

THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM



Number 253

**Retrospective Voting and Partisan Identity:
The Electorate's Perspective**

Yemile Mizrahi

WORKING PAPER SERIES



WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS
WASHINGTON, DC 20004-3027

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Preface

On July 2, 2000, Vicente Fox became the first Mexican President elected from the National Action Party (PAN), ending 71 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). His victory capped decades of struggle by political parties on the right and left to open political space in Mexico's electoral system. The PAN had its first significant victories in the early 1980s in several northern municipal elections, and in 1989 won the first of several state governorships that consolidated its presence as a significant political force. Fox's emergence as the PAN's presidential candidate for the 2000 elections—and his subsequent victory—have marked a new chapter in the party's history.

Yemile Mizrahi argues in this working paper that the PAN's political strategy once it wins state elections does not always help its chances of staying in power. The internal dynamics of the party and its approach to politics often reduce the party's ability to appeal to the electorate in future election cycles. Traditional ways of doing politics and an over-reliance on ideology stymie attempts to consolidate the party's success at a subnational level.

This analysis is especially timely as the first Mexican President of the PAN takes power and the party seeks to redefine its role in government after decades in opposition. The challenges that the PAN faces in state elections, which are the subject of Mizrahi's analysis, may well parallel the challenges faced by the PAN nationally as one of their own assumes the presidency. This working paper should make interesting reading to anyone interested in the future of Mexico's political process and its party system.

RETROSPECTIVE VOTING AND PARTISAN IDENTITY: THE ELECTORATE'S PERSPECTIVE

Yemile Mizrahi*

Woodrow Wilson Center
March 2000
(Do not distribute or cite)

Prepared for the Latin American Studies Association International Conference, Miami,
March 16-19, 2000.

* Much of the information used in this paper was processed and elaborated in collaboration
with Benito Nacif from the Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economicas, AC.

RETROSPECTIVE VOTING AND PARTISAN IDENTITY: THE ELECTORATE'S PERSPECTIVE

In democracies elected officials are motivated to respond effectively to people's needs and demands or else they risk being voted out of power in electoral contests. In authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, elected officials can become less responsive to public demands because their political careers do not necessarily depend on the electorate's judgment about their performance in office. In a country that is experiencing a transition to democracy, such as Mexico, one might have expected elected officials to become increasingly interested in their performance in office than before when the PRI maintained a virtual monopoly of political life. Even where reelection is not permitted, electoral competitiveness motivates elected officials to worry about their reputation in office, for the future of their political careers greatly depends on the performance of their party in subsequent elections.¹

If competition leads government officials to demonstrate their competence in the task of governing, to what extent does the logic of competition also affect voters' electoral choices? How much do people really care about government performance when they cast their vote? Do people use their vote to "punish" or "reward" political parties for their performance in office?

In the case of Mexico these questions become extremely relevant because non-PRI parties particularly the PAN, have faced enormous problems in maintaining their electoral coalitions in subsequent elections. This is the case even when they introduce innovative reforms geared at increasing the government's efficiency and efficacy. Indeed the PAN has endeavored to distinguish itself from the PRI by combating corruption, inefficiency, and authoritarianism, which have traditionally been associated with this party. Yet, it often loses consecutive elections. And typically, when the PAN loses an election, the winner is not the left of center opposition party (the PRD), but the PRI.

This electoral outcome sets the Mexican case apart from other Latin American experiences, where authoritarian regimes basically collapsed after the initial democratic opening. In Mexico, the PRI has, in those states where it has lost elections, managed to revive and continue playing in more democratic settings. As a result, the victories of the opposition in several states have not led to a major partisan realignment. They appear, rather, as deviating cases from a more established pattern of electoral behavior.

One possible explanation is that political change generates enormous expectations that often the new government cannot entirely fulfill. Since people tend to expect too much of the new government, they are prone to becoming disappointed with its results. Citizens, just as consumers, tend to judge their sense of satisfaction more in relation to their expectations of the future than in relation to their experience in the past. Feeling disappointed with the

¹ Although elected officials in Mexico cannot be reelected, the future of their political careers greatly depends on the performance of their party in the electoral arena. Governor Francisco Barrio's plans to become a presidential candidate were thwarted after his party lost the gubernatorial election in 1988. We can make the same argument for second term elections in the US, where reelection is no longer possible.

new government, people prefer to return to their old voting preferences even if that alternative is not too satisfactory.²

Many Panista leaders believe this explanation. They think that the electoral defeat of the party in subsequent elections stems primarily from the failure of Panista administrations to adequately advertise the government's achievements. People do not necessarily "know" what their governments have accomplished. The corollary is that a better communication policy could close the gap between people's expectations and actual delivery of results.³ The underlying assumption is that satisfaction with government performance affects the propensity to vote for the incumbent party.⁴

Using survey data, the central purpose of this paper is to analyze the relationship between government performance evaluations and voting preference and to shed light on the determinants of electoral behavior in an emerging democratic setting. I compare and contrast public opinion in three states that have experienced growing competition, but different electoral trajectories: Chihuahua, Guanajuato, and Puebla.⁵ The PAN controlled the former two states at the time of the survey; the PRI has controlled the latter uninterruptedly since 1929. However, the PAN lost the 1998 elections in Chihuahua; in Guanajuato the PAN seems to have become a dominant political force in the state.

By comparing two states controlled by the PAN with a state controlled by the PRI, I also explore whether the electorate in states that have already experienced alternation in power behaves differently from states where the PRI has never lost the governorship.⁶

Based on the results of the surveys, I shall argue that evaluations of government performance, while important, were not so decisive in shaping electoral behavior in the three states studied. First, there is no evidence that voters in Chihuahua were disappointed

² As the saying in Mexico goes, people prefer what they know even if that is bad, rather than a better but unknown option ("Mas vale malo por conocido que bueno por conocer").

³ Interview with Felipe Calderon, former president of the PAN, Mexico City, August 1998. This opinion was repeated by many Panista leaders.

⁴ The literature on partisan realignment also poses a similar assumption. According to Flanigan and Zingale (1998, 57), after a party has been rejected by the electorate, the new party in office introduces innovative policies often in sharp departure from the past. If people perceive these policies as successful, then significant numbers of voters will become partisans of the new administration's party and will continue to vote for this party in subsequent elections. If, on the other hand, voters are not widely satisfied with the administration's policies, then they will reject the party in the next election and its victory would be regarded, in retrospect, as a deviating election.

⁵ Thanks to a grant from the Ford Foundation, I was able to design and conduct the surveys in the states of Chihuahua and Puebla. These surveys were conducted a month before the elections at the state level. Both states renewed the governor, the local congress and the municipal administrations. The firm CONSULTA conducted these surveys. 1000 people were personally interviewed at their homes. The newspaper REFORMA gave me the survey conducted in the state of Guanajuato. Although I did not design this survey, it contains many similar questions as my own surveys, a fact that makes them comparable. People were asked which party they would vote for if the elections were held on that day, but there were no elections in the state at the time the survey was conducted. Consequently, we can not analyze the impact of candidates in Guanajuato. Guanajuato renews its governor on July 6, 2000. GIVE A BRIEF ABOUT THE STATES.

⁶ I use the case of Puebla as a prototype of PRI dominance. It is a state where the PRI still manages to win elections by large margins despite of the declining rates of support for this party at the national level.

with the policies introduced by the Panista administration. But second and more importantly, the relationship between evaluations of performance and voting preference is not direct. It is critically mediated by people's attitudes towards political parties.

People do not necessarily "reward" good performance evaluations with a vote in favor of the incumbent party if it fails to maintain strong links with the electorate between elections. Parties gain a reputation not only for what their governments accomplish, but also for the extent to which they cater to their constituencies and become involved in the life of the communities beyond the electoral period. The latter include a wide range of activities such as providing affordable legal advice, organizing free clinics and shelters for battered women, finding scholarships, pressing the relevant authorities to meet the demands of the community, making elected officials accountable, training leaders to organize for collective action, assisting existing mutual aid societies, and promoting cultural and other recreational events. In sum, parties are rewarded when they become existing and relevant actors in the day to day affairs of the community.

Although the evaluations of government performance exert a stronger influence on voting behavior in states that have experienced alternation in power (Chihuahua and Guanajuato) than in states where the PRI has never lost an election (Puebla), these evaluations are not sufficiently strong to determine voting preference. Partisan identity is still the single most important predictor of electoral preference in all three states. The main challenge therefore is to investigate the factors that shape people's attitudes towards political parties.

After a brief overview of the major theoretical approaches on electoral behavior, I present the results of the surveys and examine the determinants of electoral preference in Mexico.

I. Theories of electoral behavior in democratic elections

The research on electoral behavior in the United States⁷ has been traditionally dominated by two main theoretical approaches. On the one hand, the socio-psychological approach introduced by the Michigan School (E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald Stokes 1960) emphasizes the importance of voters' *attitudes* as critical determinants of electoral preference. On the other hand, the rational choice approach introduced by Anthony Downs (1957) stresses that electoral preference is the product of the voters' rational *evaluation* of a particular economic or political situation (Niemi and Weisberg, 1993: 9; Fiorina 1981). The first theoretical approach poses that electoral behavior is heavily determined by the voters' partisan identity and by the attractiveness of the candidates competing for office. Voters do not necessarily have to make judgments about the issues being discussed or evaluate the consistency of the proposals. They vote for a particular party either because they identify with that party or because they are simply attracted by its candidates. Electoral behavior reflects an attitude, not an evaluation. On the contrary, the second

⁷ Theories of electoral behavior refer mainly to the electorate in the United States. While Mexico has a dramatically different electoral tradition, it shares with the United States the presidential structure of government. Mexico forbids reelection of all elected officials. Taking this critical difference into account, most of the theoretical approaches on electoral behavior developed in the United States can be used to explain electoral behavior in Mexico.

theoretical approach gives greater weight to the voters' rational evaluations on the issues being discussed; the vote reflects a retrospective evaluation of the party (or candidate) in office or a judgment on the consistency of the proposals being discussed.

