)

Relevant Areas	Key Features
Electoral Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) replaces CFE as chief electoral authority. Led by Consejo General, which is comprised of minister of the interior (<i>gobernación</i>), four representatives of the majority party, one senator and one deputy from majority party, one member of Congress from the opposition, and six independent members, nominated by president and confirmed by two-thirds majority in Chamber of Deputies. Consejo General adjudicates electoral disputes. All parties choose precinct observers. New voter registration list with photo identification card. New formula for public funding of political parties; limits on campaign spending; new procedures for reporting and monitoring party finances. In 1993, the IFE was granted power to certify congressional elections.
Party Formation / Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalitions must be formed well in advance of elections. No two parties can nominate a single candidate unless they form a coalition for all elected offices. Coalition candidates do not count toward parties' total for PR seats.
Representation / Terms of Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminates first governability clause in favor of a formula that overrepresents the party with the most victories in SMD in the Chamber, so that if winning party gets 35% of vote, it automatically gets 250 SMD seats plus one PR seat, for a simple majority. In 1993, the second governability clause was eliminated, and a new law established that no single party can hold more than 63% of total seats in Chamber. In 1993, the number of Senate seats increased to four from each state, for a total of 128. First-place party wins three seats, and the second-place party, one seat.

party in each state and the Federal District, and from the elimination of the provision that prevented a party from holding more than 315 seats in the Chamber, it was nevertheless disadvantaged by a new provision that allocated the 200 plurinominal seats on the basis of each party's share of the overall vote—a move that made it easier for the PRI to protect its majority in the lower house of the legislature.²⁰

Since the above-mentioned reforms appeared to be successful in protecting the PRI's advantages while lending the appearance of greater democratic legitimacy, it is possible that no further reforms would have occurred thereafter. However, the guerrilla uprising in Chiapas on January 1, 1994 and the political assassinations leading up to the presidential elections the

same year led to hurried negotiations on a new set of reforms to bolster the legitimacy of electoral results. Specifically, the new Federal Electoral Law changed the governing board of the IFE so that its six independent councilors would be chosen by consensus of the major political parties (rather than nominated by the president) and approved by a two-thirds majority of the Chamber. In addition, the new 1994 law required parties to submit a report of campaign revenue and spending to the IFE and established new campaign contribution and spending limits for individuals, labor unions, and anonymous donors (contributions from businesses, churches, and foreign organizations were expressly forbidden). The 1994 reform also established the Federal Electoral Tribunal (Tribunal Federal Electoral, TRIFE). The TRIFE was composed of the Chief Justice and four other Supreme Court justices—appointed with two-thirds congressional approval—whose purpose is to examine disputes relating to congressional elections.

After he took office in 1994, President Ernesto Zedillo called for more reforms to strengthen the legitimacy of the electoral process. First, an electoral reform in 1996 made the IFE truly independent by requiring that its president be an independent citizen chosen by the Chamber of Deputies (see table 6.6). The reform also established the Supreme Court as the final arbiter of electoral disputes and integrated the TRIFE into the Supreme Court bureaucracy. The 1996 reform also gave the IFE the right to buy the time slots for party advertising and charged it with monitoring the media for signs of bias. More than previous reforms, the 1996 electoral laws paved the way for all political parties in Mexico to compete on an equal footing in local and national elections. For example, during the presidential campaign of 2006, the IFE forced the PAN to discontinue advertisements that it deemed undue personal attacks on the PRD's López Obrador.

The Zedillo administration's reforms also made it impossible for the majority party's share of seats to exceed its share of the vote by more than 8 percent and capped its seats in the Chamber at 300 seats, significantly less than the 350 needed to unilaterally amend the constitution. New proportional representation allocation formulas in the Senate also made it easier for the opposition to win seats. Without a doubt, the new laws played an important role in giving the opposition greater access to positions in the national legislature. Thus, it is not coincidental that the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies in 1997, the first year that the reforms were in effect. Moreover, since 1997, no party has won more than a plurality in either house of the national legislature.

