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MEXICO'S 2012 ELECTIONS: THE RETURN OF THE PRI

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On the eve of its 1 July 2012 presidential balloting, Mexico seemed primed for a “change” election after twelve years under National Action Party (PAN) presidents Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón. There was indeed a change of sorts, but perhaps a surprising one. Voters returned to power the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had ruled in authoritarian fashion for seven decades before the PAN finally displaced it the 2000 election—an outcome widely heralded at the time as a breakthrough for Mexican democracy. In 2012, telegenic young PRI governor Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico State won a 38 percent plurality, enough to best the 32 percent garnered by Andrés Manuel López Obrador as the candidate of a coalition headed by his Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Coming in third was the PAN’s Josefina Vázquez Mota with just over 26 percent, and in distant fourth was Gabriel Quadri de la Torre of the New Alliance Party (PANAL) with 2.3 percent.

Why, after a hiatus lasting only two six-year presidential terms, did Mexican voters reinstall in their country’s highest office a party that had run a corruption-riddled, authoritarian system for much of the twentieth century? Is there a new-model PRI that differs decisively from the old PRI? What does the PRI’s return mean for Mexico’s democracy?

On the one hand, the peaceful turnover of power—with no party rejecting the results and staging bitter protests, as happened in 2006 when Calderón narrowly beat López Obrador—stands as a welcome sign that democracy is maturing and the principle of electoral accountability is gaining ground. On the other hand, however, the PRI’s return is likely to reinvigorate several features of the old regime that the transition of 2000 never uprooted, potentially representing a setback for Mexico’s young democracy.

On the domestic front, lackluster economic performance during twelve years of right-of-center PAN administrations prompted voters to search for an alternative. Although the administrations of Fox (2000–2006) and Calderón (2006–12) kept inflation under control and avoided financial crises of the sort that had plagued Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s, they proved unable to meet the high expectations to which the 2000 transition gave rise. While the rest of Latin America rode a commodities boom to achieve an average yearly growth rate of 3.5 percent during the 2000s, Mexico's economy lagged with a yearly average of 2 percent. The underperformance relative to the region's other two main economies was even worse than the regional average suggested, since Brazil grew by 3.6 percent annually during this time and Argentina's economy expanded at a stunning yearly rate of 5 percent.

In 2009, the global financial crisis wiped out a large part of the gains made that decade as the Mexican economy, tightly linked to that of the United States, shrank by 6.2 percent. This made Mexico the Western Hemisphere's worst performer that year, trailing Paraguay and even Haiti. Employment fell and joblessness and underemployment rose, running counter to President Calderón's main 2006 campaign promise. During his administration, moreover, average real wages stagnated, while the real minimum wage declined by 6 percent.¹ The poverty rate, which had been dropping since the 1990s, began to rise again. Although the disappointing performance was due in part to the U.S. recession, and despite signs that an economic recovery was underway in Mexico, this was cold comfort for voters who watched the number of Mexicans living in poverty go from 42 million in 2006 to 53 million (out of a total population of 114 million) toward the end of Calderón's term.²

In addition to the economic problems, the country also experienced a sharp escalation of violence after 2006. For the preceding ten years, violent crime had been on the decline, with the number of homicides per 100,000 people reaching as low as 8.4. But between 2006 and 2011, deaths related to drug trafficking alone spiked to an estimated 60,000, and the incidence of homicide skyrocketed to a shocking 24 per 100,000 people according to August 2012 figures from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).³ Though Mexico still has violent-crime rates that are lower than what one finds in most of the region's other countries—Brazil has 25 murders a year per 100,000 people—violence related to the drug trade has made headlines since the beginning of Calderón's term.