At the center of the debate is the relative weight of candidates, party identity and issues as determinants of voting preference. And more specifically, the controversy revolves about the rationality of the electorate.

Recent studies have attempted to demonstrate how attitudes and rationality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It might not be irrational to vote against a charismatic and attractive candidate that is judged incompetent to solve a particularly pressing problem. Similarly, it is not irrational to support an incumbent party that is negatively evaluated for its performance in office if the alternative is considered worse (Niemi and Weisberg, 1993: 143; Fiorina 1981: 56). More importantly, as Fiorina argues, electoral preference is multi-determined and it might be self-defeating to try to segment electoral behavior into its different constituent parts. In his own words,

We tend to think of voting behavior as a neatly divisible act: so many parts to issues, so many parts to candidates, so many parts to retrospective evaluations, the rest to party affiliations. Logically then, when we expect someone to rely more on retrospective evaluations, we expect that person to rely less on other things. But maybe what we think as separable parts are actually intertwined, with the current issues and experiences becoming part of the stuff of retrospective evaluations that cumulate into a kind of long term party judgment that in turn affects the interpretation of current issues and experiences.

Candidates, party affiliations and retrospective evaluations are all interrelated, yet most analytic perspectives on electoral behavior tend to stress one of these factors above the others.

Accordingly, the "personal vote" theory stresses that the personal qualities and attributes of the candidates exert a strong influence on electoral preference. In the age of mass media and advertising, the personality and record of the candidates, independently of their parties, is what attracts the electorate.

Candidates build their campaigns around their personal qualities as leaders; they rely heavily on the mass media to promote their image and convince the electorate, and are sometimes even ready to depart from the traditional lines espoused by their parties in order to appeal to a larger electorate. In countries where public officials can be reelected, candidates also build their personal reputation on the basis of their past record in office (Fiorina 1987).

While the impact of candidates is undeniable, in reality it is difficult to separate the candidates from their parties. As Aldrich points out, even if today's elections seem "candidate centered," few candidates have any serious chance of winning an election on

their own. "Candidates with any serious hopes are always invariably partisan" (Aldrich 1995: 48). Moreover, although it is conceivable that candidates may depart from certain positions espoused by their parties to attract electoral support, it is unlikely that they will go too far. Parties are still critical for providing candidates a "brand name" and thus reducing the cost of information about their particular policies and issues they stand for. Affiliation with a political party brings the candidate a "natural reputation" (Aldrich 49).

Recognizing the difficulty of isolating the candidates from their parties, Fiorina and others have sought to analyze the weight of the candidate's personal attributes on electoral preference. Their conclusions are that while party identification has primacy in influencing voters' choice, the personal characteristics of candidates follows a close second (Fiorina 167).

Given that Mexican elected officials cannot be reelected, a candidate's previous record in office seems unlikely to exert such a strong influence on voting preference. Without the possibility of reelection, a candidate's personal reputation is strongly linked to his or her party's collective reputation. Still, personal characteristics such as a candidate's communication skills- and even their looks- can be quite important in attracting electoral support. And, as we shall see below, the majority of the Mexican electorate believes that the candidate is more important than the party in deciding who gets elected.

Although on closer examination it becomes clear that party identity filters people's opinion about their candidates, we can still hypothesize that candidates and policies exert a more important influence on electoral preference for people who lack partisan identification, the so-called independents (or neutrals).

Candidates can also become critical factors in those cases where the election is defined in terms of a PRI anti-PRI cleavage. That is, in states that have not experienced alternation in power, elections are often mechanisms to express the extent of the support or opposition for the PRI and the regime (Moreno 1999). People vote for the opposition because their candidates seem able to defeat the PRI, and not because they like their policies or identify with their parties. To the extent that opposition voters are primarily interested in defeating the PRI and not in advancing their particular ideological positions, they can give their support to whatever opposition candidate seems more likely to defeat the PRI (Magaloni 1996).⁸ But in those states where the PRI has already been defeated once, non-PRI candidates can no longer mobilize the voters on the basis of the opposition to the PRI regime. Besides their particular attributes or qualities as leaders, they become attractive to the electorate if they successfully define the issues they stand for and are able to articulate a convincing political program. To do that effectively, they are often forced to rely on their parties and to appeal to their collective reputation.

⁸ Electoral parties, for example, usually rely on strong candidates for electoral mobilization. The case of Barrio in Chihuahua, Ruffo in Baja California and Cardenas in the Federal District are examples of this. Vicente Fox, PAN's presidential candidate, is another relevant example. His candidacy is based on the basis of his personal record in the state of Guanajuato, and on his consistent opposition to the PRI and the regime for which it stands for.

The party's collective reputation leads us to the second major theoretical approach on electoral preference. The "theory of retrospective voting" (Fiorina 1981) posits that parties gain reputation not only for their ideological positions, but also for what they do once they are in office. That is, people make subjective evaluations of government performance and use their vote to express their degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the government. If satisfied, they vote for the incumbent party (or candidate) and if not, they vote for the opposition. The vote is thus used as a tool to punish or reward the government for its performance in office. According to this theory, people do not need to be sophisticated to form an opinion about government performance. They can recognize good government when they experience it. As Fiorina argues, "they need not know the precise economic or foreign policies of the incumbent administration in order to see or feel the *results* of those policies...If jobs have been lost in a recession, something is wrong...If thugs make neighborhoods unsafe, something is wrong....And to the extent that citizens vote on the basis of such judgments, elections do not signal the direction in which society should move so much as they convey an evaluation of where society has been. Rather than a prospective decision, the voting decision can be more of a retrospective decision" (Fiorina 5, 1981).

The question, of course, becomes whether citizens in fact vote on the basis of such judgments. Although rationally it may seem quite logical to punish or reward the government with one's vote, the relationship between government performance evaluations and electoral preference is far more complicated than what it seems. The first problem is that parties do not always gain credit for what their governments accomplish. If elected officials distance themselves from their parties and are considered mostly responsible for their actions, then the judgment about their performance might not be transferred to their parties. This is especially the case if officials cannot be reelected. Secondly, party identity may bias one's opinion about government's performance. Democrats tend to evaluate Democratic governments better than Republicans, and vice versa (Weisberg 1984, 456). Also, not all aspects of government performance have the same importance for voters. While the state of the economy is usually recognized as critical in influencing electoral behavior (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1992; Markus, 1993), other issues like unemployment or public safety might become at times more relevant for voters (Fiorina 1981). A negative evaluation regarding a particular policy might be electorally damaging even if on all other realms the government is positively evaluated. Finally, in the case of Mexico, where opposition parties have only recently begun to gain access to government, their record is still too feeble to build a reputation for their performance in office. While people can tell a good government from a bad one, they do not necessarily associate the government's performance with their party if the latter fails to work closely with the government, advertise the government's achievements, and become present and relevant in the life of the community. Furthermore, we can hypothesize that while a bad performance is more readily punished at the polls, a good performance is not always rewarded if people fail to develop stronger and longer-term ties with the incumbent party.

The development of long-term ties to a party relates to the question of party identity, the third major analytical approach on electoral behavior. As many authors recognize, party identification is the single most important predictor of voting behavior (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, 1960; Fiorina, 1981). People vote for a particular party because they identify with this party's ideological positions and policy positions. Moreover,

and particularly in the United States, partisan identity is considered more stable than the actual voting choice (Le Duc, 1984, 424). The question is what are the bases of partisan identity? In part, partisan identity is undoubtedly based on emotional, not rational grounds. It might derive from long rooted family traditions or from deep ideological convictions that sometimes go beyond a rational argumentation. But part of partisan identity is also based on rational evaluations of the party's performance in office. These evaluations include judgments about the government's capacity to deal with major policy issues (Flanigan and Zingale 1998) as well as concrete experiences with the party's engagement in people's daily life. The latter ranges from casework and constituency service activities to patronage and clientelism (Coleman 1996; Lawson, Pomper, and Moakley, 1986).

In the case of Mexico, in particular, where for decades opposition parties played such a marginal role in the electoral arena, the number of people strongly identified with them on ideological or traditional grounds is still too limited to be electorally significant. In those places where the opposition was able to win an election, they managed to attract a large percentage of voters who were discontented with the status quo and who did not have a strong partisan identity. Once in power, however, the main challenge for these parties still remains building a large enough base of loyalists who maintain the party active between elections and safeguard its grip on power.

As I have argued elsewhere (Mizrahi 1999), winning against the PRI the first time is no guarantee of future victories, because the first victory might have more to do with an effective mobilization in opposition to the PRI than with a positive identification with the party in question. For that end, opposition parties need to become more proactive and programmatic, to cater to their constituencies on a more permanent basis, and to maintain a close check on elected officials' behavior.

Here is precisely where the different approaches to electoral behavior interrelate. In contrast to the PRI, which can largely build on tradition, habit, and an extended patronage network, opposition parties have to build their mass of loyalists using their record in office, the nomination of attractive candidates, and an alternative network of patronage as an incentive. The latter, in particular, requires disassociating patronage activities from the corrupt and authoritarian clientelist practices traditionally associated with the PRI.⁹ The aim in the long run is to forge partisan identities, for this is still considered to be the most stable basis of electoral support.

