

# 2018 Elections

## A Historical Political Juncture in Mexico

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The result from election day on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 in Mexico can be considered an historical event from several points of view. Even if the victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador had been forecast several weeks ahead by most national polls, his landslide margin of victory was indeed surprising, given recent presidential races in Mexico: he got 53.2 per cent of the national vote and his coalition got a widespread majority in both chambers of Congress.

Since Mexico's multi-party democracy is relatively young and increasingly competitive, majorities have been relatively scarce. The last time that a president was elected to office with an majority of votes in Mexico was in 1988, when elections were still organized by the government and marred with serious fraud accusations. On the other hand, the last time that a presidential candidate obtained a majority in both chambers of Congress was in 1994, only to lose it three years later in what later became a period of divided governments in Mexico that lasted more than two decades. During that period, the recurrence of divided governments was regarded as a hindrance for presidents to successfully carry out their government programs. Thus, the return to a unified government, this time under real multi-party competition and with fairer elections than those held during the hegemonic party period, would put to the test the checks and balances built during the country's democratic transition.

The Mexican party system also was put to the test in 2018. In the years preceding the elections there was a concern for an increasing fragmentation of the party

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system. The three major political parties, PRI, PAN and PRD, registered historical low vote shares in 2015, whereas the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena), the new political party led by López Obrador, entered the picture. Before the 2018 campaigns began, some experts anticipated yet another presidency elected with only a plurality of votes, as it had occurred since 1994. However, instead of more fragmentation, the traditional political parties suffered an unprecedented upheaval in the 2018 elections by Morena, a party that had only registered three years before, but that capitalized the discontent with mainstream parties. The 2018 election outcome posed two related questions: whether the party system had changed, and by how much, and whether this was the emergence of a new hegemonic party. Conversely, whether the coalition of Morena, PT and PES had merely taken the place of former mainstream parties such as PRD or PRI.

The 2018 elections brought the third partisan turnover in the presidency since 2000, a positive signal of democratization in Mexico. Moreover, for the second time the ruling party was displaced to a third place, as it occurred with the PAN in 2012, which is a clear sign that Mexican voters are perfectly able to punish undeserving governments at the polls. At the local level, between 2015 and 2018, there was also increased partisan turnover rates and increasingly competitive races, especially when electoral coalitions took place.

However, the victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador is also important because it was the first turnover towards a left-leaning political option. Between 1988 and 2000, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas could not succeed in three attempts, and López Obrador only succeeded until his third race as a challenger. The consecutive defeats from left candidates had produced increased mistrust in electoral rules and democracy from an important segment of the Mexican electorate that had voted for left options for several years. For similar reasons, some voters interpreted the 2018 outcome as the first turnover or even as a regime change.

The fact that López Obrador ran as a challenger for the presidency three times in a row, also allows to analyze the 2018 elections as a case study on the importance of electoral campaigns, the effect of changing economic, political and social contexts, and the personal attributes of each candidate. After the highly contested and controversial 2006 election, where López Obrador was defeated by a margin of 0.53 per cent, and another electoral defeat by a wider margin in 2012, it seemed somewhat unlikely that he could succeed in a third race, especially by such a landslide as it finally happened. Nevertheless, a number of contextual factors operated in favor of his campaign in 2018: the wear and tear of two consecutive PAN governments, with Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón, followed by the PRI with Enrique Peña—so called neoliberal governments; a lackluster economic performance, increasing levels of violence and insecurity, as well as a large number of corruption scandals both at federal and local levels.

The role and actual impact of some of the above-mentioned factors in the 2018 electoral results in Mexico, both at the aggregate level and on individual vote choices, take central part in the articles included in this special volume.