The reason was his controversial decision to use the military to fight drug-trafficking organizations. Supporters of Calderón's militarized strategy see it as a valiant effort to rein in criminal organizations that had been left unchecked for decades and had grown in power with the

MAP—MEXICO'S STATES



decline of the Colombian cartels in the 1990s. Still, the gruesome violence that ensued left many voters longing for the relative peace of the years before the PAN replaced the PRI in the presidency. According to a March 2012 survey, four-fifths of the public supports the military's anti-drug efforts, but only 28 percent deem them successful while 43 percent think that they have failed. More than half of respondents (52 percent) said that organized crime was winning, while only 19 percent said that about the government.⁴

Worries that the government is losing tend to be sharpest in places where the military has taken over law enforcement. These include, to name a few, the Pacific coast states of Michoacán (2006), Guerrero (2007), Baja California (2007), and Sinaloa (2008) plus the northern states of Chihuahua and Nuevo León and the state of Tamaulipas on the northern portion of Mexico's Gulf coast (all in 2008). Each has seen a drastic rise in violence since the military assumed police powers.⁵ During Calderón's six-year term, the rate of kidnappings and extortion more than doubled nationwide.⁶ With seemingly random violence increasingly affecting them and witnessing a worrisome rise in human-rights violations by security forces,⁷ many Mexicans have become tired and fearful. Not surprisingly, among those with means migration to the United States has taken off.

The flagging economy and spiraling violence came amid an international context that seemed to favor change. North of the border, U.S. voters had opted for a major break with President George W. Bush's policies by electing Barack Obama in 2008. To the south, most of Latin America had voted in left-of-center governments that vowed to allevi-

ate poverty and address high levels of inequality. Moreover, governments of the left in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador have presided over strong national performances which signal that economic growth is not the sole province of right-of-center administrations.⁸

The “Change” That Wasn’t

In short, both domestic and international factors seemed to point toward a break with the past. In Mexico’s three-party system, the PAN represents the right and the PRD speaks for the left while the PRI sits in the center. Would the left reach power for the first time, with Mexico becoming part of Latin America’s widely noted “left turn”? The answer was no: A plurality bypassed the left-wing option and opted to bring back the PRI—the same party that had ruled Mexico for 71 years until it was finally voted out in 2000. How did this happen?

The 2012 campaign was the first to go forward under new rules adopted in 2007 and 2008. Responding to major glitches and allegations of fraud in the 2006 race, the changes were aimed at bringing equity and transparency to the process while reducing its cost. The main changes had to do with the length of the campaign period, public financing, and the role of the media. The time allowed for campaigning was cut from six to three months. Private funding was limited to 10 percent of the spending ceiling, and public funding was reduced by 48 percent. In order to minimize the influence of special interests, only the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)—acting on behalf of the political parties—was allowed to buy radio and television advertising.⁹ These reforms set the stage for an election with abbreviated campaigns but plenty of allegations of irregularities regarding campaign spending and the influence of the media and interest groups.

Of the four candidates, two ran as the standard-bearers of coalitions, and two ran on the tickets of single parties. As they had in 2006, the PRI and the Mexican Green Ecologist Party (PVEM)—a pseudo-environmentalist group that is more akin to a family business than a political organization—formed the Commitment for Mexico coalition with Peña Nieto as their candidate. Between 2005 and 2011, the 46-year-old had been governor of the State of Mexico—the populous and economically important state that nearly surrounds Mexico City. His good looks, recent marriage to a famous soap-opera actress, and cozy relationship as governor with the country’s television networks gained him favorable media coverage despite the vagueness of his proposals.

Peña Nieto promised to liberalize the economy and deepen cooperation with the United States. He advocated opening up Pemex—Mexico’s state-owned oil company—to private investment and called for expanding cooperation between Pemex and the private sector via production-sharing agreements. He pledged to continue trade liberalization and to undertake labor-market reforms that would make it easier for the private

sector to hire and fire employees. He vowed to expand the size of the Federal Police in order to reduce violence.

The second campaign coalition brought together three left-of-center parties under the Progressive Movement label, with the PRD as the anchor. Their candidate was López Obrador. Often called AMLO, he had remained a prominent figure on the left after his extremely narrow 2006 loss to Calderón and leadership of a week of public protests against the result that involved occupying part of downtown Mexico City. An ex-mayor of the capital and former PRD president, AMLO won the PRD nomination after defeating his successor as Mexico City mayor in a primary based on a national poll that the party commissioned in order to select its presidential candidate.