II. Partisan Identity, Retrospective Evaluations and Candidate Attractiveness: Electoral Preference in Chihuahua, Guanajuato and Puebla

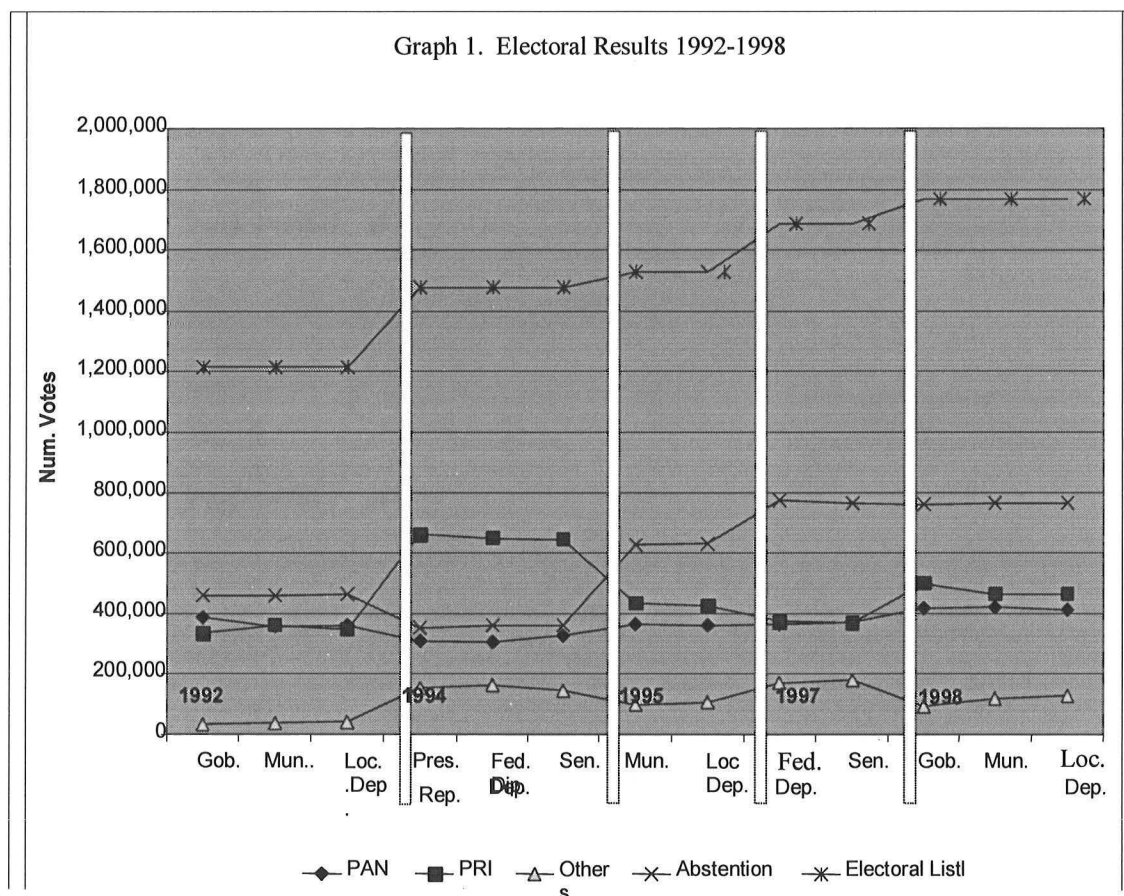
The results of the 1998 elections in the states of Chihuahua and Puebla are intriguing and seem paradoxical. The government in Chihuahua was generally positively evaluated for its

⁹ For an interesting analysis of how authoritarian clientelism can give way to amore democratic system of patronage, see Fox "From Clientelism to Citizenship: Mexico," *World Politics*, vol.46, January 1994, pp.151-185.

performance in office and yet the PAN lost the elections in the state. In Puebla, in contrast, despite a less favorable evaluation of government performance, people overwhelmingly continued to support the incumbent party, the PRI.

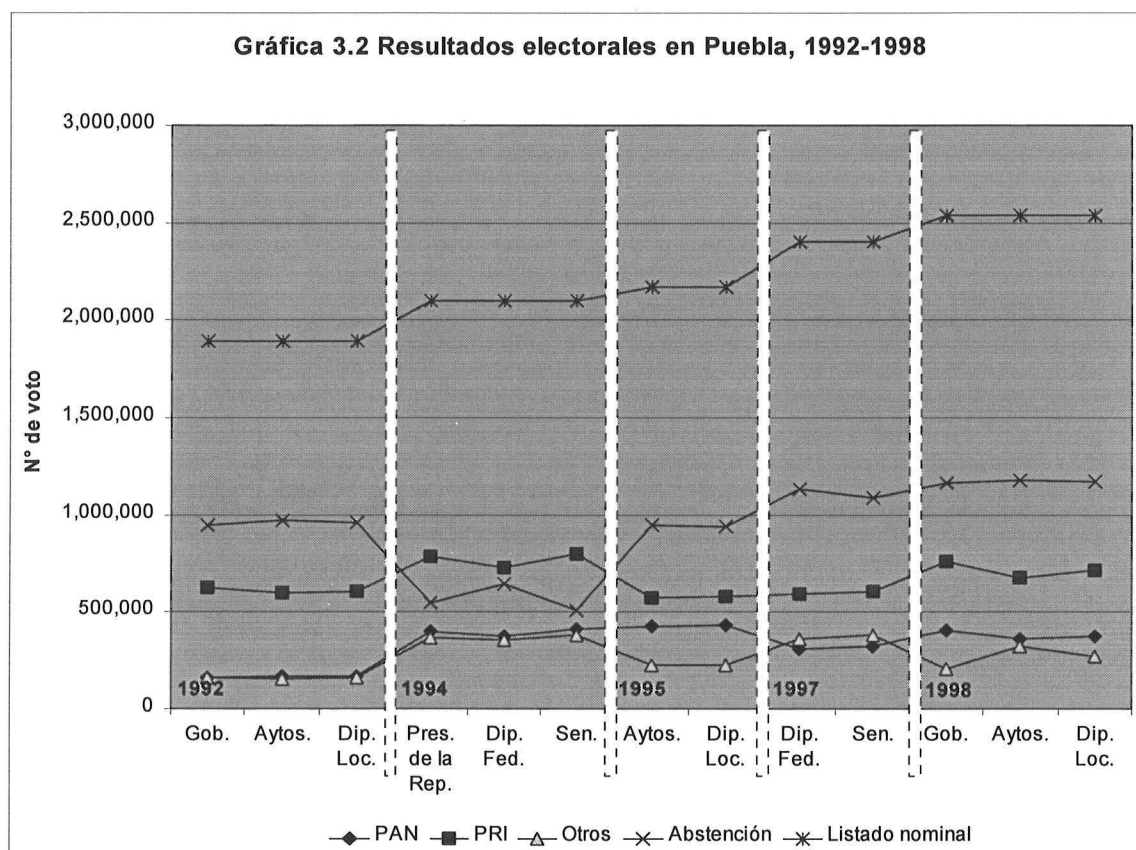
Furthermore, if we look at the parties' electoral trajectories, it becomes even more puzzling that throughout the "sexenio" (six year term) of Governor Francisco Barrio, the PAN failed to maintain its leading position in Chihuahua, a state considered one of the most important electoral strongholds of this party. As graph 1 shows, the PAN lost in virtually all subsequent elections after 1992. The results of the 1998 elections only confirmed a longer electoral trend. Being the first state to be "re-conquered" by the PRI in a clean electoral process, these electoral outcomes pose important questions about the strength of the PAN, particularly when one considers PRI's eroding prestige at the national level.

CHIHUAHUA



In Puebla, in contrast to Chihuahua, the PRI was able to maintain its dominant position throughout the "sexenio" of Governor Manuel Bartlett. As Graph 2 shows, the PRI won most of all subsequent elections at the local, state, and federal levels. Although the PAN

won a number of important cities in 1995¹⁰, it by no means challenged the dominance of the PRI in the state. By 1998, the PRI managed to regain control in most of these cities. Moreover, in the federal elections of 1997, the PAN's share of the vote fell even behind the left-of center PRD. Puebla can be regarded as a typical case of PRI dominance in the context of growing electoral competitiveness.¹¹

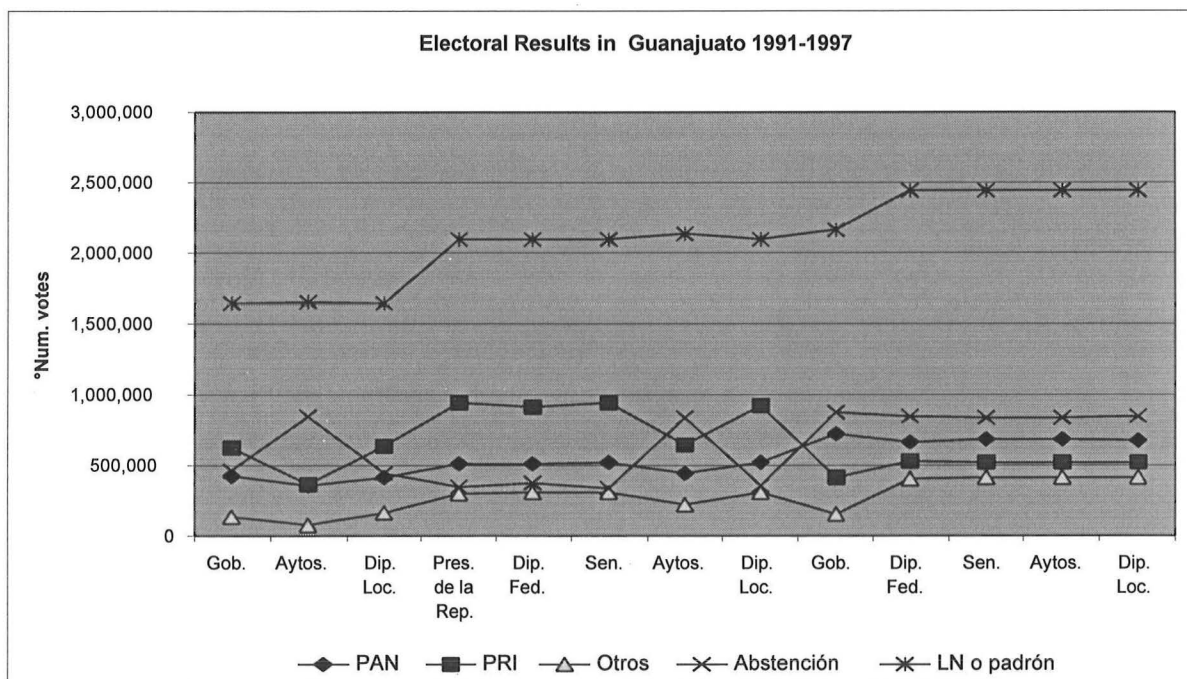


Compared with these two states, the electoral trend in Guanajuato shows that unlike Chihuahua but like Puebla, the incumbent party (the PAN) has managed to maintain its dominant position in the state. After Governor Vicente Fox was elected in 1995 (see graph 3), the PAN won in subsequent state and local elections. Furthermore, according to an opinion survey conducted in 1999, the PAN was ahead of the PRI by a margin of 20 percentage points.¹²

¹⁰ The PAN won in 23 out of the 217 municipalities in the state, including the most important cities like Puebla, Tehuacan, Atlixco, and Cholula.