### **2018: AN ANGRY ELECTORATE AND THE DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE MEXICAN PARTY SYSTEM**

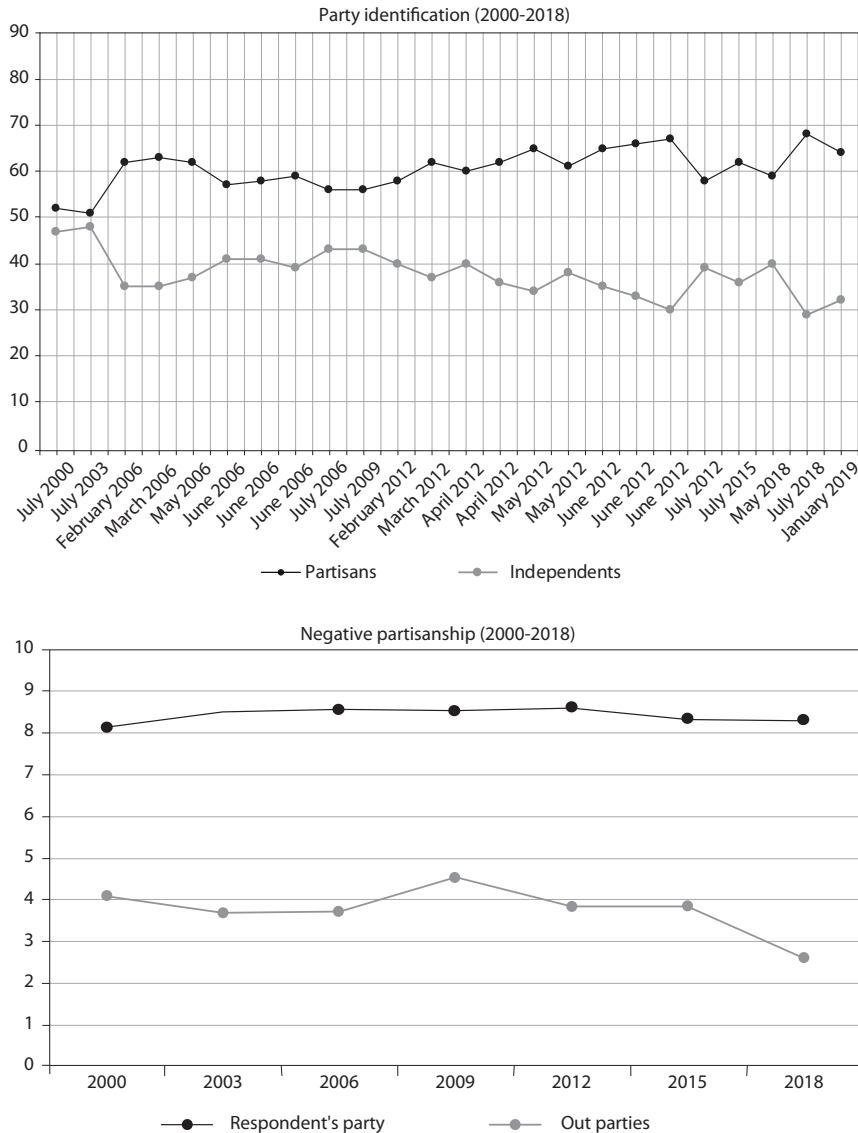
In this section, we analyze individual-level data that sheds light on the historic victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. As this section shows, and several studies in this special issue further analyze, the context of the 2018 election was uniquely negative. Most voters perceived that the overall economy, as well as corruption and insecurity were in bad shape in the country, and reported negative evaluations of the traditional three-party system in Mexico. This context seemed to benefit López Obrador's third bid for the presidency, allowing him to even broaden his electoral coalition adding new social groups that did not support him in the previous campaigns. This section relies on data from Mexico's National Electoral Study, which is the eighth postelection study conducted by CIDE and coordinated by Ulises Beltrán since 1997 (Beltrán, 1997; Beltrán, 2007; Beltrán, 2009a, 2009b; Beltrán and Castro Cornejo, 2019), which is part of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The CSES postelection study is a collaborative program among election study teams from around the world that includes a common module of survey questions in their post-election studies. The 2018 National Electoral Study is part of module 5 that focuses on the politics of populism with the aim to examine populist attitudes across young and long-standing democracies and examine how such populist perceptions shape voters' electoral behavior. Mexico's National Electoral Study also analyze issues that have been part of the questionnaire since 1997: voters' perceptions of parties and political elites, perceptions of the economy, satisfaction with democracy and representation, partisanship, ideology, political information, political efficacy, vote-buying, among others. The 2018 study was designed as a four-wave panel election study with two waves conducted before election day and the last two conducted after the election.<sup>1</sup>

The 2018 National Electoral Study shows important continuity in terms of aggregate partisanship, which is widespread within the Mexican electorate. As Figure 1 shows,<sup>2</sup> Mexico's National Electoral Study (CIDE-CSES, 2018) has found since 2000 that around six out of ten voters in Mexico self-identifies with a political

<sup>1</sup>Ulises Beltrán, Sandra Ley and Rodrigo Castro Cornejo were the co-principal investigators of the 2018 National Electoral Study (CIDE-CSES). The two pre-election waves were conducted in May (May 27-June 4, N=2 600) and June (22-28 June, N=1 239) and the two post-election waves were conducted one week after the July 2018 election (12-18 July, N=1 239) and January of 2019 (Jan 26-Feb 5, N=1 018).

<sup>2</sup>Figure 1 also includes survey data conducted by BGC Ulises Beltrán y Asocs. We thank Ulises Beltrán and Leticia Juárez for sharing their survey data conducted during the presidential campaigns

**FIGURE 1.** Partisanship in Mexico (2000-2018)



*Source:* National Electoral Study, CIDE-CSES, 2018 (Beltrán, Ley and Castro Cornejo, 2020) and BGC Beltrán Juárez and Asocs. (2018).