The 2007 Federal Electoral Reform

In the political crisis that followed the controversial 2006 presidential election, several new laws were introduced that constituted the first

Table 6.6. 1996 Electoral Law Reforms

Relevant Areas	Key Features
Electoral Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal District: Introduces direct election of mayor/governor of DF. • Allocates public campaign funds to all political parties: 30% are distributed equally among parties, 70% based on share of vote in previous election. • Establishes sanctions for violating spending laws. • Parties must submit annual reports on revenue and spending. • Permanent commission established to oversee campaign spending and party expenditures. • Establishes independent audit of voter registration list. • Legalizes participation of international election observers. • IFE president is an independent citizen (rather than minister of the interior) chosen by consensus and with two-thirds approval of Chamber. • Voting rights within IFE limited to its president and eight independent electoral councilors chosen by consensus with two-thirds approval of Chamber, to serve six-year terms. • Establishes Supreme Court as final arbiter of electoral results. • Integrates Federal Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE) into Supreme Court bureaucracy. • IFE given right to buy time slots for political party advertising. • IFE monitors media for signs of bias.
Representation / Terms of Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes Senate seat allocation to two per state (64), 32 to second-place parties, and 32 on the basis of PR. • Majority party in Chamber can have no more than 300 seats and number of seats cannot exceed share by more than 8%.

major electoral reform since the end of the era of PRI hegemony. The new reforms granted the IFE expanded regulatory oversight of the media, the message, and the money employed in electoral campaigns. First, the 2007 reforms established new restrictions on the purchase of media air time (radio and television) for campaign purposes, limiting its use to political parties and forbidding individuals and private interest groups from advertising or campaigning on a candidate's behalf. Part of the intent of this reform was to ensure that candidates and their parties, and not shadowy, deep-pocketed interest groups, are the ones responsible for the messages conveyed in a campaign. A second aspect of the 2007 reform was to introduce new restrictions on the content of campaign messages to prevent the use of negative campaigning against individuals, parties, and institutions. In the wake of the very negative campaign messages targeting AMLO, this reform was intended to restore civility to political campaigns in Mexico.

Finally, a third component of the 2007 reform set limits on the amount of public funds distributed to political parties, as well as new restrictions on campaign contributions from private individuals to political parties. In 1987, the Federal Electoral Code established that parties would receive public funds in proportion to their electoral returns and percentage of seats held in the Chamber.²¹ Shortly thereafter, in 1990, COFIPE altered the allocation formula and introduced electoral spending limits. However, the latter were so high that they made no practical difference in the way the PRI funded its electoral campaigns. COFIPE also established procedures for reporting and monitoring campaign spending, yet in practice these rules were widely ignored. Further reform occurred in 1996 when parties were obligated to submit annual revenue and spending reports, and Congress established that public, rather than private funds would be the most important source of campaign financing.²² Even with the limits on private contributions enacted in 2007, Mexican elections are among the most expensive in the world, and many argue that further reform is needed to ensure that competition among the parties remains fair.

Each of these reforms at least nominally strengthened the role of the IFE in the regulation of campaigns and elections. What remains to be seen, of course, is whether the IFE can in fact enforce the letter and spirit of the 2007 electoral reforms. With regard to the first component of the reform, interpreting what counts as political advertising can be difficult, since indirect advocacy or issue advertising can be developed to favor or harm a particular candidate or party without overtly political language. For example, an interest group could presumably still seek to subtly sway the electorate by using an advertisement about abortion in a district where a candidate expresses strong views on that topic. Likewise, determining when the content of campaign messages is negative is a highly subjective exercise that could make it difficult for the IFE to maintain the appearance of objectivity. Moreover, trying to restrict negative campaigning could even be harmful if it prevents voters from being well informed about candidates' bad behavior or the unfulfilled promises of an incumbent political party. Lastly, effectively capping campaign expenditures has proved to be a notoriously difficult task in many democratic systems.