¹¹ The opposition still claims that electoral processes in the state are not completely unbiased in favor of the PRI. However, during the 1998 gubernatorial elections, there were virtually no complaints of electoral fraud. Political parties in the state widely approved the more independent electoral authorities.

¹² Elections for governor in Guanajuato are scheduled for July 2000. The state of Guanajuato is peculiar because of its turbulent electoral past. In 1991, after a highly controversial electoral process in which the PRI allegedly won the elections for governor, the governor had to resign amidst a growing popular mobilization against electoral fraud. An interim Panista governor was appointed but he was forced to appoint a Priista as the Government Interior Secretary (Secretaria de Gobierno), the most important position after the governor.



How can we explain these electoral outcomes? How important are government performance evaluations in influencing electoral behavior after all?

A) Evaluations of government performance

As I argued above, in increasingly competitive electoral environments, public officials have greater incentives to become more responsive and responsible towards the electorate, for they are accountable to the electorate at the polls. Even if elected public officials cannot be reelected, their future political careers greatly depend on their party's electoral performance. A vote against the incumbent party can be interpreted as a public repudiation for their performance in office, a situation that profoundly damages their reputation for subsequent elections.¹³ Electoral competitiveness enhances the incentives for good government performance to the extent that people base their electoral preference on their judgments about government performance

If we compare the evaluations of government performance in Chihuahua, Puebla, and Guanajuato, it is not clear that these evaluations exert a direct influence on electoral behavior. But in the two states that have experienced alternation of power, these evaluations play a more significant role in shaping electoral preference.

Extraordinary elections for governor were held in 1995 and were won by the PAN by a comfortable margin. Elections for governor were scheduled for the year 2000, to make them coincide with the presidential elections.

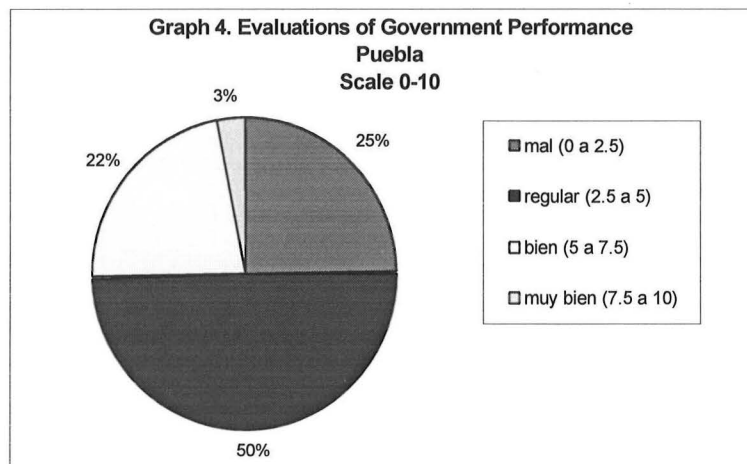
¹³ For example, this was the case with the Priista Governor Fernando Baeza in Chihuahua in 1992 and with the Panista Governor Francisco Barrio in 1998.

The main goal of analyzing government performance evaluations is to provide some measures of people's degrees of satisfaction with their government's administration and its capacity to solve important problems in their state. To be fair, however, it is important that we take into account the policy areas for which the state government, rather than the federal or local governments, is mainly responsible. In a heavily centralized country like Mexico, this is particularly important, as many areas of government still remain in the hands of the federal government.

Thus, in designing the surveys, the questionnaires considered people's evaluations of the areas of education, public works, public safety, employment, and the government's capacity to solve the most important problems in the state. It did not include health or housing since these areas only began to be decentralized in 1998.

The evaluation of government performance in each of these policy areas was given a value from a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means an extremely poor evaluation and 10 an excellent evaluation of government performance.¹⁴ We then created an Index of Government Performance (IGP) that averages people's evaluations in these five policy areas. The Index also takes a value from a scale of 0 to 10.¹⁵

According to this Index, in Puebla, the electorate overall rated the government's performance at only 3.8 and as graph 4 shows, 75% of the surveyed population rated government performance below 5.¹⁶

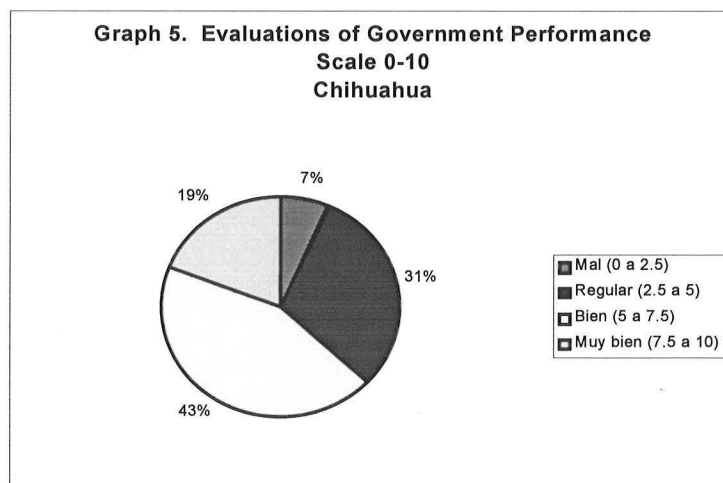


¹⁴ The questions were the following: To what extent has the state government been able to improve the quality of education that is taught in schools? To what extent has the state government been able to solve the problem of unemployment? To what extent has the state government been able to solve the problem of crime? To what extent has the state government built more roads and highways? What is the most important problem in the state? And to what extent has the government been able to solve this problem?

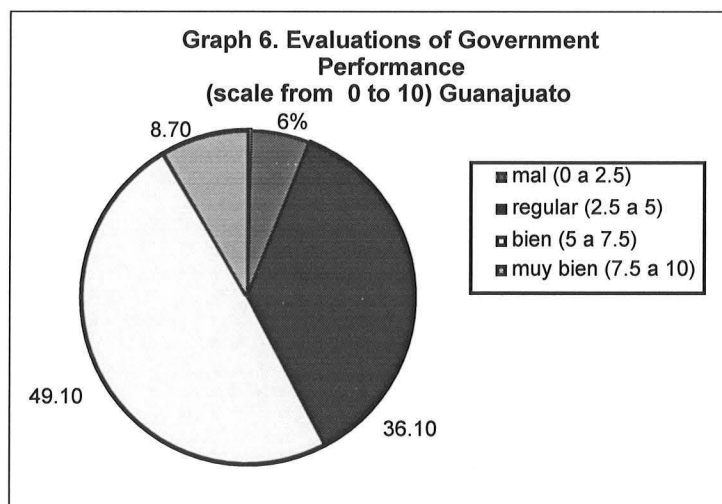
¹⁵ Due to the way this index was constructed, an evaluation higher than 5 is considered a positive one. It is extremely difficult for any government to be highly evaluated (close to 10) in all policy areas at the same time.

¹⁶ The government in Puebla was rated at 5.1 in education and 5.2 in public works. In employment promotion, public safety, and the state's capacity to solve the most important problem in the state it was rated well below 5 (3.5, 2.5, and 2.7). The most important problem in the state was considered unemployment.

In Chihuahua, government's performance was rated at 5.75, and as can be seen in graph 5, 62.7% of the surveyed population evaluated government performance with a rate above 5.¹⁷



In Guanajuato, government performance was rated at 5.4 and, as graph 6 shows, 57.8% of those interviewed rated government performance above 5.¹⁸



If we examine the evaluations of the governor, we can see a similar pattern. The governor was better evaluated in Chihuahua and Guanajuato than in Puebla. While 42.5% of the surveyed population in Puebla said they approved the way the governor handled his job,

¹⁷ The government was rated at 7.9 in public works, 6.7 in employment creation, 6 in education, 3.8 in public safety, and 3.9 in the state capacity to solve the most important problem. The latter was considered to be the problem of crime.

¹⁸ The government was rated at 5.6 in public works, 5 in public safety, 4.7 in employment creation, 6.3 in education, and 5.2 in the government's capacity to solve the most important problem. The latter was considered unemployment.

64% approved the governor's job in Chihuahua and 60% approved the governor's job in Guanajuato.

We asked people to evaluate whether their economic situation as well as that of their state in general improved or worsened during the course of the year. 72.7% of the people surveyed in Puebla believed the economic situation in the state had worsened and 61% believed their personal economic situation had deteriorated. Only 14% believed that their personal as well as the state's economic conditions had improved.

In the case of Chihuahua, in contrast, 45% of the surveyed population believed the state's economic situation had worsened and only 36% believed their personal economic situation had deteriorated; 32% believed the personal and the state's economic situation had improved. In Guanajuato, only 19% of those surveyed believed the state's economic situation had worsened and 22% believed their personal economic situation had deteriorated. In addition, 30% believed their personal economic situation had improved, and 40% believed the state's economic situation had improved.

Finally, we asked people to tell us what they considered more important for the next governor, continuity or change. More than half of the surveyed population in Chihuahua (60%) said they wanted continuity, while in Puebla, more than half of the population (62%) said they wanted change. The survey did not include this question in Guanajuato.

