The Role of the Printed Press in the Process of Democratization: The Case of Mexico

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
Political Science
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Abstract

This work addresses the gap in the media and democracy literature on Mexico’s democratization process. It examines the role of a liberalizing and increasingly diverse press in the transition and its impact on the political process once it was freed of political control in the stage of electoral democracy. It investigates the role of opinion-makers in Mexico and delves into the significant difference between published opinion and public opinion. The central argument in this dissertation is that structural factors, specifically economic changes and reforms, relaxed press controls significantly in the 1990s, propelling the incipient liberalization process of the print media. It further argues that once electoral democracy was achieved, opinion articles reflected the existing political polarization, as divisions and disagreements increased among opinion makers. The elitist orientation of the Mexican press is key to explaining the press’s propitious role during the democratization process in Mexico, as well as the dynamics of the post-transition period. A key component of this dissertation is a systematic analysis of opinion articles from three national newspapers on the 1996 and the 2007 electoral reforms. Content analysis was based on a model identifying the frame elements, which represent the functions of media frames: diagnose or define problems, explain causes or provide context, evaluate, and prescribe solutions. Identifying frame elements revealed the support or rejection of different aspects of the
legislation, as well as the connections between opinion-pieces’ authors and their arguments.

Research findings suggest the influence of an increasingly plural and diverse print media is more direct in the earlier stages of a process of transition than during the stage of democratic consolidation. The Mexican case contributes to understanding the role of opinion-makers and print media in developing countries with low press readership in a transition process, in young democracies, and in contexts of political polarization.
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments......................................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents............................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables ......................................................................................................................................... vii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. x
List of Acronyms .............................................................................................................................. xi
Chapter 1 Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Methodology .................................................................... 24
Chapter 3 Mexico’s Transition to Electoral Democracy ................................................................. 56
Chapter 4 The Mexican Press and Opinion-Makers ..................................................................... 92
Chapter 5 The 1996 Electoral Reform: A Definitive Step towards Electoral Democracy and Alternation in Power ...................................................................................................................... 138
Chapter 6 The 2007 Electoral Reform: Contentious Changes in a Context of Polarization........ 181
Chapter 7 General Conclusions: The Press and Democratization – Lessons from Mexico ........ 226
References ........................................................................................................................................ 245
Database of Opinion Articles .......................................................................................................... 265
Appendix .......................................................................................................................................... 291
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Examples of Single Frames and Corresponding Frame Elements

Table 4.1 Number and Percentage of Authors and Articles Classified According to Authors’ Main Professional Activity 1996

Table 4.2 Number and Percentage of Authors and Articles Classified According to Authors’ Main Professional Activity 2007

Table 4.3 Number of Authors Classified According to Professional Activity in *El Universal, La Jornada*, and *Reforma* 1996

Table 4.4 Number of Authors Classified According to Professional Activity in *El Universal, La Jornada*, and *Reforma* 2007

Table 4.5 Article Position and Author’s Professional Activity 1996

Table 4.6 Article Position and Authors’ Professional Activity 2007

Table 5.1 Main Aspects of the 1996 Political-Electoral Reform

Table 5.2a Party Positions – Electoral Reform Negotiations

Table 5.2b Party Positions – Points in Common

Table 5.3 Authors with Electoral Expertise or with Involvement in the Democratization Process, 1996

Table 5.4a Number of References to Causal Interpretation Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform negotiation, 1996

Table 5.4b Number of References to Evaluation Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996

Table 5.4c Number of References to Treatment Recommendation Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996
Table 5.4d Number of References to Perspective Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996

Table 5.5 Aggregated Number of References to Evaluation Arguments Against / In Favour of Reform/Changes 1996 and Article Position

Table 5.6 Numbers of Articles Classified According to Article Position and Tone (Critical/Neutral/Optimistic/Prescriptive) on the 1996 Electoral Reform

Table 5.7 Authors’ main activity Cross-tabulated with Relevance and Accuracy of Arguments 1996