Since AMLO comes from a tradition of economic nationalism within the left, it was not surprising that his proposals differed the most widely from those of the other candidates. He called for significant change, though his 2012 campaign was considerably more moderate than its 2006 predecessor had been. Rather than focusing on demands to “put the poor first” and renegotiate the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), this time he promised a government based on the well-being of all sectors of society. He opposed opening Pemex to private investment and called instead for rooting out corruption and increasing public investment in the company. Rather than advocating a tax increase, he stressed the need to cut government waste. Speaking about the drug war, he promised to return the military to the supporting role in antidrug operations that it had played before the Calderón administration. He also pledged to emphasize social programs and job creation as keys to preventing crime.

Unable to nominate Calderón for reelection because of a one-term constitutional limit, the PAN chose longtime party stalwart, cabinet official, and legislator Josefina Vázquez Mota as its candidate. She had served as Fox’s social-development secretary and Calderón’s education secretary before becoming the PAN’s leader in the Chamber of Deputies in 2009. Her victory over two rivals in the party’s closed primary made her the first female major-party presidential nominee in Mexican history.

Vázquez Mota’s main message veered between calls for continuity and efforts to differentiate herself from Calderón. On the one hand, she emphasized the need to build on the economic stability achieved by the two PAN administrations. She promised to follow through on the labor-market reform for which Calderón’s government had paved the way, vowing to make the rules governing private-sector personnel decisions more flexible. Pledging to maintain Calderón’s *mano dura* (stronghanded) approach, her security proposals pointed to the potential benefits of the government’s antidrug strategy. To drive her security message home, she promised to name Calderón as her attorney-general. On the

other hand, she tried to convey the sense that she represented a real alternative. One of her main campaign slogans was “Josefina, diferente.”

The fourth candidate was the environmentalist Gabriel Quadri of PANAL. He never expected to be competitive, but hoped to win the 2 percent of the total vote needed to maintain his party’s legally recognized status and access to government resources. The idea behind this was to give PANAL, which was founded by the leader of the powerful teachers’ union, a chance to become the crucial “makeweight” party essential for forming a working majority in Congress. Potentially commanding the votes of Mexico’s estimated 1.5 million unionized teachers, PANAL deliberately fielded an “outsider” candidate with the stated objective of “fixing” politics. This allowed Quadri to draw attention to topics that his rivals avoided—he favored more permissive laws regarding drug use, same-sex marriage, and abortion, for instance—in order to make his candidacy distinct and to draw those voters most committed to his high-profile stands on these matters.

The Campaign and the Results

Even before campaigning officially began at the end of March, most polls showed Peña Nieto drawing 45 to 50 percent support and enjoying a comfortable lead of 20 points or more over any rival. This positioned him as the solid frontrunner and led wide sectors of society to believe that his victory was inevitable several months before the election. Vázquez Mota appeared in second place hovering around 25 percent while López Obrador ran third at about 21 percent.

The race began to tighten in early May, when the first of two presidential debates agreed to by all candidates took place. Although the three campaigns had their share of major blunders, no single event appeared to move preferences significantly. In the aftermath of the first debate, however, AMLO gradually displaced Vázquez Mota in second place. Marred by logistical mistakes and lukewarm support from many party notables, her campaign steadily lost steam to the point where even former president Fox openly campaigned for Peña Nieto. At the same time, López Obrador’s popularity climbed steadily, with some polls suggesting that the election had become a two-way race.

This gain in support came in part from the mobilization of students in the movement #YoSoy132. In one of the campaign season’s few refreshing moments, university students from across public and private institutions came together to denounce what they saw as biased media coverage of the race. The group took its name from a show of solidarity with 131 students who had organized a demonstration denouncing Peña Nieto’s human-rights record. When the media dismissed the protest as staged by outsiders, these students posted a video online in which they displayed their student identification cards. The video went viral and

the movement took its name as supporters added themselves as the 132nd participant through online social networks.