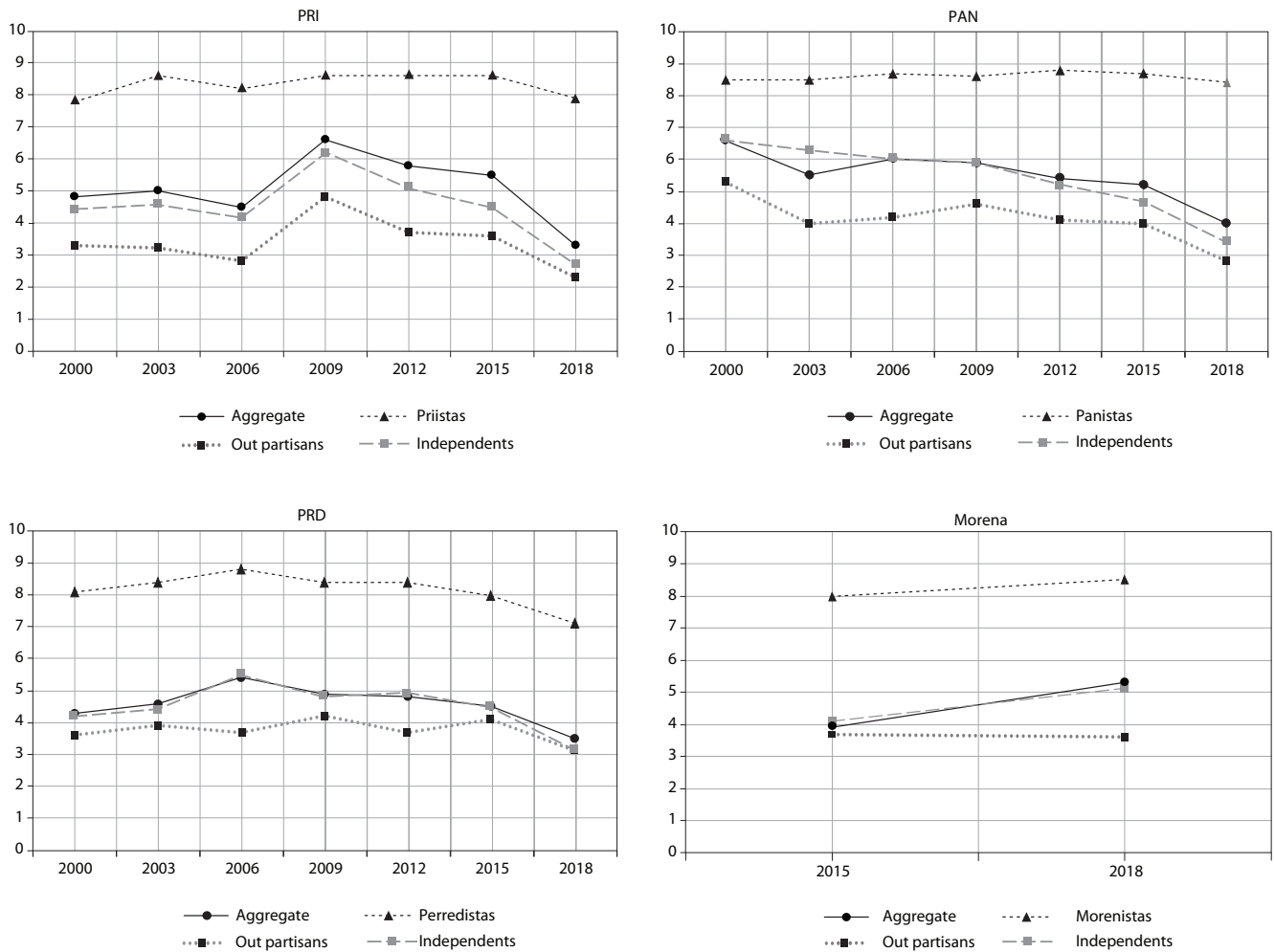
party, even when excluding independents that lean towards a political party. This is consistent with recent research in Latin American political behavior that finds that partisanship is stronger in the region that past literature considered (Lupu, 2015; Baker and Renno, 2019). In addition, similar to trends in other countries like the U.S. (Abramowitz, 2018), partisanship in Mexico is increasingly negative. Negative partisanship implies identification with a party but also loathing of the opposing

party and its candidates (Abramowitz and Webster, 2018). For instance, since Mexico's transition to democracy, the proportion of voters who both like their party and greatly dislike the opposing parties has increased significantly. Between 2000 and 2018, the average evaluation of the co-party on a feeling thermometer (where 0 means very bad opinion and 10 very good opinion) has been consistently above 8.0. However, in the same period, the average opinion of the out-party decreased; while, in 2000, the average was 4.1, in 2018, it decreased to 2.4 (Figure 1). This means that a majority of voters in Mexico do not dislike “all parties”, they dislike all parties—except theirs. These first results shed light on the increasing political polarization in Mexico politics that several studies have noticed at the elite level (Bruhn and Greene, 2007; Bruhn, 2012), but also seem to be extended among citizens.

While there are strong continuities in terms of aggregate partisanship, as expected, the entrance of a new major political party in 2015—Morena—, has altered the country's political environment. Even in contexts in which voters in young democracies have developed partisan loyalties, as it has been the case of Mexico (Castro Cornejo, 2019), these are necessarily limited by the success/survivability of parties (Mainwaring, 2018), party brand dilution (Lupu, 2014) or parties' changing reputations (Baker *et al.*, 2016). The Mexican party system did not experience the collapse of major parties in 2018 or the entire system as many Latin American countries in the past (e.g. Venezuela or Perú: Cameron, 1994; Morgan, 2011; Seawright, 2012; Lupu, 2016; Cyr, 2017). However, the emergence of a new major party has transformed voters' partisan attachments for an important part of the electorate. While partisan loyalties were fairly stable between 2000-2015, when priistas were the first partisan group, followed by panistas and perredistas, in 2018, morenistas became the larger partisan group. According to the 2018 National Electoral Study (CSES), 30 per cent of the electorate self-identified with Morena, 16 per cent with the PRI, 15 per cent with the PAN, 4 per cent with the PRD, and 30 per cent self-identifies as “independent”—a proportion of voters that is fairly consistent with past elections. This means that some voters have been able to develop long-term partisanship consistent with socio-psychological theories of partisanship (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Green *et al.*, 2002; Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2008). Some others have a short-term partisanship that allowed them to transition to a new party loyalty (Lupu, 2013; Castro Cornejo, forthcoming), particularly to Morena. This last type of partisanship seems to behave more like a “running tally” of political evaluations (Lupu, 2013), which is consistent with more rationalist interpretations of voting behavior (Fiorina, 1981).

As mentioned before, parties' changing reputations are likely to change partisan loyalties within the electorate. In fact, that happened among voters in Mexico when we analyze the evaluation of major parties—the PRI, PAN, and PRD—based on a feeling thermometer. As Figure 2 shows, partisans like their own party (PRI: 7.9; PAN:

**FIGURE 2.** Evaluation of major parties in Mexico (2000-2018)



Source: National Electoral Study, CIDE-CSES, 2018 (Beltrán, Ley and Castro Cornejo, 2020) and BGC Beltrán Juárez and Asocs. (2018).