Table 6.1 Main Aspects of the 2007 Electoral Reform

Table 6.2 Authors with Electoral Expertise or with involvement in the Democratization Process, 2007

Table 6.3a Number of References to Aggregated Causal Interpretation Arguments in Favour of or against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model and Article Position

Table 6.3b Number of References to Specific Causal Interpretation Frame Elements Representing Arguments in Favour of or against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model

Table 6.3c Number of References to Aggregated Evaluation Arguments in Favour of or against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model and Article Position

Table 6.3d Number of References to Specific Evaluation Frame Elements Representing Arguments in Favour of or against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model

Table 6.4a Number of References of Aggregated Causal Interpretation Frame Elements in Favour of or Against Removing Electoral Councillors and/or Selection Process and Article Position

Table 6.4b Number of References to Specific Causal Interpretation Frame Elements Representing Arguments Related to the Removal of Some of IFE’s Electoral Councilors
Table 6.4c Number of References of Aggregated Evaluation Arguments in Favour of or against Removing Electoral Councillors and Selection Process and Article Position

Table 6.4d Number of References to Specific Evaluation Frame Elements Representing Arguments Related to the Removal of Some of IFE’s Electoral Councilors and Selection Process

Table 6.5 Number and Percentage of Articles Classified by Article Position and Tone (Critical/Neutral/Optimistic/Prescriptive)

Table 6.6 Author’s Main Activity Correlated with Relevance and Accuracy of Arguments 2007
List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Article Position Compared

Figure 4.2 Article Position by Newspaper 1996-2007

Figure 4.3 Article Quality by Newspaper 1996-2007

Figure 4.4 Article position and article quality 1996-2007

Figure 5.1 Proportion of Articles According to Tone (Critical/ Neutral/ Optimistic/ Prescriptive) in *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*

Figure 6.1 Percentages of Articles by Tone in *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*
List of Acronyms

**AMEDI.** Academia Mexicana de Derecho a la Información (Mexican Academy of Right to Information).

**CCE.** Consejo Coordinador Empresarial (Business Coordinating Council).

**CENCA.** Comisión Ejecutiva para la Negociación y Construcción de Acuerdos del Congreso de la Unión (Executive Commission for the Negotiation and Construction of Agreements of Congress).

**CIRT.** Cámara de la Industria de Radio y Televisión (Chamber of Radio and Television Industry).

**COFIPE.** Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales (Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures).

**CNDH.** Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (National Commission of Human Rights).

**EZLN.** Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

**FDN.** Frente Democrático Nacional (National Democratic Front).

**IFAI.** Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información (Federal Institute of Access to Information).

**IFE.** Instituto Federal Electoral (Federal Electoral Institute).

**IMF.** International Monetary Fund.

**LOPPE.** Ley de Organismos Políticos y Procesos Electorales (Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes).

**PAN.** Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party).

**PIPSA.** Productora e Importadora de Papel Sociedad Anonima (Paper Producing and Importing Society).

**PRD.** Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution).
**PRI.** Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

**PVEM.** Partido Verde Ecologista de México (Mexican Green Ecologist Party).

**PT.** Partido del Trabajo (Labour Party).

**PRONASOL.** Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program).

**SEGOB.** Secretaría de Gobernación (Ministry of Interior Affairs).

**TEPJF.** Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación Federal Electoral Court.
Chapter 1
Introduction

The democratic transition in Mexico culminated in the year 2000 with the election, for the first time in seven decades, of a president from an opposition party. The defeat of the presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ended the almost total domination of national politics in Mexico by that political party, and signaled the start of the process of democratic consolidation. At the height of the PRI regime, the print media was primarily dependent on and controlled by the government, except for a few spaces in which critics could express their discontent. By the 1990s, there were two processes taking place as well as an interaction between them: one of growing media independence compounded and accelerated by structural changes, and the other of political reform, including pressures for deeper transformations and growing party competition. In the stage of electoral democracy, the press became more plural, but legacies of the authoritarian period constrained its role in democratic consolidation.