Electoral Trends in Mexico

The long-term prospects for all of Mexico's political parties have been significantly determined by the evolving configuration of Mexico's electoral institutions. For seven decades, the design of Mexico's electoral system was one of the major factors that kept the PRI in power. However, over the last three decades of the twentieth century, a series of gradual electoral reforms, like the introduction of proportional representation, also helped

dramatically transform the Mexican political system, as opposition parties grew both in electoral support and representation in public office. This dramatic reshaping of the Mexican party system illustrates the changing preferences of voters over time, but it also offers a testament to the power of institutions as a means to convey those preferences into tangible political outcomes. The leaders of the PRI understood that power and used institutions very carefully to preserve the position of the ruling party, but because opposition groups were successful in renegotiating the rules of the game, they were ultimately able to shift the results in their favor.

Over the last thirty years, the party that most clearly benefited from the declining power of the PRI was the PAN. In part, this reflected the PAN's institutional strength as Mexico's long-established and second largest political party, as well as its ability to attract and field strong candidates to oppose the ruling party, particularly when the economic crises that started in the 1970s drove many businessmen and women into politics. However, the PAN's ability to advance politically also reflected its ability to negotiate specific reforms, such as giving a portion of senate seats to the second largest party in a given state. As a result of such reforms, the PAN was able to establish a strong foothold at the local and state level and ultimately to succeed in developing a dominant position over the PRI in the national political arena.

After twelve years of continuous rule and declining political fortunes in local and midterm elections, it is not clear the PAN will maintain its position as Mexico's new ruling party. One measure it has taken to stave off a return of the PRI has been to negotiate with its traditional rivals in the PRD and other opposition parties to form electoral coalitions. While coalitions tend to be more common in parliamentary systems of government, Mexico's use of proportional representation creates incentives for parties to pool their respective shares of the vote into a plurality or even a majority winning coalition. This tactic proved successful for various multiparty coalitions in the states of Chiapas in 2006 and Oaxaca in 2010. While certain parties—such as the PRI and the PVEM—have found it relatively easy to strike up regular, mutually beneficial alliances, constructing broad coalitions across parties with opposing ideological points of view has proven more difficult.

In the case of the PAN and the PRD, for example, the parties joined forces in 2010 to oust the PRI for the first time in Oaxaca, Puebla, and Sinaloa by supporting gubernatorial candidates Gambino Cue, Rafael Moreno, and Mario López Valdez, respectively. But PAN-PRD alliances have not always been successful, and more often than not, both the PAN and the PRD have opted not to join forces. Indeed, after their successful run in 2010, the PAN went so far as to sign a secret pact with the PRI affirming its commitment not to enter into alliances with the PRD in the 2011 elections in the state of Mexico, with President Calderón using this agreement as leverage to

negotiate a new federal tax reform package. When the PRI-PAN "anti-alliance" pact fell apart, members of the state party organizations of both the PAN and the PRD began working to establish a coalition, until the national leaders of the PRD finally voted to oppose the agreement in April 2011. In the absence of a PAN-PRD coalition, the PRI was able to maintain control of the governorship of the state of Mexico, an important stronghold for the PRI and a strong predictor of the outcome of the 2012 presidential election.

To be sure, by the later part of the Calderón administration, most pundits had already begun to speculate that PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto would have the advantage in the 2012 presidential election. A young, attractive candidate, Peña Nieto had important advantages heading into the general election, but the most important was the ability of the PRI to unite behind a single candidate for the first time in over fifteen years. Indeed, from mid-2009 onward, the PRI consistently outperformed its rivals in public opinion polls, regardless of which candidates the other parties selected (see figure 6.1). Furthermore, a series of Mitofsky polls in the spring and summer of 2011 indicated that Enrique Peña Nieto had 87 percent support among PRI voters and consistently garnered about 47 percent support among voters who expressed a preference. Meanwhile, although the PAN's Santiago Creel enjoyed 65 percent name recognition, voters had an unfavorable opinion of him and his platform. Moreover, no PAN candidate received more than 19 percent support among voters asked whom they would choose if the election were held that day. Similarly, while the PRD's top candidates, AMLO and Marcelo Ebrard, enjoyed high name recognition, many voters held strongly negative opinions (in the case of AMLO) or only mildly positive opinions (in the case of Ebrard). All of these results reinforced the notion that Enrique Peña Nieto is the man to beat in 2012.