For many young people, the movement represented the first time they had become involved in politics, and raised awareness regarding the election and its significance. After one of the two TV networks decided to show a soccer match instead of the first presidential debate, #YoSoy132 pushed for the second debate to be broadcast nationally and even organized a third debate. The third debate brought together three of the four candidates—Peña Nieto declined to participate, charging bias on the part of the #YoSoy132 movement. Although the debate was only broadcast online, the grassroots organization of a debate for the country's highest office was unprecedented. The group participated in election monitoring and has remained politically active since the election.

A week before election day, in the last polling “snapshot” allowed by Mexico's electoral law, most surveys showed Peña Nieto with a comfortable lead of 7 to 20 points. In contrast to the almost unbelievably close 2006 presidential race and the heavy toll that it took on the IFE's credibility, the 2012 balloting was shaping up as a shoo-in for the PRI candidate. Although surveys suggested that a majority believed that the 2006 election had been rigged and had serious doubts about this one,¹⁰ all candidates signed a civility pact pledging not to contest the results. López Obrador also expressed his confidence in the IFE, stating that this time he harbored no suspicions that a systematic fraud would be orchestrated.

On July 1, the country went to the polls not only to choose the president but also to renew all 128 seats in the Senate and all 500 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Gubernatorial and legislative races were also held in the states of Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Yucatán, and the Federal District (Mexico City), while a handful of other states held municipal elections. Despite fear of violence related to organized crime, no major incidents were reported on election day. Turnout was recorded at 63 percent, and only two polling places were unable to open due to poor security conditions—a new record for the IFE.

The seven-point difference between Peña Nieto and López Obrador saved the IFE and the Electoral Tribunal from the sort of pressure that they had come under after the close 2006 race and follow-on protests. Even so, some López Obrador supporters pointed to the exaggerated lead that most pollsters had predicted for Peña Nieto as an effort by their media sponsors to influence the outcome by discouraging voter participation. They also alleged inequities before election day, including vote buying, exceeding campaign spending limits, and preferential media treatment. After a recount covering about half of all polling places, the Electoral Tribunal declared the election valid and Peña Nieto the winner. Still not conceding defeat but this time refraining from postelec-

tion protests, López Obrador announced that he was leaving the PRD in order to found a new leftist party.

The electoral results show a country divided roughly in half, with Peña Nieto or the PAN winning in the north and AMLO in most of the south. The PAN won majorities in the Gulf coast states of Tamaulipas and Veracruz, in Nuevo León (which sits just inland of Tamaulipas and, like it, borders Texas), and in Guanajuato. As in 2006, this pattern maps onto the economic differences that exist between the more developed and industrialized north, which has generally benefited from economic integration with the United States, and the poorer and more agrarian south, which lags behind on most indices of development.

The new composition of Congress reflects the declining electoral fortunes of the PAN and the modest gains of the other parties. The PAN's seat share fell from 41 to 30 percent in the Senate and from 28 to 23 percent in the Chamber. The PRD-led leftist coalition lost some influence in the Senate, from 28 to 22 percent, but advanced in the lower chamber, from 17 to 27 percent. The PRI-PVEM coalition increased its share of Senate seats from 30 to 48 percent but lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies, slipping from 53 to 48 percent. The junior partner in that coalition, the PVEM, made important gains in both chambers, going from 6 to 9 Senate seats and 22 to 34 deputies (though five later switched to the PRI). In addition to maintaining legal recognition as a party, PANAL maintained a single Senate seat and increased its deputy count from 8 to 10.

Although the PRI will enjoy a plurality in both chambers of Congress, Peña Nieto will face important checks by a legislative branch that has not seen a one-party majority since 1997. Some of his main reform proposals require changes to the constitution and hence a two-thirds majority of both houses plus simple majorities of seventeen state legislatures. Interestingly, several of these reforms are similar to ones that Calderón tried to push through, only to have the PRI block him. Will the PAN support these reforms from its place in the opposition? Will the PRD, a consistent critic of such reforms, nonetheless find room to compromise with the PRI on social policy? With the help of the PVEM and PANAL, the PRI will likely be able to approve legislation requiring a simple majority in Congress.