The media is the “connective tissue of democracy,” through which citizens and their elected representatives communicate in their reciprocal efforts to inform and influence the political process (Gunther and Mughan 2002, 420). A free press can be one important engine of political transition, but no specific pattern of press development is essential to the democratization project; the political communication and democracy literature shows no consensus about the direction or even the existence of this relationship (McConnell and Becker 2002; Pasek 2006).

For most of the twentieth century, the Mexican press was overwhelmingly in favour of the PRI-regime. Few spaces existed where people critical of the regime (mostly intellectuals) could publish their opinions and express their discontent; this served as a façade of press “freedom” for the regime and helped to bolster its legitimacy. I argue in this dissertation that structural factors, specifically economic changes and reforms, relaxed press controls significantly in the 1990s, propelling the incipient liberalization of the press. This allowed opinion-makers—a group that continued growing in size, independence, and diversity—to make a contribution towards electoral democratization in the 1990s. I further argue that once electoral democracy was achieved, a free press reflected the existing polarization. Divisions and disagreements increased among opinion-makers, and opinion articles did not have an impact on democratic reforms.
Although multiple debates were evident in the press, the low readership of newspapers meant that not all the arguments were made known to the general public.

In this work I address the gap in the media and democracy literature in transition processes: I analyze the interaction between the print media and two electoral reforms comparatively at the different stages of democratization, as Randall (1993, 1998a) suggests. I first explore the role of a liberalizing and increasingly diverse press in the transition process, and second, examine the impact of the print media once it became independent of political control in the stage of electoral democracy. Regardless of the denomination of stages in a democratization process, what is important is the distinction between the origins or pre-transition, the phase of transition itself, and the consolidation or deepening of democracy.¹ There is an interaction among the various phases in shaping what kind of role the media plays in the political processes of transition and democratic deepening or consolidation. This interaction is highly contextual, with structures and practices of the pre-transition period shaping what comes after, and those of the transition period shaping what happens during the process of democratic deepening (Bennett 1998; Randall 1993, 1998a, 1998b).

The role that the media plays in a particular time or setting is determined by several explanatory factors: the structure of the media market, specifically reach and readership; and regime type, political system, and institutional development, which shape media legislation. Living standards and economic development are also relevant variables that speak to the quality of a democracy; as Jones (2002) notes, underdevelopment correlates with poverty and illiteracy, which limit the reach of the written press.

The Approach: Focus on the Written Press, Opinion Articles, and Democratization

In most unequal societies, print publications have the potential to be much more influential on the political process because they are more avidly read by politicians, public officials, corporate executives, and other decision makers and agents of change in society (Lichtenberg 1990a; Jones 2002) rather than by the general public. By contrast, electronic media, particularly television, in

¹ The stages in a democratization process are successive and thus the boundaries between them are not very clear.
unequal societies are likely to exert power most strongly on the less well-educated and influential members of society. This is different from liberal democracies, where the print media has a broader impact and more direct influence on public opinion.

The political communication literature sheds light on the interaction between the print media and its audiences, including political actors and other elites. My work looks at the impact of the print media on the policy making process—in particular on politicians—beyond political campaigns, elections, and approval ratings. Since political decision makers value, rely, and potentially benefit from newspapers’ coverage (Keplinger 2007, 10), editorials exert a stronger influence on decision makers and serve as a forum for debate among elites (Cook 2005, 9). Most studies analyze the media’s influence on public opinion, that is, on citizens and the population as a whole, for example the impact of the news on voting behavior (Larson 2002; Blumler and Gurevitch 1995).

The case of Mexico contributes to our understanding of the role that opinion-makers and the print media play in a developing country with low press readership in a transition process, in a young democracy, and in contexts of political polarization. My work emphasizes the difference between published opinion and public opinion (briefly defined below and explained in Chapter 2). I analyze how the Mexican print media relates to the power structure, including the government and the country’s elites. My findings show that some of the characteristics of opinion-makers, such as professional activity and political alignment, are helpful to identify patterns of opinion among authors representing different perspectives or positions.