8.4; PRD: 7.1 on the 0-10 scale), but the average opinion of the three major parties in Mexico significantly eroded among out-partisans. While, in 2000, the PRI registered an average opinion of 4.8 (4.4 among independents and 3.3 among opposition voters) it declined to 3.3 in 2018 (2.7 among independents and 2.3 among opposition). In the case of the PAN, in 2000, it registered an average opinion of 6.6 (6.6 among independents and 5.3 among opposition voters) and declined to 4.0 in 2018 (3.4 among independents and 2.8 among opposition voters). The PRD declined from 4.3 (4.2 among independents and 3.6 among opposition voters) to 3.5 (3.1 among independents and 3.1 among opposition voters). These results show the important ero-

sion of the party system that was born as a product of Mexico's transition to democracy, which is an important context to understand the outcome of the 2018 presidential election. As several studies suggest, when stable party systems do little to respond to challenges in a country—whether a deteriorated economy or widespread corruption—(Seawright, 2012) parties become more susceptible to voters' short-term retrospective evaluations (Lupu, 2014) and the party systems begin experiencing a process of deinstitutionalization (Mainwaring, 2018). In the case of Morena, in 2018, it registered an aggregate opinion of 5.3, 8.5 among its co-partisans, 5.1 among independents, and 3.6 among opposition voters.

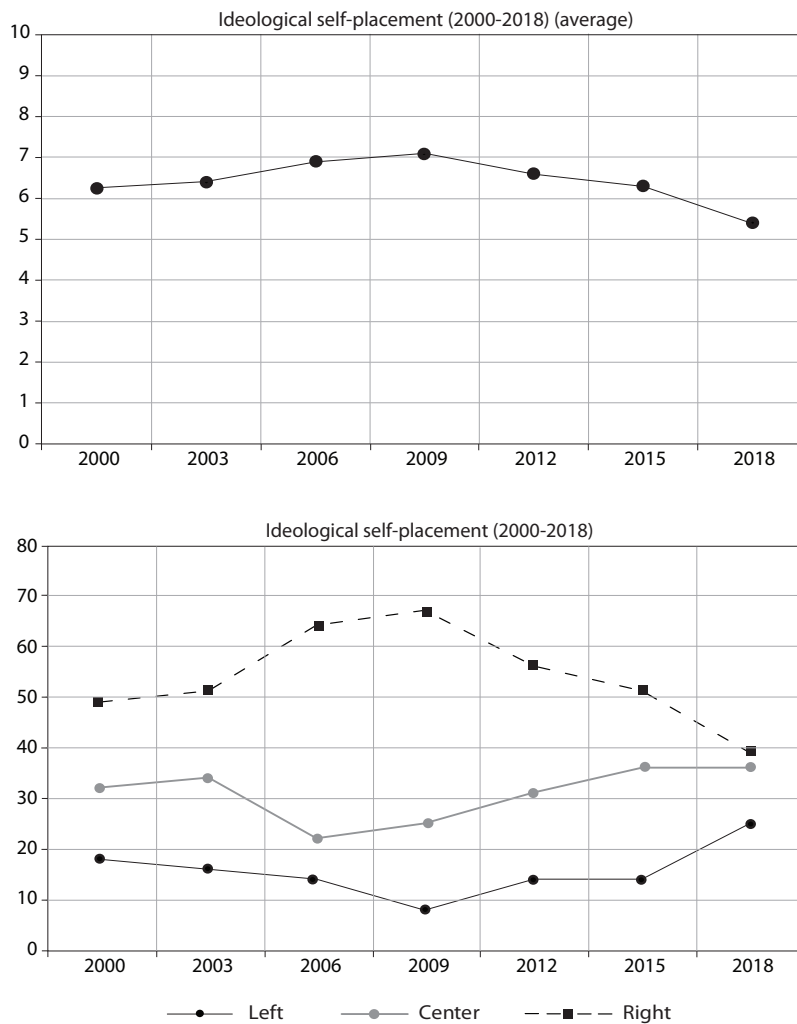
Another variable that tends to structure the way voters understand politics is ideology. Ideology is normally considered as a broad worldview along the left-right dimension (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992; Stimson, 1999). Following that perspective, both past (Beltrán, 2009a; 2009b) and recent studies (Sánchez y Sánchez, 2019) find that there are few ideologues within the Mexican electorate when measured on stances towards actual policies. In other words, there is no issue-based ideology since there is weak constraint between issues: voters who self-identify as leftists sometimes endorse conservative policies, or voters who self-identify as rightists sometimes support liberal policies. This is not uncommon even in long-standing democracies as in the U.S, where many conservatives tend to support some liberal welfare policies even though they self-identify with the “conservative” label (Ellis and Stimson, 2012).

Recent literature differentiates between issue-based ideology and symbolic ideology (Ellis and Stimson, 2012; Noel, 2014). This second perspective proposes that ideology is based in social identity (Mason, 2018a). Labels like “left” and “right” can be loosely connected with issues but have a psychological and emotional meaning for voters and, importantly, is associated with their electoral behavior and opinion formation. This is, in fact, what the literature in Mexico has found; regardless if the labels “left” and “right” have a substantive meaning, voters' ideological self-identification tends to be associated with vote choice (Moreno, 2015 and 2018). In terms of the 2018 election, the National Electoral Study (CSES) finds that issue-based ideology is weak<sup>3</sup> and symbolic ideology experienced some important changes. For example, between 2000 and 2015, the average voters' ideological self-placement on the 0-10 scale oscillated between 6 and 7; in 2018, the average moved slightly to the left to a moderate 5.4 (Figure 3). Similarly, the proportion of voters who choose 0, 1 or 2, on the ideological scale increased to 25 per cent in 2018, while the per cent of respondents who choose 8, 9 or 10 decreased to 39 per cent.