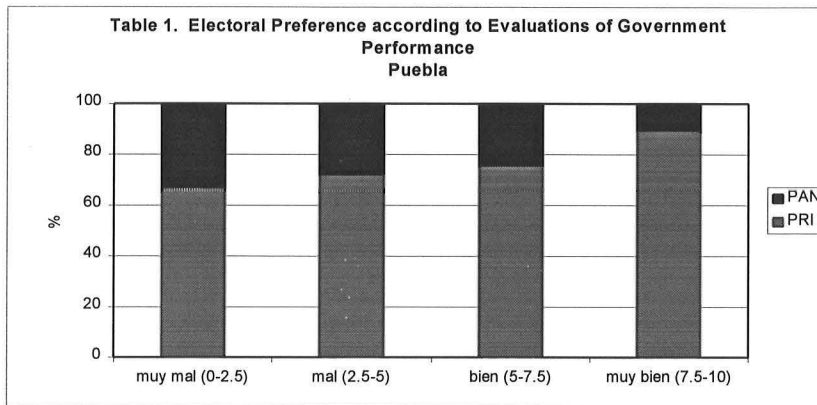
As we can see from the results of these surveys, the governments of Chihuahua and Guanajuato were much better evaluated than the government in Puebla. Yet the negative evaluations of performance in Puebla did not seem to affect the PRI in the electoral arena, particularly when the great majority of the people said they wanted change rather than continuity. 60% of the people surveyed said they would vote for the PRI in the next election, and only 22% said they would vote for the PAN. The opposite was the case in Chihuahua. Positive performance evaluations did not reflect the voters' electoral preference: 49% of the people surveyed said they would vote for the PRI in the next election and 41% said they would vote for the PAN.

This is a puzzling outcome. First, in Puebla, notwithstanding the negative evaluations of government performance, the PRI enjoyed a comfortable "cushion of support." In contrast, in Chihuahua the PAN was "punished" by the electorate even when the vast majority of the electorate was relatively satisfied with the government's performance. And finally, in Guanajuato, similar to the PRI in Puebla, the PAN continued to be supported by the majority of the electorate.

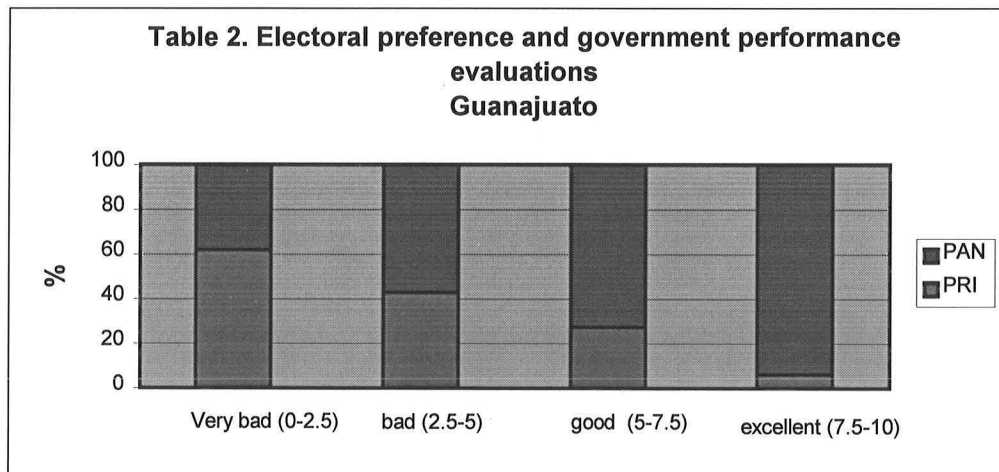
To examine more closely the relationship between government performance evaluations and electoral preference, we combined these two variables in tables 1, 2 and 3.

As table 1 shows, in Puebla, the evaluations of government performance seem to bear a weak relationship with electoral preference. The PRI was the net winner among those who evaluated government performance poorly, as well as among those who evaluated government performance positively. Although the PAN had its highest percentage of the vote amongst those who evaluated the government extremely badly, the PRI still managed

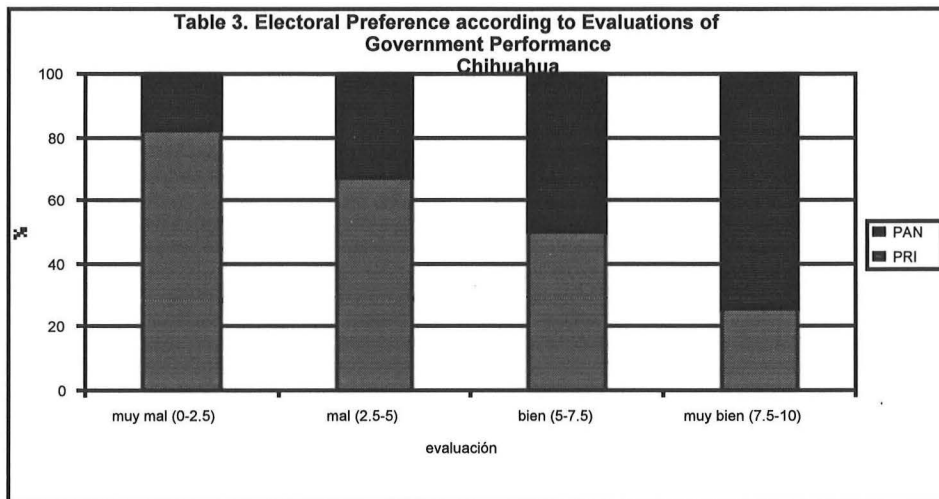
to become the net winner with more than 60% of the vote. This cushion of support evidently stems from other sources: a strong partisan identity and/or the lack of a viable and attractive alternative. I return to these points below.



In contrast, in Guanajuato and Chihuahua a clearer relationship seems to exist between government performance evaluations and electoral preference. Indeed, in both states, the majority of those who evaluated government performance negatively said they would vote for the PRI, and those who judged the government's performance positively said they would vote for the PAN. But, as Table 2 shows in Guanajuato, the PAN had a greater "cushion" of support than in Chihuahua. The majority of those who gave bad evaluations to the government (between 2.5 and 5), still said they would support the PAN. In Chihuahua, as Table 3 shows, those who evaluated the government poorly were more ready to punish the PAN with their vote.¹⁹



¹⁹ Interestingly, among those who evaluated the government between 5 and 7.5, the PRI still got a large percentage of the vote.



We might conclude that retrospective evaluations of government performance are more important in states that have experienced alternation in power. People might be more willing to use their vote as a tool to express their degree of satisfaction with the government only when they have tried out an alternative to the PRI. Given their propensity to become disappointed with the government's results, voters tend to punish a bad performance while not necessarily rewarding a positive one. Yet if these evaluations are such important determinants of electoral preference, the PAN, not the PRI, should still have won the elections in Chihuahua, for the majority of the people evaluated the government satisfactorily, with a rate above 5. Evidently there are other factors influencing electoral behavior.

B) Partisan Identity

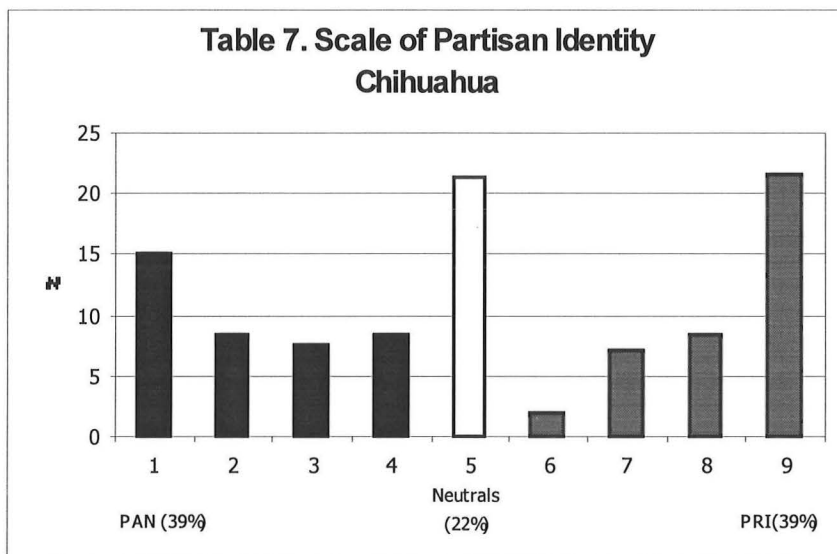
Given that performance evaluations do not seem to exert such a definitive impact on voting behavior, we now explore the relationship between peoples' attitudes towards political parties and their electoral behavior. At the end of a six-year term, what is the spectrum of partisan alignment in these states? What is party identification based upon?²⁰

To analyze people's attitudes towards the two main political parties in each one of these states, we classified people according to their degree of identification with the main two political parties in their states (PRI and PAN). We first asked people whether they considered themselves Priistas, Panistas or whether they lacked any political identification. To those who said they identified with the PRI or with the PAN, we asked the intensity of their partisan identification. Those who claimed to have no partisan identity were ranked according to their opinions about the two political parties. Accordingly, those who said they were strong Panistas were placed at number 1 of the scale and those who said they were strong Priistas at number 9. Moderate Panistas were placed at number 2, and soft Panistas at number 3. Moderate Priistas were placed at number 8, and soft Priistas at

²⁰ In the case of Guanajuato, I am exploring people's attitudes towards parties after 4 years in office.