Opinion and commentary articles have an important function in the political communication process: newspaper editorial pages are a forum for the exchange of opinions (Hoffman and Slater 2007, 58). Despite the important role of editorials, columns, and opinion articles—both as part of journalistic discourse and in the definition of priorities in the political sphere—this broad genre has been the subject of relatively few studies in political communication (McCombs 1997; Le

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2 Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) and Voltmer (2006) define political communication as a system of dynamic interaction between political actors, the media, and audience members, who produce, receive, and interpret political messages.
The extent to which opinion articles contribute to public deliberation—including their influence in political outcomes, particularly in countries in transition or young democracies—is not yet clear. My work addresses this gap in the existing literature through an analysis of the interaction of professional opinion-makers with political reforms in two stages of the democratization process in Mexico. With the notable exception of a few authors (Camp 1985 Contreras 2010; Ochoa 2005) who have focused on the role of Mexican intellectuals or opinion-makers, this topic is still understudied.

Before proceeding to describe the methodology and research design, I will define some of the key concepts for this study. In this work, the term “opinion-makers” refers generically to authors of columns and opinion articles published in the press (including journalists, academics or other experts, and political actors). Authors of opinion genres (including opinion articles and columns) are also referred to generically as columnists. In Mexico they are also called “commentocrats” and the collectivity is sometimes referred to as the “commentocracy.”

This study emphasizes the difference between “published” and “public” opinion. Opinion-makers produce published opinion, which is a qualitative notion, that is, an authorized opinion (in the sense of being made by an expert with authority on the matter). Columns and opinion articles are published opinion; these opinions are not necessarily broadly shared, they are simply published, or made known. Conversely, an opinion is public in the sense that it is a shared opinion among a wide range of people. Published opinion is the opinion of people who are well informed or experts in the subject they write about; it may be more relevant in a transitional context or young democracy than in a more stable society. For example, opinions published in the press may help elites define priorities or foster agreements. Nevertheless, when readership of

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3 Op-ed pages in newspapers contain roughly three types of articles: editorials, columns, and opinion pieces; although there are some differences between these three, they are all part of the same genre. Chapter 2 (11) includes brief definitions of these types of articles; for the purpose of this work, all are considered together.

4 Most of the existing literature on editorials analyzes them through a linguistic or critical discourse approach.

5 In English, the term “commentocracy” refers to something different: a mass of reader responses to news articles, blog posts or other types of content across the Web.

6 Published opinions do not automatically form public opinion. The ability to convert a published opinion into public opinion can be a dimension of political power.
the press is low, there is little opportunity for opinion-makers to directly influence public opinion in the population as a whole.

“Democratization” refers “to a movement toward democracy” and thus indicates a shift from an authoritarian or totalitarian regime toward a different political system (Mainwaring 1989). “Transition” indicates the period from the opening of an authoritarian regime to the holding of “founding” elections (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

The term "electoral democracy" describes a specific type of democracy—one in which (more or less) inclusive, clean, and competitive elections take place, but the political and civil freedoms essential for liberal democracy are not upheld (Schedler 1998, 93).7 I discuss the specific features of liberal democracy in more detail below. Electoral democracies face the challenge of democratic completion—consolidation or deepening.8 By contrast, liberal democracies go beyond political competition and participation, and also encompass substantial levels of pluralism and freedom (notably of speech and of the press).9

Democratic consolidation or deepening is often associated with the movement away from some “diminished subtype” of democracy toward a “non-diminished” or liberal democracy10 (Schedler 1998, 98). Democratic consolidation or deepening substantially reduces the uncertainty that is central to transition and is essential for stability (Karl 2005; Schedler 1998).11 An important aspect of democratic consolidation that alludes directly to the electoral dimension is a country’s first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another. However, post-transitional regimes are said to consolidate or become stable when there are no longer threats to democracy or dangers of eroding it and when the rules of the democratic game