Behind the PRI's Comeback

Retrospective voting on mediocre economic performance and high levels of violence certainly played an important role in the PAN's defeat. Beyond these short-term considerations, however, there are four main underlying factors that explain the PRI's return to the presidency. First, the PAN governments failed to dismantle key institutions upon which the PRI had built its decades of electoral dominance. The two PAN administrations—and Fox's especially—missed precious opportunities to use the

democratic “honeymoon” as a chance to level the old regime’s clientelist structures, uncover corruption, and undermine the power of private oligopolies that had grown up under decades of PRI cronyism.

Although Fox took important steps toward making government more transparent with a freedom of information law, he shied away from democratizing the old corporatist structures and making them accountable. Abandoning a much-touted anticorruption crusade just months after taking office, his government proved unwilling or unable to pursue high-level corruption cases involving a number of unions. What corruption investigations there were tended to end without significant legal consequences for those involved. In the Pemexgate scandal, for instance, the state oil workers’ union was caught funneling almost US\$50 million illegally into the PRI’s 2000 campaign coffers, but union leaders were absolved and the PRI got off with a fine.¹¹ Similarly, rather than look into the large personal fortune amassed by the head of the teachers’ union—a politically influential group that forms one of the main drags on Mexico’s dysfunctional school system—Calderón struck an electoral alliance with her. This may have allowed him to edge out AMLO in 2006, but the failure to make unions more accountable and transparent left intact an important source of resources and cadres for the PRI.

The PAN governments also balked at leveling the playing field for business and undermining the power of groups that owed their wealth to the PRI. The power of the two national television networks is a case in point. Before 2000, this duopoly served as an important pillar of the PRI regime. In those days, the founder of Televisa, the network controlling most of the market, unabashedly called himself “a soldier of the PRI” and maintained a decidedly progovernment bias in his network’s news coverage. This role was key in exalting the authoritarian government, masking its flaws, and denying a voice to the opposition—all while helping to provide the trappings of democracy.

The transition created space for independent media outlets to emerge, but the big networks’ power was left untouched. In a country where most people get their news from television, the two networks’ overwhelming dominance gives them considerable muscle to flex when their interests are at stake. For good measure, both networks have a number of top executives serving as PRI or PVEM senators or deputies.

This interweaving of the networks’ and the PRI’s interests created strong incentives to advance Peña Nieto’s candidacy. In an unfortunate coincidence, the surveys sponsored by Televisa presented Peña Nieto leading in the public’s preferences by the widest margins. Both networks tried to minimize the role of the student movement that emerged to oppose the PRI candidate. As noted above, one network refused to broadcast a presidential debate and showed a soccer match instead, fueling claims that the real agenda was to shield Peña Nieto’s lead.

Second, the 2000 election moved the PRI out of the presidency but only partially undermined the party's ability to leverage resources at the state and local levels. In several states, incentives for accountability and transparency have been lacking. For example, the PRI has yet to lose a gubernatorial election in nine states that together are home to a third of the total populace. Many of these states remain enclaves of authoritarian practices including clientelism, corruption, censorship, and a personality cult around the governor reminiscent of patrimonial times. Additionally, though the opposition has made important electoral gains in certain parts of the country, the PRI has controlled a majority of state governments since the transition. As of early 2012, the PRI governed 20 of the country's 31 states plus the Federal District. This allowed the PRI to rely on well-oiled machines that remained significantly intact after 2000.

Since the 2000 transition did bring about the demise of hyperpresidentialism, these governors have emerged as key power brokers in an increasingly fragmented system. Strengthened by a reform that assigned oil surpluses to state and local coffers, they have enjoyed great latitude regarding the extent to which federal standards apply. More important, this has allowed the PRI access to patronage jobs, money for its agents and supporters, and advertising funds. The ability to leverage these resources has given the PRI a precious electoral advantage.

Third, the meager achievements of the last twelve years—not enough economic growth but considerable violence—have created greater openness to nondemocratic alternatives. Almost 30 percent of those who voted in 2012 were too young to have been of age under a PRI president, but had experienced as adults the post-2006 spike in violence. According to the latest *Latinobarómetro* survey, the share of Mexicans agreeing with the statement that democracy is the best form of government was 54 percent in 2006 (up 14 points from 2000), but by 2011 had dropped back to 40 percent.¹² In that year, Mexico had Latin America's lowest percentage of people who were willing to say that they were satisfied with the way in which democracy was working in their country. This disappointment paved the way for the return of a party with a very recent authoritarian past, one that many older voters remember as corrupt but perhaps more orderly and that younger voters did not experience.