<sup>3</sup>The 2018 National Electoral Study (CSES) included questions about issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, inequality and the role of the government, social spending, taxes, and the role of the state in the energy sector. In most cases, these issues were not strongly associated with partisanship or vote choice.



**FIGURE 3.** Symbolic ideology (2000-2018)



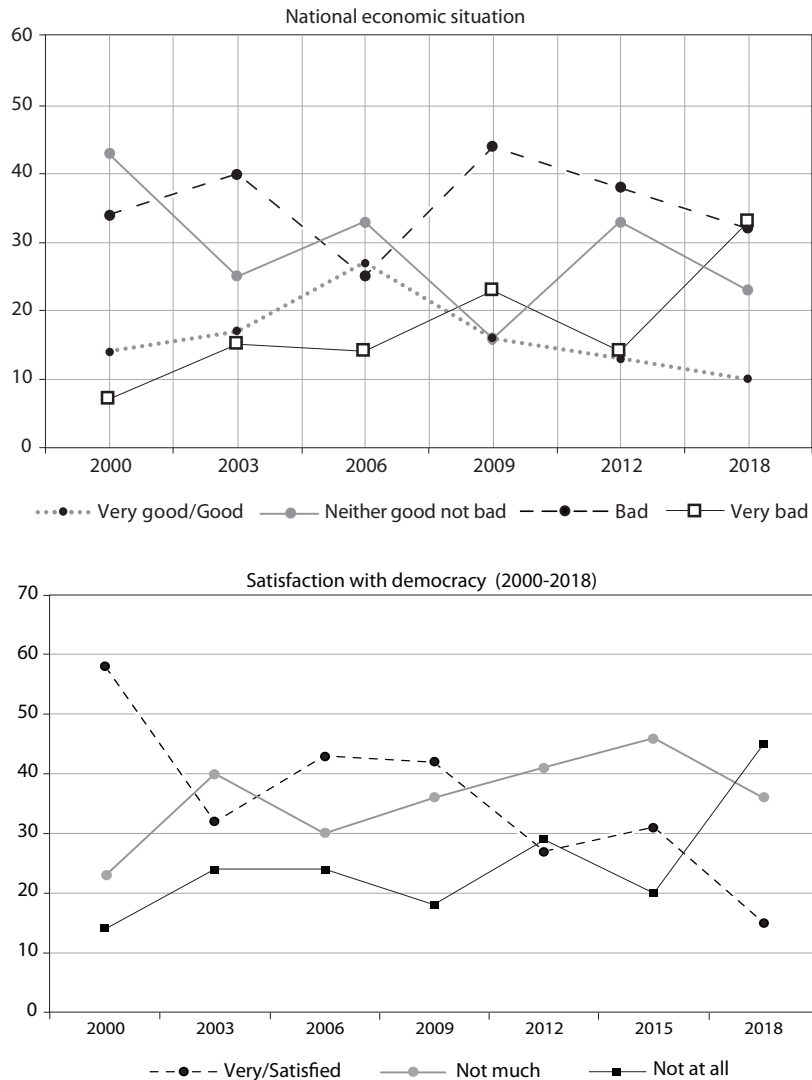
*Source:* National Electoral Study, CIDE-CSES, 2018 (Beltrán, Ley and Castro Cornejo, 2020).

These results speak to the historic victory of López Obrador who, regardless of its substantive content, has consistently identified with the political “left” building an emotional meaning to that label, which reported the highest proportion of voters choosing the left side of the ideological spectrum since the survey has been conducted in Mexico.

As several articles in this special issue discuss, the context of the 2018 election was uniquely negative, which is also reflected in the National Electoral Study (CSES). Perceptions about the national economy, corruption and security, in fact, reported the most negative opinions since the study has been conducted: 65 per



**FIGURE 4.** Evaluation of the economy and democracy (2000-2018)



Source: National Electoral Study, CIDE-CSES, 2018 (Beltrán, Ley and Castro Cornejo, 2020).

cent of voters considered that the economic situation of the country was “negative” or “very negative” (see Figure 4) and 63 per cent reported that their personal economic situation has “worsened” in the last year. Similarly, 79 per cent considered that the security was “equally bad” or have “worsened” in the last years, and 83 per cent reported that corruption in Mexico is “very” or “somewhat” widespread. Moreover, the presidential approval ratings are the lowest registered by this electoral survey: only 18 per cent of voters approved of the way Enrique Peña Nieto governed, well below previous presidents such as Vicente Fox (67%) and Felipe