7 Adjectives used to describe a democratic regime with hyphenated terms such as “low-quality democracies,” depict transitional democratic regimes that may lack accountability, responsiveness, institutional balance, and effectiveness between elections (Diamond et al. 1995, 8).
8 The Mexican democratization process has mostly focused on the mechanisms of participation, thus the denomination of the country as electoral democracy.
9 The term "liberal" refers to a political regime in which individual and group liberties are strong and protected.
10 Democracies, in general, are ongoing and unfinished processes. Some scholars prefer to use the term democratic deepening rather than consolidation (see for example Wong 2003).
11 As Diamond et al. (1995, 7) explain, the boundary between democratic and undemocratic (or less than democratic) “is often blurred and imperfect.”
are respected and considered legitimate by all political groups: in short, once democracy is the only way (Linz and Stepan 1996).

A liberal democracy encompasses not only fair and competitive elections characteristic of an electoral democracy, but also civil and political rights. Robert Dahl’s polyarchy (1971) offers a comprehensive conceptualization of a liberal democratic regime. According to Dahl, a polyarchy includes the following characteristics: 1) elected officials; 2) free and fair elections; 3) inclusive suffrage; 4) the right to run for office; 5) freedom of expression; 6) alternative information; and 7) associational autonomy (Dahl 1971, 221). As Fox (1994, 151) explains, democratization is the process of movement toward the conditions delineated by Dahl, while the consolidation of a democratic regime “requires fulfilling all of them.” My work is based on the premise that the flow of information that is free of political control is critical to each of Dahl’s three requirements for democracy: that citizens can formulate, express, and expect response to their preferences. As Milton (2001, 497) notes, the news media help define society-wide expectations and boundaries.

The concepts of freedom of expression (or freedom of speech) and press freedom (or freedom of the press) are related, but are not strictly synonymous. In this work, freedom of expression encompasses several aspects: the ability of the media to publish or broadcast information and of journalists and columnists to express their opinions without censorship or interference from the government or antidemocratic groups (freedom of the press); the right of ordinary individuals to have access to a medium that will allow all voices in a society to publicize their views (the right to communicate); and the right to information, which is crucial for citizens to participate in a democracy.

Research Design

My dissertation focuses on two periods of the democratization process in Mexico: the transition stage, which started with the 1977 political reform; and the period of electoral democracy, which

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12 The countries that meet these criteria are commonly referred to as “liberal democracies” rather than “polyarchies.”
13 In Chapter 2 I elaborate on the difference between freedom of expression and freedom of the press. This is to recognize the existing debate, as my objective is not to discuss the best use of the terms.
began in 2000 with the first alternation in power. I analyzed editorials, columns, and opinion pieces published in three of Mexico’s most prominent newspapers: La Jornada, Reforma, and El Universal. I examined how opinion-makers depicted the 1996 and the 2007 electoral reforms and their implications for the country’s democracy. I chose these newspapers because all three are available and read nationwide and they are among the top most circulated newspapers in the country. Table 1 in Appendix A shows the number of articles in my sample for each of those three newspapers in 1996 and 2007. It is relevant to note that in Mexico, unlike in liberal democracies, there is no official or independently verified information about the numbers of newspapers published (in terms of either circulation or readership); this information is provided by individual print media outlets (Pérez Espino 2004; Riva Palacio 2004; Sarmiento 2005; Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview, 2011).14

A central component of my methodological approach is a content analysis of the opinion articles concerned with the 1996 and the 2007 electoral reforms. I identified patterns, changes in the arguments advanced, and the issues of contention or agreement for each topic, as well as how they relate to the articles’ authors. This shed light on whether opinion-makers who publish in the press bolstered democratic institutions or whether they promoted other agendas. I triangulated data by obtaining and using different material and evidence: opinion articles and semi-structured, open-ended interviews with political actors, journalists, and columnists, as well as specialists on the Mexican media (Table 2 in Appendix A shows the breakdown of interviewees according to their professional activity).