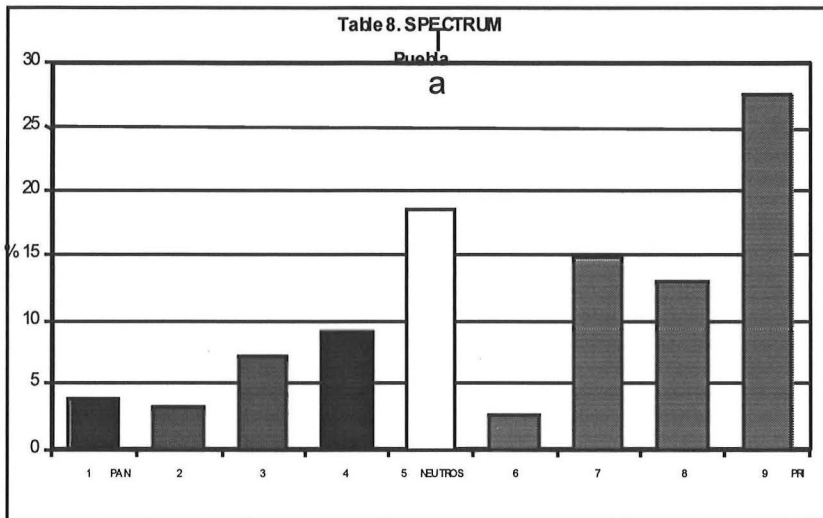
number 7. Numbers 4,5, and 6 included those without a partisan identity. But the people who were placed on 4 had overall a better opinion of the PAN than of the PRI. The opposite was the case for those placed in number 6. Number 5 represented those voters without partisan identity and who either had no opinion or an equally good or bad opinion of the two parties. We considered the latter to be “neutrals.”²¹

As we can see from table 7, at the end of the Panista administration in Chihuahua, there was a larger proportion of hard-line Priistas than of hard-line Panistas (21% vis a vis 15.1%). Although the total percentage of Priistas and Panistas in the state was similar (39%), their distribution within the scale of partisan identity (intensity level) was quite different. The so-called neutrals accounted for 21% of the population, a significant percentage, but as we shall see below, not enough to have made a difference in terms of the final electoral outcome.

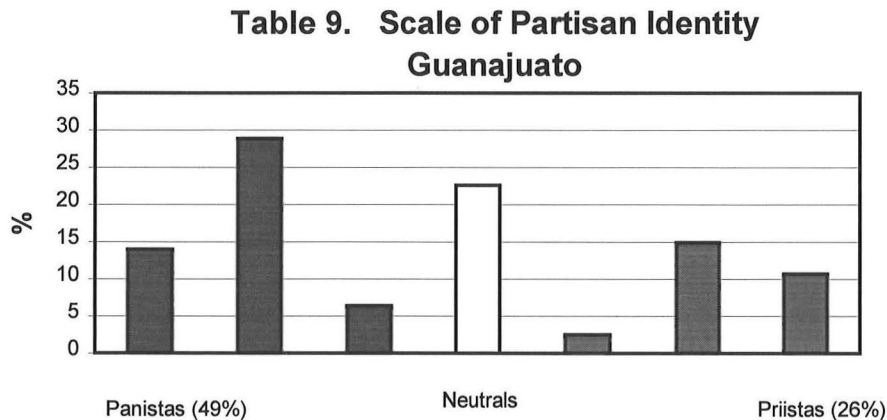


If we now analyze the scale of partisan identity in Puebla, we can see in table 8 that the proportion of Priistas is enormous when compared to the Panistas. 23% of the total population was identified with the PAN, while 58% identified with the PRI. Furthermore, if we compare the proportion of hard-core Panistas and Priistas (1 and 9 in the spectrum), the disparity becomes even more obvious, for only 3.8% was identified as a strong supporter of the PAN, while 27.4% was identified as a strong Priista supporter. Given that the government was so badly evaluated for its performance, these results lead us to conclude that in the case of Puebla, the identification with the PRI was not related to a judgment about the quality of the government.

²¹ In the case of Guanajuato we had only two intensity levels in the survey, so the spectrum took values from 1 to 7.



Finally, table 9 shows that in the case of Guanajuato, the percentage of Panista loyalists far outgrow that of the Priista loyalists (49% vis a vis 26%). Evidently a major partisan realignment occurred in this state, since the PAN only became a major political force after 1991. The similarities between the scales of partisan identity in Puebla and Guanajuato (strong identification with the incumbent party), despite the obvious differences in the evaluation of government performance in these two states, leads us to conclude that partisan identity relies on something beyond the evaluation of government performance, namely, the activities the party conducts between elections.



Like in many states controlled by the PRI, in Guanajuato the PAN was able to organize a widespread machine that allowed it to penetrate deep into the communities. Many journalists, academics, and even some Panista leaders criticized the PAN in Guanajuato for doing exactly what the PRI had done for decades.²² Indeed, the PAN not only built similar

²² Personal interview with Luis Miguel Rionda, Professor Universidad de Guanajuato, Guanajuato, 1999. According to a high ranking leader of the PAN, "the PAN is basically *buying* the old-Priista leaders and incorporating their organizations into the PAN. The problem is that often these organizations are used to

machines; it also incorporated into its ranks some of the former Priista peasant and urban-poor organized groups. The so-called "Liga Agraria" and the "Movimiento Popular Ciudadano" became two new institutional mechanisms to integrate these groups into the PAN in Guanajuato.²³

By contrast, in the case of Chihuahua, the governing PAN shrunk after its victory in 1992 and became virtually paralyzed between elections. Many Panista leaders in the state believed that the PAN would consolidate its presence throughout the state on the merits of the successful performance of its government. As one local deputy who became the leader of the PAN in the state said, "there is no doubt that we are better than the PRI. It is a matter of time before the results can be appreciated by people who have great expectations for the government."²⁴ The result was that even when people overall judged the government's performance satisfactorily, the PAN failed to maintain its electoral coalitions in the state.

The corollary is that the presence and visibility of the political party on the ground is critical for building partisan identities. Political parties need to cater to their constituencies continuously, not only during electoral periods. Parties, not only their governments, need to build their reputation with their own record of caring for their constituencies. While a large part of this activity can be based on patronage, it is important to recognize that not all forms of patronage are necessarily corrupt or morally questionable. Parties can service their constituencies by distributing goods and services without undermining people's freedom to express themselves, associate in political organizations and freely decide for whom to vote. Positive evaluations of government performance are not necessarily rewarded at the polls if the party fails to work closely with the community.

One method to gauge people's perceptions of a political party's relevance in their daily life is to ask whether or not the party solved some of the problems in their neighborhoods. Unfortunately we do not have this question in the Guanajuato survey, but we can compare the cases of Puebla and Chihuahua.

Although only a minority of people in both Chihuahua and Puebla responded affirmatively to this question, in Chihuahua a mere 9.6% of the surveyed population believed political parties were relevant actors in their community, whereas in Puebla, 28.3% said political parties were engaged in their community's problems. Moreover, as could be expected, the majority of people named the PAN in Chihuahua (59%) and the PRI in Puebla (80%).

support some candidates and boycott others in the party's conventions." Anonymous Interview, Leon Guanajuato, 1999.

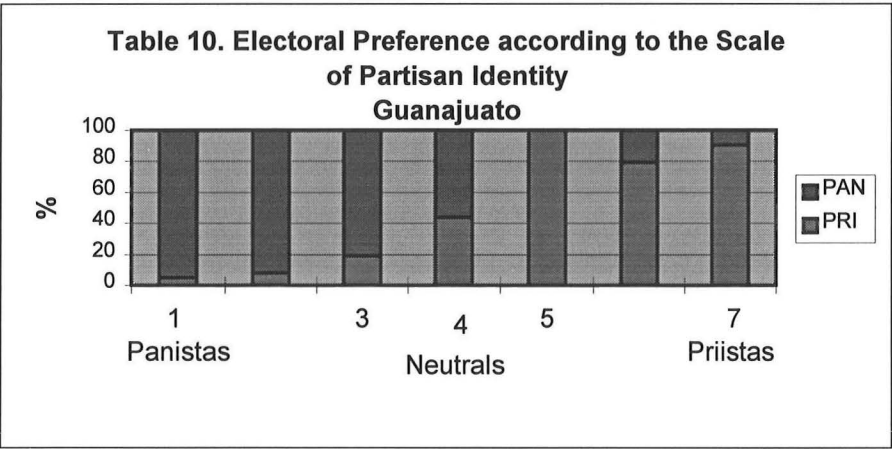
²³ Personal interview with Juan Carlos Oliva, president of the PAN in Guanajuato. Leon, Guanajuato, 1999.

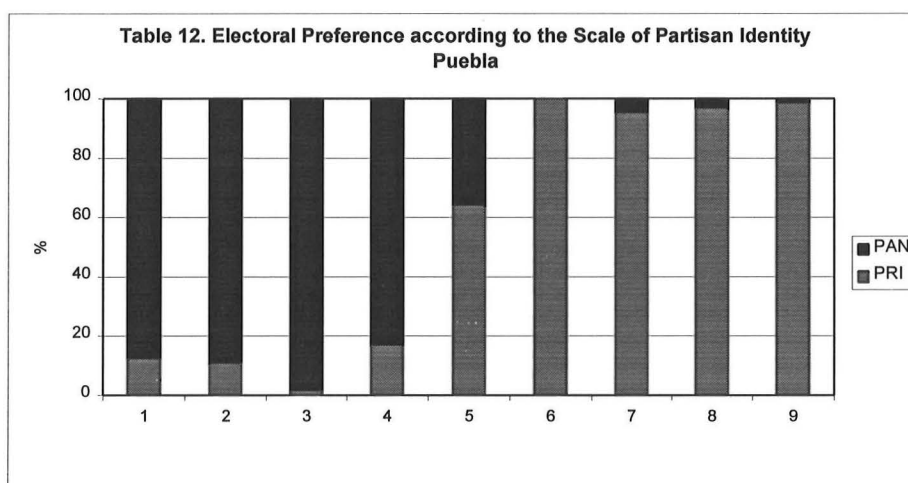
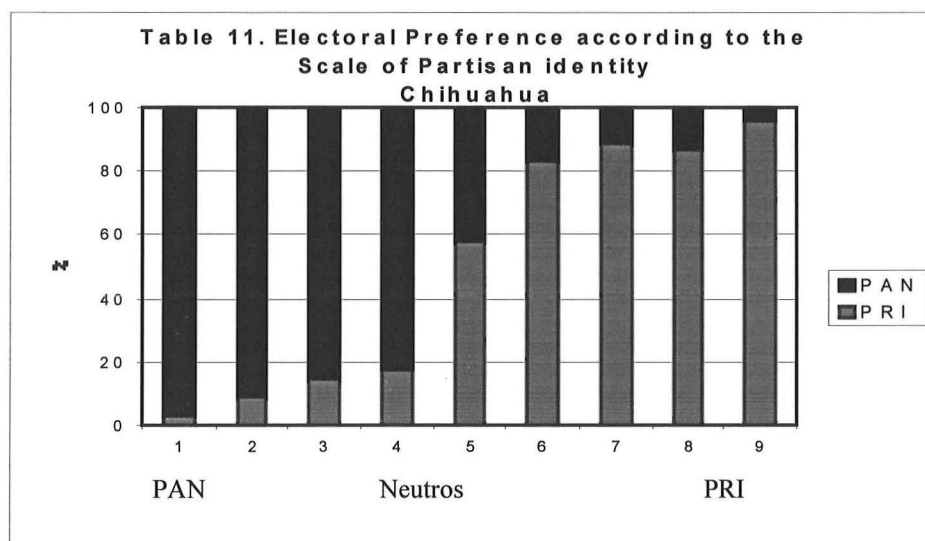
²⁴ Personal interview, Chihuahua 1994. The interview was conducted after the presidential elections of 1994, when the PRI obtained one of its highest percentages of the vote in Chihuahua. Indeed, after Zacatecas, Chihuahua became the second state with the highest vote in support of the PRI. Many Panistas at the time believed that the electoral outcome was in large part the result of the failure of the government to advertise its results. The idea was that because people do not see what the government is really doing, they become disappointed and vote for the PRI. While there is some truth to this argument, I suggest here that the declining electoral support for the PAN stems from the party's own organizational weakness.