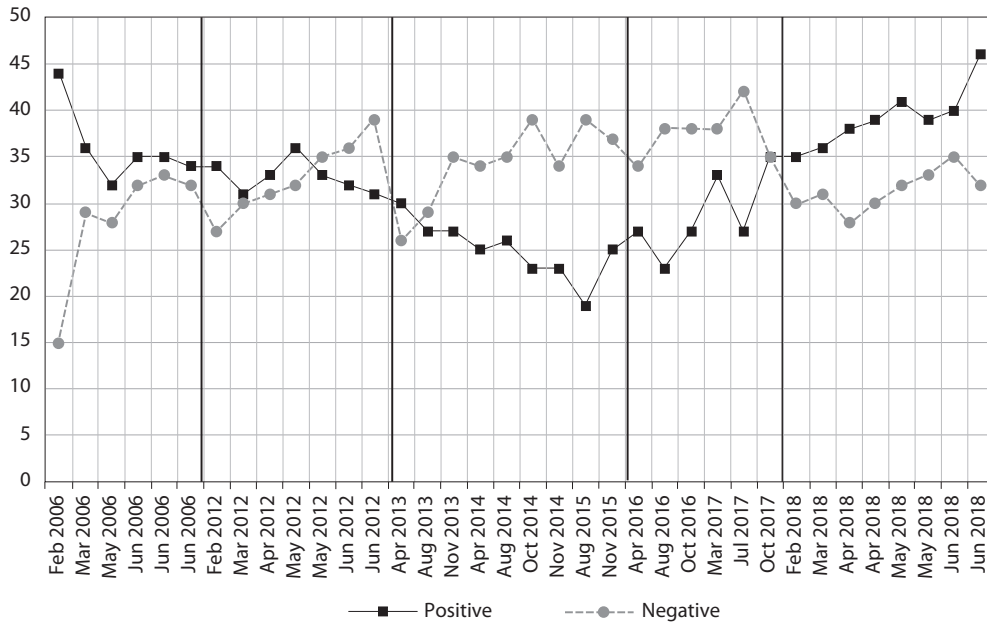
Calderón (54%). Not surprisingly, satisfaction with democracy also significantly decreased in 2018: while in 2000, 58 per cent of voters were satisfied and 22 per cent “somewhat” satisfied, in 2018, 45 per cent of voters were “not at all” satisfied with the way democracy works in Mexico (and 36 per cent “not much,” see Figure 4). In fact, most voters reported being angry with the country’s situation. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means “not angry” and 10 “very angry,” the average was 7.1; being independents (7.5) and morenistas (7.2) the ones that reported higher rates of anger compared to panistas (6.8) and priistas (6.7). These conditions seemed to be an ideal context for López Obrador’s third bid for the presidency: an angry electorate ready to be mobilized against the traditional party system in Mexico. This context also allowed him to broaden his electoral coalition, including voters who did not previously support his candidacy in 2006 and 2012, as the next section analyzes.

#### **2006-2018: AMLO AND A NEW COALITION OF VOTERS**

As discussed in the previous section, the Mexican electorate amid the 2018 presidential election was polarized, not particularly divided along programmatic lines but divided by a political identity/partisanship —what the literature calls “affective polarization” (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Iyengar *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the context of the country seemed to generate important grievances among voters against the traditional party system in Mexico. In parallel to this deteriorated context, voters’ opinion about López Obrador was increasingly positive. Figure 5 shows results from nationally representative polls conducted by BGC Beltrán, Juárez y Asocs. between 2006 and 2018. The opinion ratings show a U-shape: during the 2006 campaign, the evaluation of López Obrador went from very positive to very divided; during the 2012 campaign, it became negative as the campaign unfolded; during the term of Enrique Peña Nieto, the opinion of López Obrador was negative until 2015, and from then onward to the 2018 campaign, they became more positive and switched to very positive by the end of the campaign. In fact, by the end of the 2018 presidential campaign, López Obrador’s favorability was fairly similar to the first part of the 2006 campaign: more than 45 of the electorate reported a “very good” or “good” opinion about López Obrador.

One of the most significant changes is the renovated electoral coalition that allowed López Obrador to win the 2018 election in his third bid for the Presidency. As Table 1 reports, in 2006, López Obrador received slightly more support from men, younger voters, voters with higher levels of education, voters who self-identify as leftists (symbolic ideology, as previously discussed), voters who live in urban electoral districts and who report having no religion (“nones”). In turn, in 2018, López Obrador was finally able to win the independent vote —always necessary for a winning coalition— gained support from self-identified moderates and rightists, and closed the gender, education and urban/rural gaps. In other words, his third

**FIGURE 5.** Opinion of Andrés Manuel López Obrador



Source: BGC Beltrán Juárez and Asocs. (2018).

**TABLE 1.** Vote for AMLO (2006–2018) (% who reporting voting for AMLO of the three-party vote)

Among...	2006			2012			2018		
	PAN	PRI	AMLO	PAN	PRI	AMLO	PAN	PRI	AMLO
<i>Party Identification</i>									
Panistas	93	3	5	90	6	4	93	2	5
Priistas	10	80	9	2	95	3	4	91	5
Perredistas	1	2	97	2	5	94	53	6	41
Morenistas	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	1	98
Independents	47	14	40	19	45	35	22	15	62
<i>Ideology</i>									
Left (0-3)	11	14	75	9	22	78	16	16	68
Center (4-6)	39	22	39	22	46	32	27	21	52
Right (7-10)	53	18	30	31	55	14	31	25	44
<i>Gender</i>									
Male	41	20	40	22	49	29	27	18	55
Female	45	20	35	27	48	25	25	24	52

**TABLE 1.** Vote for AMLO (2006-2018) (% who reporting voting for AMLO of the three-party vote) (continuation)

Among...	2006			2012			2018		
	PAN	PRI	AMLO	PAN	PRI	AMLO	PAN	PRI	AMLO
<i>Education</i>									
Elementary	41	25	34	20	51	29	21	24	56
Middle School	47	18	35	24	53	23	27	19	54
High School	44	13	44	29	41	30	30	21	49
College +	43	11	47	33	37	31	31	18	51
<i>Age</i>									
18-25	42	14	44	28	47	26	28	17	55
26-40	47	19	34	25	50	26	29	18	53
41-60	40	23	37	24	50	27	22	25	53
61+	39	26	34	21	45	34	22	27	51
<i>Religion</i>									
Catholic	45	19	36	24	49	27	24	24	52
Evangelical	31	25	43	22	50	28	25	17	57
None	34	20	46	28	44	29	31	12	57
<i>Electoral District</i>									
Rural	43	30	27	21	57	23	21	21	45
Mixed	44	21	35	20	57	23	20	19	47
Urban	43	16	41	26	45	29	23	17	46