CONCLUSION

Although the PRI dominated the Mexican political arena for seven decades, in the late 1980s the opposition began to organize and compete effectively for power. By the mid-1990s, Mexico had a multiparty system and a competitive electoral system. In 2000, the PAN's victory in the presidential election opened a new era in which electoral competition and uncertainty became the new norm. Indeed, intense competition in the 2006 presidential election provoked perhaps the greatest test of Mexico's democratic electoral system to date, given the PRD's initial refusal to recognize the results. However, changes within the PRD softened its position and even led to important collaboration with the PAN in certain state

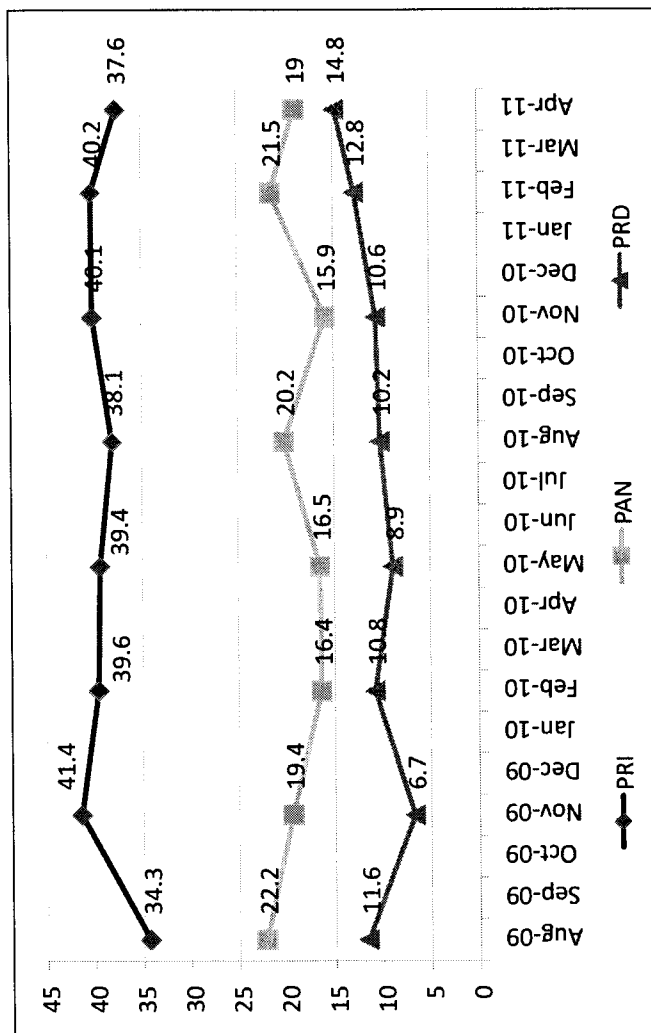


Figure 6.1. Voters' Intentions in 2012

Source: Consulta Mitofsky, *Preferencia electoral para la presidencia de México (sin candidatos)*, February 2011.

elections, as a check against the resurgence of the PRI. Despite these efforts however, in the 2009 midterm election and in the lead up to the 2012 elections, the PRI had returned to a strong position to retake the presidency. There is much speculation about what a return of the PRI to Los Pinos could mean for Mexican democracy. However, given all of the changes to Mexico's political parties and electoral institutions we have highlighted in this chapter, it seems unlikely that the PRI would be able to recapture its dominant position of the past: the opposition is much stronger and more deeply rooted in Mexican society, and Mexico's electoral institutions have been reformed to prevent the excesses of single-party hegemony. For these reasons it appears quite certain that competitive party politics will continue to be an important feature of contemporary Mexican politics for the foreseeable future.