In order to assess the positions of the different authors in the press systematically, consistently, and objectively, I based the qualitative content analysis of opinion articles I conducted on framing. In political communication, framing broadly refers to a process by which all actors “define and give meaning to issues” and connect them to the wider political context (Callaghan and Schnell 2004, 185). Frames determine how people understand and evaluate an issue (Entman 1993, 54); as Entman (1993) argues, a communicated text exerts its power through frames.

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14 As Chapter 4 explains, this is a legacy of the authoritarian period, when newspapers relied on government subsidies to survive. In the stage of electoral democracy, there is little incentive for newspapers to be transparent about this information, as their aim is to compete with other newspapers for government or private advertising revenue.
Drawing on Entman’s definition (1993), I focus in particular on the elements of a frame (which represent its different functions): problem definition, causal interpretation, evaluation, treatment recommendation, and perspective. Through a systematic identification of these elements, I show how the different authors depicted the two electoral reforms (including negotiation and their implications) across the three newspapers included in this study, as well as the connections between the authors of opinion pieces and the arguments they make.

The selection and salience of policy aspects indicates how the framing of different issues (in this case in opinion articles) can affect how audiences or readers understand events. A systematic analysis of how authors frame their pieces is helpful to assess whether they have an influence in policy outcomes. Frame analysis, in relation to the specific context for each of the policy aspects being discussed, is a valuable tool to help determine patterns and opinion trends that, in cases such as Mexico, can influence the impact of these print media discussions (published opinion) on political or other elites. If these then permeate to the broader public conversation, they may potentially influence public opinion.

The Mexican Case and the Relationship between the Press and Democratization

The presidential election of the year 2000 in Mexico was a watershed event in the transition from an authoritarian one-party dominant system, which had been in power for longer than any other in the world, to an electoral democracy. The defeat of the presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ended the party’s 71 years in the country’s presidency. Nevertheless, this did not signify the end of Mexico’s democratization (Barracca 2004; Middlebrook 2004; Pastor and Wise 2005; Gómez 2008). After 2000, the overall focus of debate concerning political change in Mexico shifted to the obstacles to longer-term democratic consolidation or deepening. The reform agenda paralleled that of many other post-transition countries, with the main goal of making real the formal conditions of political democracy.

15 Frames emphasize specific facts or values, and render them apparently more relevant than others. Framing refers to how events and issues are depicted in the media, for example by using different thematic slants and highlighting different aspects. In the theoretical section in Chapter 2, I expand on the most relevant aspects of media frames and framing. In the methodological section, I elaborate on the definition of the different frame elements.
As Aziz (2003, 9) argued, Mexico, as a country in a process of democratization, faced a two-fold challenge: to build a democracy and at the same time to solve the problems that such a system entails. The initial expectations resulting from the victory in 2000 of an opposition candidate were not met: changes conducive to improving economic and social conditions for all Mexicans were not implemented in either of the two following administrations. The reforms mostly focused on electoral processes; in the stage of electoral democracy, political actors failed to reach agreements regarding broader reforms to transform the political and institutional framework (Dresser 2008); the country’s political institutions, designed for a presidentialist regime, failed to adapt to the growing pluralism (Eisenstadt and Poire 2005; Rodríguez 2010); and a competitive party system stopped short of enhancing transparency, accountability, and governance and thus deepening democracy.

For most of the twentieth century, the PRI regime controlled the print media through a wide array of mechanisms (Adler 1993; Benavides 2000; Carreño 2007; Fromson 1996; Hallin 2000; Hughes 2003, 2006; Lawson 2002; Riva Palacio 1997, 2004; Rockwell 2002; Trejo Delarbre 1991, 2001). The press published information that overwhelmingly benefited the president, the government, and the official party. Despite this, critical intellectuals found a few spaces in print media outlets where they could express their discontent. This was a façade of press “freedom” for the regime and helped to bolster its legitimacy and image. A small group of critical journalists survived and expanded in the 1980s and 1990s leading the liberalization of the Mexican press, which was characterized by an increase in opinions and editorial diversity within several national newspapers. Competition increased among print media outlets to attract more readers, and human agency was another factor stimulating the press opening (Hughes 2003, 2006), seen for example, in the creation and expansion of independent newspapers (Lawson 2002).