*Source:* National Electoral Study, CIDE-CSES, 2018 (Beltrán, Ley and Castro Cornejo, 2020).

candidacy broaden his electoral coalition and received support equally from men/women, lower-educated/highly-educated voters, and rural/urban voters. This broad coalition of voters made possible the victory of López Obrador, the first candidate of the political left to win the Presidency in the 30 years of democracy in Mexico.

#### **SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE 2018 ELECTION IN MEXICO**

In this special issue we present articles that address several questions related to the historical political juncture that Mexico experienced in the 2018 election: Why did the Mexican electorate vote the way they vote? What were the patterns of support for the major parties in Mexico? What was the most important issue driving support for López Obrador? Did populism, campaigns, and topics like religion affect voters' electoral behavior? Moreover, this special issue is a collaborative effort not only to

understand voters' decisions but also the erosion of electoral institutions, corruption, and the increasing political violence that took place in this past electoral cycle that provide important context to our understanding of Mexico's democracy in 2018.

This special issue includes seven articles and four research notes that analyze issue voting, voters' populist attitudes, party system nationalization, electoral institutions, corruption, electoral violence, social media, vote buying, corruption, the indigenous vote, and religion and politics. Two papers rely on data from the 2018 National Electoral Study (CIDE-CSES) and analyze vote choice and turnout in the presidential election. Melina Altamirano and Sandra Ley focus on the three campaign issues that stood out among the Mexican electorate: the economy, security and corruption. They study the effect of these three issues on vote choice and find that the evaluations of the state of the economy, in first place, and national security, in second, are associated with voting for López Obrador. Interestingly, despite the fact that corruption was widely discussed by López Obrador during the electoral campaign, it was not a relevant variable to understand voters' support for his candidacy. This paper contributes to our understanding of the victory of López Obrador but also to the literature in comparative political behavior. As opposed to most studies that tend to focus on a single issue, Altamirano and Ley's article evaluate the simultaneous effect of these three major issues within the same survey, something that is rarely observed in comparative studies.

Castro Cornejo *et al.* focus on how populist attitudes mobilized voters during the 2018 presidential campaign. In particular, they study the three conditions analyzed by the literature that are required for the populist activation: a national context that produces grievances within the electorate, a belief of a corrupt elite, and anger about the situation of the country. Interestingly, voters' partisanship moderates the effect of populist attitudes on voters' mobilization. In other words, only morenistas and independents met the three conditions of a populist mobilization: morenistas and independents with high populist attitudes were *a)* more likely to report negative evaluations of the national economy, security, and corruption, *b)* more likely to believe that there was "mafia del poder" in Mexico, and *c)* more likely to report being angry about the situation in the country and more likely to go to the polls. Similar than Altamirano and Ley's paper, this research contributes to the literature by evaluating the three conditions for the populist mobilization in the same study, something that is also rarely observed in comparative studies of populism.

The next two papers rely on aggregate-level data to understand patterns of support for the PRI and patterns of nationalization across parties. Milena Ang studies the unprecedented rise of governors prosecuted and incarcerated for corruption during the sexenio of Enrique Peña Nieto, most of which were from the PRI. These cases, in fact, affected support for the PRI in the 2018 presidential election. With

qualitative evidence, the author finds that these cases weakened the PRI's party brand because they were seen as evidence of a larger network of corruption—and not isolated cases—that enabled the malfeasance revealed by these cases. Moreover, Ang presents a difference-in-difference design of district-level electoral outcomes for the presidential campaigns in 2012 and 2018 and show that PRI electoral losses were higher in states where a PRI governor was prosecuted. This effect is particularly strong in districts with higher internet access, since they were more likely to be exposed to the corruption information. This article contributes to our understanding of the PRI's historical loss but also to debates in comparative political behavior. While most corruption literature tends to focus on corruption scandals and their effect on vote choice (Botero *et al.*, 2015; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2017; De Vries and Solaz, 2017), Ang's work analyzes the effect of systemic and widespread corruption, advancing our understanding of the conditions under which voters punish politicians' malfeasances.

Paul Johnson and Francisco Cantú evaluate patterns of nationalization across Mexican parties during the 1994-2018 period. While most theories predict that countries with many districts, federal institutions, and a presidential system are unlikely to have nationalized parties, the authors provide evidence that this is not always the case. The Mexican parties, in fact, have highly nationalized voting patterns likely explained by the fact that parties have centralized party organizations, which have control of the ballot access and financial resources. In terms of the 2018 presidential election, the results of the PAN and PRI were not followed by the vanishing of the national force of their vote; they report similar nationalization scores to those produced in the past. Morena scores are higher than any other party in terms of relative nationalization in 2018, showing that López Obrador's party did not disrupt the party system but followed an established trend in Mexican electoral competition. The authors also highlight the similarities of the nationalization levels for the PAN in 2006, PRI in 2012, and Morena in 2018. The three presidential campaigns created strong coattails that moved electoral support across districts in the same direction—in other words, the electoral behavior of the Mexican electorate follows national rather than local issues.