What these results suggest is that through their activities, political parties can promote a growing mass of supporters that become bound to parties on practical, and not necessarily on ideological or programmatic terms. People may feel attached to a particular political party not because they are convinced of this party's ideology or policy proposals, but rather because the party does things for them and helps them solve their problems. As Fiorina argues, in the US and Britain, constituency service and casework activities exert an important influence on voting behavior. In a country like Mexico where there is no reelection, it is the party, rather than the public official, which has the greatest incentive to become involved in these types of casework activities. More importantly, in a country with so many unfulfilled needs, this type of community servicing seems even more rational as a method of attracting electoral support.

To examine the strength of the relationship between partisan identity and voting behavior we combined the scales of partisan identity with electoral preference in our three states. Tables 10, 11 and 12 suggest that those people who identify with a political party voted overwhelmingly in support of that party. This is the case even for those who did not identify with the party but who had positive opinions of the party in question (numbers 4 and 6 for Chihuahua and Puebla, 3 and 5 for Guanajuato).

As can be seen, in all three states, the party loyalists determined the electoral outcome. Electorally, the neutrals were not decisive in any of our three cases. However, it is still interesting to analyze how these neutrals tended to vote. One might expect that for these voters, evaluations of the candidates and the government's performance are the most important factors in their voting decisions.





As we can observe, in the case of Chihuahua, the majority of the neutrals (58%) decided to support the opposition party, the PRI. The neutrals, accounting for 21% of the electorate, could have altered the electoral outcome only if they had voted overwhelmingly (by more than 70%) in support of the PAN. This could have happened only if these voters had evaluated the PAN's candidate much higher than the PRI's candidate or if they had evaluated government performance exceptionally well. Neither of these conditions was true. The "neutrals" evaluated government performance more like the Priistas, as Table 13 illustrates.²⁵ And as we shall see below, these voters gave better evaluations to the PRI's candidate.

²⁵ With respect to the most important problem in the state, the neutrals and the Panistas believed the most important problem was crime, while the Priistas believed the state of the economy to be the most important problem in the state. We can hypothesize that the Neutrals could have changed their electoral preference if

In the cases of Puebla and Guanajuato, the neutrals gave their support to the incumbent party by comfortable margins. However, interestingly enough, these voters evaluated the government more like the opposition (as the Panistas in Puebla, and as the Priistas in Guanajuato). For these voters it seems that performance evaluations were not critical in deciding their electoral preference. We might conclude that neutrals in these two states decided to support the incumbent party simply because they did not perceive a better alternative. This is clearer in the case of Puebla, where as we see in the next section, the Panista candidate was barely known by the majority of the electorate.

C) Candidates

In the states of Chihuahua and Puebla, the surveys were conducted a month and a half before the elections.²⁶ The candidates for governor in these two states were actively engaged in their campaigns. In the case of Chihuahua, both candidates were widely known by the great majority (67%) of the electorate.²⁷

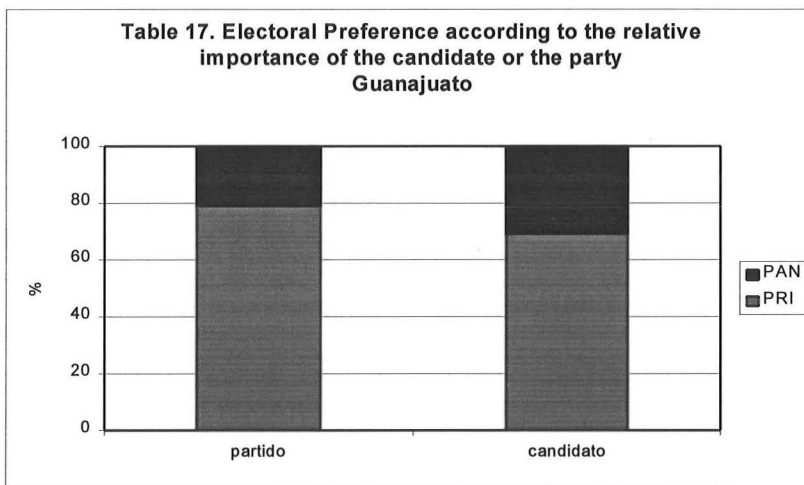
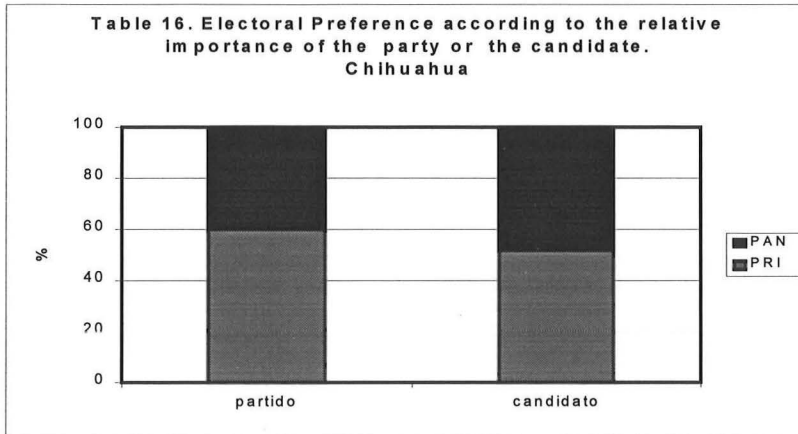
In the case of Puebla, only the PRI candidate was widely known. More than 65% said they recognized the PRI's candidate whereas only 39% recognized the PAN's candidate. Recognition of the candidates, however, did not seem to affect the electoral outcome; among those voters who knew both candidates, the PRI was the overwhelming winner (62% against 38%).

To examine the importance of candidates for electoral behavior, we asked people what was more important in their voting decision, the party or the candidate? We then analyzed the voting preference among those who responded that the candidate was more important. As we see in table 16, in Chihuahua, the PRI wins by a slight margin of 52% against the PAN. In the case of Puebla, the PRI wins overwhelmingly with 69% of the vote.

the government had done a better job with regards to combating crime. The rising levels of crime in the state negatively affected the PAN, and it is not surprising that the PRI built its campaign around this particular problem.

²⁶ Show results of the surveys and compare with actual electoral results. The survey accurately predicted the electoral results in these states.

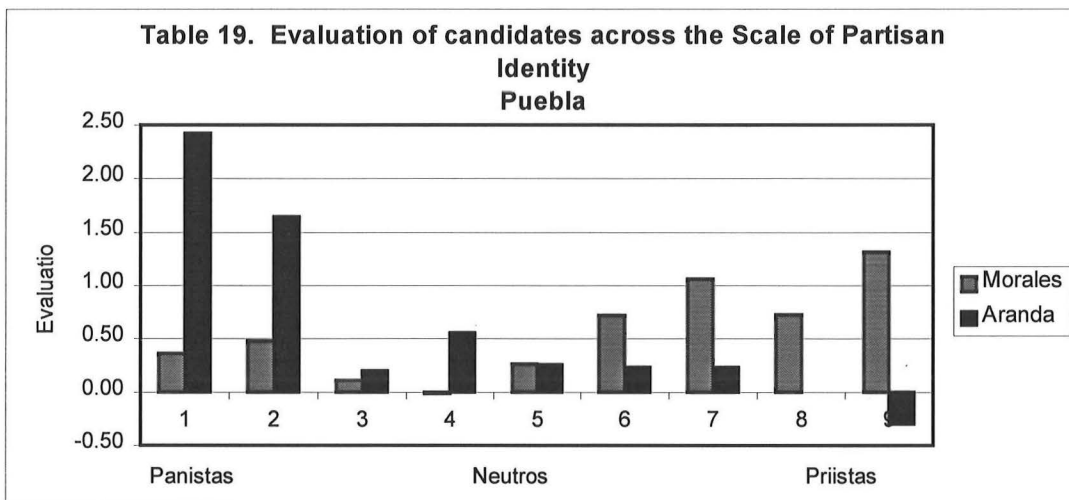
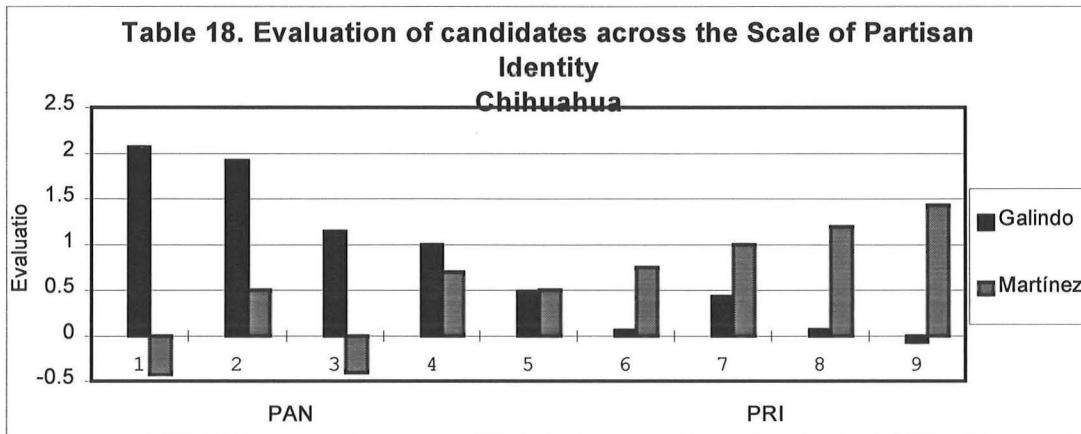
²⁷ In Guanajuato the survey was conducted during a non-electoral period, so we do not have information about candidates.