Fourth, the disarray of the leftist parties crucially aided the PRI's return to power. The reluctance of some sectors of the Mexican left to view the "rules of the game" as legitimate and worth respecting is a big reason why they cannot shake the specter of radicalism and suspicions that they are an "antisystem" force. The postelectoral protests that disrupted everyday life in Mexico City in 2006 fed an image of obstructionism that turned off many of those who had been AMLO's supporters. As the 2006 and 2012 results suggest, the leftist base is about 18 or 20 percent of the electorate—not enough to claim the presidency. Unless the left-of-center forces in Mexican politics can come together behind

a moderate message that appeals to a broader swath of the public, they will keep handing the presidency to the PRI.

A Renovated PRI?

To be sure, Mexico has changed a great deal since 2000. Electoral-oversight authorities have become stronger—with a sharp prompt from the credibility setback of the disputed 2006 vote. Civil society has become better organized and savvier, and though the drug-related violence has taken a toll on press freedom (Mexico is among the world's most dangerous places for journalists) competing voices are regularly heard. Voters are becoming more used to alternation in power, which has contributed to exposing corruption, reducing cronyism, and decreasing government abuse. Mexicans have also learned that corruption and incompetence were not the exclusive province of the PRI, and that other parties too have their share of flaws.

In this context, the turnover of power to a renovated PRI that has learned from past mistakes would certainly be a step forward for democracy. With periodic alternation in power through free and fair elections, governments have incentives to become more attentive to citizens' concerns, less complacent about corruption, and more accountable. Not only are governments that turn over from one party to another more apt to uncover wrongs that prior administrations have done, they also have reason for restraint since whatever treatment they mete out may well be meted out to them in return when their opponents take power. Knowing that they will be judged based on their performance and responsiveness to different constituents' demands, officeholders will grasp that competence is a promising road to reelection. First and last, however, alternation in power through free and fair elections prevents the feelings of exclusion that can fuel dreams of reaching power through irregular and even violent means.

Whatever the flaws of the PRI, its return to the presidency does make it possible for broad sectors of society that sympathize with its proposals to be represented at the highest levels of government. The opportunity to bring policy more into line with most voters' preferences is valuable for the sake of democracy's legitimacy. Then too, the PRI contains a wealth of experienced politicians whose skills at striking agreements may enhance governability. After all, today's PRI stalwarts are the heirs of the postrevolutionary project that built modern Mexico.

Yet it is misguided to think that the PRI, having found itself on the sidelines and marginalized from power, has therefore embraced contrition.¹³ Two terms out of the presidency were hardly enough time to transform seven decades of authoritarian practices, particularly given that the PRI's power at the state and local levels has suffered few interruptions. In many states, including Peña Nieto's State of Mexico, the PRI has never lost power and the benefits of alternation have yet to arrive.

Although the PRI's rhetoric since 2000 has been one of renewal, its legislative record, its governors' behavior, and its electoral practices do not support this claim. First, over the last dozen years the PRI has used

Rather than distancing itself from politicians who cling to dubious practices, the PRI has sheltered and even promoted such figures. Some have been placed high atop party lists during elections, rewarding them with congressional seats and the legal immunity that attaches to them.

its power in Congress to block important reforms meant to chip away at the power of party bosses and machines and bring accountability to elected posts. One of these reforms—the PRI stopped it in 2005 and 2011—would have allowed for consecutive legislative reelection. This would have strengthened Congress by encouraging the professionalism of legislators, giving them a stake in a strong legislative branch, incentivizing officeholders to respond to their constituents' needs (for the sake of reelection), and protecting them from the pressures that increasingly powerful governors exert. Similarly, the reform tried to reduce the number of party-list seats—currently

200 of 500 in the House of Deputies and 32 of 128 in the Senate—in order to make lawmakers more accountable to those they represent while still maintaining some degree of proportional representation. The PRI, joined by PVEM and PANAL, sank the initiative, arguing that it would only expose legislators to the influence of vested interests.¹⁴ Ironically, these parties have twice hindered accountability reforms that would have benefited the populace at the expense of party bosses.