The next two articles provide important context to our understanding of Mexico's democracy amid the 2018 election, in terms of clientelism and the erosion of electoral institutions. Kenneth Greene and Alberto Simpser study vote buying attempts in the 2018 election. With innovative survey methodology, they find that the use of electoral clientelism have significantly increased since Mexico's transition to democracy. In fact, they report that 42 per cent of voters were offered some good or service by a political party during the campaign season (53 per cent if including campaign merchandise). These efforts were practiced by nearly all parties, included a variety of material offers, and involved millions of citizens. However,

their data also suggest that it is less clear if parties were successful in changing voters' behavior or even if citizens understood what parties asked to do in exchange for the electoral gifts. Regardless, while Mexico's democracy has successfully achieved free and fair elections, with strong institutions capable of rooting out fraud, and have parties with strong party reputations, there are systematic attempts made by parties to buy electoral support during campaigns. These efforts have not faded from Mexico politics after transitioning to democracy and, instead, are increasingly widespread as shown by Greene and Simpson's research.

Joy Langston highlights that most studies analyze why parties create autonomous electoral institutions to limit their actions, but few of them consider the strong incentives that parties have to cheat, manipulate or simply ignore the rules they helped creating. Her article presents evidence that after the country's democratization—similar to a case of regulatory capture—parties in Mexico were able to weaken electoral institutions (IFE-INE and the Electoral Tribunal). These efforts constituted maneuvers from simple pressure to outright malfeasance, such as placing allies in the IFE's leadership, threatening to reduce budgets, removing councilors or magistrates, changing the length of tenure, consistently bypassing campaign spending limits that they imposed on themselves, among others. Similarly, parties took advantage of different electoral reforms to impose higher costs on participation for smaller parties, ambitious politicians, and voters. As argued by Langston, this behavior of party leaders, along with other variables, helped lead to a massive rejection of the traditional three-party system in the 2018 election.


Finally, Víctor Hernández Huerta finds that the 2018 electoral process was the most violent in recent history in Mexico: 48 candidates were assassinated. In order to explain what was behind this wave of political assassinations, Hernández Huerta built a database of candidate killings from newspaper notes in all the states in which assassinations of candidates occurred during the 2017-2018 electoral cycle. His analysis finds that political violence was not a result of electoral competition but can be attributed to the activities of criminal organizations in the municipalities in which the murders occurred. In particular, his research finds that in some states the candidates were among civilian casualties in the midst of criminal violence that the country is experiencing. However, in states like Puebla and Guerrero, they seem to be targeted by criminal organizations. This research not only contributes to our understanding of the 2018 electoral process in Mexico but also provides new evidence of how criminal organizations get involved in the democratic process, as it is the case in other parts of the world as Italy, Brazil, or Colombia.

In addition, four research notes included in this special issue provide important analysis about campaigns and electoral behavior in 2018. First, Sebastián Garrido and Flavia Freidenberg present descriptive statistics about the results of the election. They show how the configuration of the party system changed after the 2018



election and offer an important historical perspective of the magnitude of the changes, particularly the massive shift of the vote and the reduction of party fragmentation. Ulises Beltrán analyzes campaign effects, particularly the role played by news coverage, political advertising of parties, and social media. Contrary to what sometimes is claimed by journalists or media commentators—but consistent with the academic literature on the “minimal effects” model of campaign influence—the author finds that voters’ media consumption, particularly from social media, had no significant effect on their electoral behavior.

Finally, two research notes analyze two important topics that can shape voters’ electoral behavior: religion and indigenous identity. Alejandro Díaz Domínguez studies why López Obrador attracted secularists but also many religious voters, particularly observant and traditionalist Catholic voters in the 2018 presidential election. As Díaz Domínguez argues, while Morena is a leftist party that championed support for the poor, promised to fight corruption and cut bureaucratic privileges, López Obrador also emphasized values and religious appeals during his campaign and sent a vague policy message on abortion and gay rights, which could have appealed observant and traditionalist Catholic voters. Interestingly, despite López Obrador’s electoral alliance with Encuentro Social, an Evangelical party, Díaz Domínguez did not find strong support for López Obrador among evangelicals; in fact, they were less likely to vote for him. Willibald Sonnleitner studies voting patterns of a topic rarely analyzed in studies of political behavior in Mexico: the indigenous vote. In particular, his analysis focuses on those electoral districts in which there is more than 40 per cent of an indigenous population. Sonnleitner finds that while these districts tend to report higher turnout rates they are not characterized by any specific political behavior; vote choice is mostly explained by sociodemographic factors, particularly levels of education.

Although this volume does not pretend to be exhaustive, the papers included in this special issue contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the different factors that shaped the outcome of the 2018 election in Mexico. We appreciate the collaboration of the authors of this issue: Melina Altamirano, Milena Ang, Ulises Beltrán, Francisco Cantú, Alejandro Díaz Domínguez, Flavia Freidenberg, Sebastián Garrido, Kenneth Greene, Víctor Hernández Huerta, Paul Johnson, Joy Langston, Sandra Ley, Alberto Simpser, and Willibald Sonnleitner. We also appreciate the contribution of anonymous reviewers and the participation of Álvaro López Lara, Eric Magar, Mariano Sánchez Talanquer, Salvador Vázquez del Mercado, Gerardo Maldonado, and Javier Márquez as discussants at the “Política y Gobierno” Special Workshop organized at CIDE on December of 2018 and April of 2019. We also want to thank Julio Ríos and Luis de la Calle, previous and current editor of *Política y Gobierno*, respectively, for the invitation to serve as the editors of this issue. Luis de la Calle helped us coordinate every stage of the volume. 

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