What these results reveal is that in highly competitive electoral contexts, as in Chihuahua, candidates could have made a difference in the final electoral outcome. In the case of Puebla, on the other hand, it seems unlikely that a better or more widely known candidate on the opposition would have made much of a difference. In a state with this partisan profile, only an extremely charismatic candidate helped by an impending political or economic crisis could have made a difference in the final electoral outcome.

To measure people's evaluations of their candidates, we created an Index of Candidate Evaluations that included people's opinions regarding the candidates' attributes: their honesty, their capacity to rule, and their proximity to the people. The Index went from a scale of -3 to 3, where -3 meant an extremely negative evaluation and 3 an excellent evaluation. In the case of Chihuahua, the PAN's candidate paradoxically obtained a higher evaluation than his Priista counterpart. We might conclude that something more than the opinion about attributes, like the image or the message was at work. In the case of Puebla, the PRI's candidate was better evaluated, but we know that the PAN's candidate was virtually unknown.

Just as it is the case with government performance evaluations, candidates' evaluations are also highly influenced by the voters' partisan identification. If we analyze how voters throughout the spectrum evaluated the two main candidates, we can see in tables 18 and 19 that party identification filters people's perception of the candidates, Panistas evaluate their candidate better than the Priistas and vice-versa²⁸.



However, as we can see in tables 18 and 19, neutrals in both states evaluated the PRI's candidate better. In the case of Chihuahua, where the margin of victory of the PRI was 8 percentage points, this outcome suggests that the neutrals could have voted differently if the PAN had presented a more attractive candidate. But as we have seen in previous chapters, the PAN nominated a traditional Panista who appealed mainly to the core of the Panista constituency but could not reach out the larger electorate. Moreover, knowing that the majority of the electorate wanted continuity rather than change, PRI's candidate, a businessman who highly resembled the types of candidates supported by the PAN in the

²⁸ It is also possible that people identify with a particular party because they like their candidate. This basis of partisan identity, however, is more ephemeral and thus more volatile.

past, built his campaign around the topic of continuity. He promised to maintain the “continuity of change.” The Panista candidate, on the other hand, attacked the government for abandoning its commitment to the principles advocated by the PAN, and promised to bring about change.

Given the lack of alternatives in the state of Puebla, the preference for change was circumscribed within the PRI. This was an issue that could have been relevant for the PRI’s primary election, but totally irrelevant for the general election. Given that the PRI’s candidate was not the governors’ favorite, it is plausible to suggest that people perceived that this candidate could bring about change.²⁹ The opposition was too marginal to make any difference.

We can conclude from this section that in the case of Chihuahua, the PAN’s candidate could have made a difference in altering the electoral outcome had he been more able to attract a significant percentage of neutrals. Although to a great extent the results of the election were defined by the people who were strongly identified with political parties, as we saw, the neutrals could have altered the electoral results if they had been more convinced by the Panista candidate. In the case of Puebla, on the other hand, candidates played a much smaller role. Given that the neutrals could not have altered the results of the elections, only an extremely charismatic leader, helped by the sense of an impending crisis could have possibly convinced people to change their voting preferences in this state. This never occurred.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In emerging competitive electoral settings, where political parties effectively compete for votes and where parties regularly win and lose elections, voters become increasingly sophisticated in their voting decisions. They take into consideration a variety of factors that range from the attractiveness of the candidates and the consistency of their messages, the evaluation of the incumbent governments, the identification with a particular political party, and an assessment about the existing alternatives, including abstaining from participating in the election. As Fiorina argued, the voting decision is not a neatly divisible act; it is rather a decision based upon multiple and interrelated factors. And it becomes even more complex as the electoral environment becomes more competitive.

In the case of Puebla, a state where the PRI has never lost power, the electorate votes primarily on the basis of its identification with the main political parties. In the absence of viable political alternatives, voters tend to be less sensitive to short term factors like their evaluations of government performance or the persuasiveness of the candidates’ messages. People continued to identify with the PRI and to vote for this party despite their negative evaluation of government performance, the nomination of a Priista candidate who was strongly associated with the most conservative wing of the party, and a generalized opinion that change, rather than continuity, was preferable for the next government.

²⁹ The PRI’s candidate was selected through a primary election. Flores was governor Manuel Bartlett’s candidate, but he lost the primary elections. Morales was perceived as someone who came from outside the domain of the governor, a change even if it was confined within the PRI.

It is clear that in Puebla, the PRI still continues to enjoy a broad base of party loyalists that continue to support it, despite the PRI's reputation for corruption and authoritarianism and its eroding levels of support at the national level. The opposition is too weak to make any electoral difference. With a fragile machine, weak presence in-between elections, and a propensity to nominate "sectarian" candidates, the PAN, the most important opposition party in the state, is still unable to confront the PRI. In states with this electoral and political profile, only an impending political or economic crisis coupled with the opposition's success in nominating a charismatic and electorally attractive candidate can motivate a transformation of electoral behavior.

In contrast, in Chihuahua and Guanajuato, states that have experienced an alternation of power, short-term factors became increasingly relevant in people's voting decisions. While partisan identification still continues to be the single most important determinant of electoral preference, it becomes increasingly intertwined with the evaluations of government performance, the perceptions of competing candidates and the activities of the party in between elections. Together, these factors make up the political parties' reputation, a critical element in forging new partisan identities.

In Chihuahua, the PAN failed to build a "cushion of support" that could have protected it against the negative evaluations of government performance with regards to crime and the selection of a sectarian candidate. During the six years of Panista government, the PRI managed to maintain (or expand) a larger base of hard core supporters than the PAN. These voters were crucial for the final electoral outcome. Moreover, against its authoritarian tradition, the PRI introduced a primary election to select its candidate for governor. The candidate appealed to the larger electorate and promised to continue with the Panista government's achievements. The PAN, on the other hand, closely following its traditional rules, nominated a candidate that appealed to the core of panista voters, but that failed to attract the larger electorate. This candidate, moreover, distanced himself from the Panista administration arguing that it had failed to promote the traditional Panista ideals and concerns, and he promised to bring about change.

In contrast to Chihuahua, in Guanajuato, the PAN succeeded in building a machine that like the PRI works closely with the communities in between elections. The PAN has managed to create a larger base of hard-core supporters that outnumbers that of the PRI. While there were no candidates at the time of the survey, the PAN had become a dominant political party in the state. It is highly unlikely that the PAN will lose in the next gubernatorial elections.³⁰

In a country that is emerging from more than seventy years of one-party rule, partisan identity—other than Priista—is not well developed or entrenched. While many people become discontented with the PRI, they are not ready to feel attracted or attached to a different political party. Electoral support for opposition parties does not necessarily reflect

³⁰ An opinion poll conducted in the State of Guanajuato in April, three months before the elections, gives the PAN a comfortable lead against the PRI. *Reforma*, April 9, 2000.

a longer-term commitment to these parties. If these parties do not work closely with their constituencies, their supporters are easily lost.

Thus, to maintain their grip on power in highly competitive electoral environments, political parties have to mobilize political support between elections, provide attractive candidates and be able to show positive results when they are in office.

The survey data collected in three Mexican States demonstrate that people are aware; they can distinguish a good government from a bad one. Moreover, in competitive electoral contexts, good evaluations of government performance become critical in justifying and legitimizing the party in power. But in isolation, good performance evaluations do not have such a strong impact on electoral preference.

People do not reward a positive evaluation of performance with their vote if the governing party fails to work closely with its constituencies. The party is critical in gaining credit for government actions and for making the government's achievements relevant to the people. An administration that is left alone is too weak to persuade voters to continue to give support to the party. As Coleman argues, strong parties are those that "live beyond election campaigns, have a sense of permanence and ongoing involvement in the community and in politics, and are engaged in matters such as party building that have effects beyond the next election" (Coleman 1994: 810).

To the extent that parties succeed in maintaining a mass of party loyalists, they build a "cushion of support" that protects them when they face short-term economic or political difficulties or when the party fails to nominate an electorally appealing candidate. People may continue to support a party that enjoys a good collective reputation even if they do not agree with the way it runs some of their administrations or if they dislike some of its candidates. More importantly, strong parties exert a powerful counterweight to elected officials who once in office, might be tempted to impose their will and act arbitrarily. Parties are not only electoral machines; they are important actors in the daily life of democratic systems. Parties that have strong roots in society are more effective in preventing charismatic leaders such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru or Hugo Chavez in Venezuela from destroying the very institutions that make democracy work.

While electoral outcomes cannot be predefined, for this is the very nature of competition, political parties can work to increase their chances of getting elected in duly competitive elections. Without building and maintaining a core of supporters, parties remain too fragile and volatile to play the democratic game. Needless to say, without strong parties, the very nature of democracy is at stake.

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