Second, during the PRI's two terms outside the presidency, several PRI governors and party notables became associated with many of the practices that the country had hoped to banish with the 2000 transition. Two former governors of Tamaulipas (they ran the state from 1999 to 2011) are now under investigation for links to money laundering and drug trafficking. A former governor of Coahuila who also served as the PRI's president sank his state into a debt crisis, allowing its debt to explode a hundredfold (to \$2.8 billion) during just the six years between 2005 and 2011. He is also accused of embezzlement and document falsification. The governor of Puebla during the same period was caught on tape negotiating the incarceration and sexual abuse of a journalist who was pursuing an embarrassing story. One of Peña Nieto's closest aides, then a senator, was also caught on tape peddling his influence to gambling interests. As these examples suggest, corruption in the PRI after the transition has not been a matter of a few isolated incidents, nor has it failed to reach high levels within the party.

Third, in spite of the emergence and strengthening of independent

electoral authorities, the PRI's electoral practices continue to raise eyebrows. Although the buying of votes is notoriously hard to prove, the PRI has consistently found itself having to explain what at best seems highly suspicious behavior in local and federal elections. A recent scandal is the so-called Monex Case, in which PRI members allegedly received prepaid debit cards in exchange for campaign work and voting in the 2012 elections. A sum of \$7.5 million and ten-thousand cards were involved. How they were filtered through ghost corporations remains unexplained, though the head of the PRI's legal team, a former governor of Hidalgo State, claims that there was no wrongdoing.¹⁵ A similar scandal involves thousands of prepaid cards good for purchases at Soriana supermarkets. The PRI allegedly handed these cards out in exchange for votes, which is illegal and would represent campaign spending in excess of what is allowed. That invoices have surfaced which tie the transactions to contracts signed between Soriana and several PRI state and local governments, including in Peña Nieto's Mexico State,¹⁶ only heightens suspicions that the PRI's "renewal" is conspicuously incomplete.

Rather than distancing itself from politicians who cling to dubious practices, the PRI has sheltered and even promoted such figures. Some have been placed high atop party lists during elections, rewarding them with congressional seats and the legal immunity that attaches to them. If twelve years without the presidency were not enough to make the PRI change, how will Peña Nieto's entry into office on the shoulders of the PRI's old guard? No one becomes governor of Mexico State and unchallenged PRI presidential nominee without support from party notables. In particular, Peña Nieto owes his political stardom to his mentor Arturo Montiel—his predecessor as Mexico State's governor—who dropped out of the 2006 presidential race due to a corruption scandal. For these reasons, the return of the PRI makes likely the reinvigoration of key aspects of the old regime. Without the checks that the federal government exerted on state and local governments, these features are likely to wax rather than wane.

This does not mean that Mexico will return to the same authoritarianism that characterized the PRI of the twentieth century, when coercion and cooptation ruled the day and elections were stolen in broad daylight. Meaningful checks have emerged since, including an independent electoral authority, a legislature that serves as a counterweight to the executive branch, a less dependent judiciary, and a freer press. But if the new PRI's record over the last twelve years is any indication, progress toward Mexico's further democratization may be severely compromised, or at best stagnate.

This is a serious concern given the threat that organized crime poses to the country's institutions. Some argue that the corruption and cronyism of the past, which led to politicians growing rich at public expense as they swapped favors and government contracts for campaign cash, may be necessary evils if the relative prosperity and orderliness of the

old regime are going to return.¹⁷ But in Mexico's current security context, corruption and cronyism could very easily give way to money laundering, extortion, and worsening violence. As the Colombian experience has shown, the marriage between politics and organized crime could have disastrous consequences. Although the country has given the PRI the benefit of the doubt, time will tell whether Mexico's institutions are strong enough to rein in the new PRI's old practices.

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