Thus, a free press did not suddenly appear with the dismantling of the old authoritarian regime (Carreño 2007; Hallin 2000; Hughes 2003; 2006; Lawson 2002; Riva Palacio 2004; Trejo 1998, 2001, 2015). Political opening and print media liberalization were building on each other by the 16

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16 The scope of my analysis ends in 2007. In the first two years of the Administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI), who took office in December 2012, several structural reforms (including education, tax, and telecommunications) were approved.
1990s. Structural factors, including the economic crisis and reforms as well as social changes, produced gradual electoral and political reforms that slowly allowed other parties to access power. Those same factors also contributed to an increasingly independent and diverse press, in which a larger number of voices critical of the PRI regime could be heard. The mid-1990s saw two processes underway and an interaction between them: the first was growing media independence, and the second was political liberalization, including pressures for deeper electoral reform, growing party competition, and the acquisition of office by opposition parties. Although in the stage of electoral democracy the press gained in terms of diversity and pluralism, its capability for more direct impact on policies and legislation decreased in a polarized political context.\(^\text{17}\)

The print media moved further and more quickly toward independence than the broadcasting industry (Carreño 2008; Lawson 2002; Orme 1997; Riva Palacio 2004). The elitist character of the press in Mexico is a key factor shaping its role during the authoritarian period, in the transition, and in the stage of electoral democracy. In Mexico there is a very marked distinction between published opinion and public opinion. Only a small proportion of the population is actually exposed to the print media. As a result, published opinion does not necessarily permeate to the rest of the population; rather, its impact is on political elites. The parameters of the political conversation have largely been set by opinion-makers, who write articles about a wide array of issues. Columns and opinion articles have been channels of communication for the country’s elites and have played a significant political role in Mexico, even during the authoritarian period (Carreño 2007; Riva Palacio 2004; Trejo Delarbre 2015). Since the 1970s, and increasingly since the 1990s (and until today), opinion articles widely debate economic, political, or social issues deemed of interest.\(^\text{18}\) It is not uncommon for columnists or other writers of opinion articles to use that medium as a communication channel, through which they

\(^{17}\) Carreño (2007) explains that the transition stopped short of transforming political communication and developing a democratic media system. Legislators did not follow through with a much-needed updated media legal framework.

\(^{18}\) As will be shown in Chapter 4, when the process of press liberalization began, diversity in terms of opinion became relevant. Various media outlets increasingly aimed to incorporate people with expertise, special knowledge, and recognition in public forums as contributors of opinion pieces.
exchange messages, criticize, and respond to each other in the same manner (Carreño 2007; Riva Palacio 1997, 2004; Trejo 2015).

Although the increased openness and diversity in the print media was crucial, for the most part it led to liberalization in the circulation of ideas among the country’s elites, rather than among the public in general. This particularity of the Mexican context is key to understanding the limits of the role of opinion-makers. Approximately 80 percent of Mexicans get their information from television, 20 percent from radio, and only 18 percent from the print media (SEGOb and INEGI 2001, cited in Sarmiento 2005, 286).\(^\text{19}\) In 2015 the consulting firm EY produced the Study of Advertising in the Mass Media in Mexico and found that only 12 percent of Mexicans read newspapers (EY 2015).

Soon after Vicente Fox took office, he publicly complained about critiques of his administration and dismissed media outlets and critical opinion-makers. Since the early 2000s, the term “Red Circle” has been increasingly used in Mexico in reference to opinion-makers. The notion appears to have originated with Vicente Fox’s explicit distinction between a relatively small group of people, composed prominently of opinion-makers and the country’s informed elites (which he felt were highly critical of his administration), and the rest of the population: the Red and the Green Circles, respectively.\(^\text{20}\) The most recognizable representatives of this group generally have an outlet in the media, particularly the press, through which they express their opinions. In this dissertation, Red Circle refers to a particular group of opinion-makers—that is, authors of columns and editorials—not to the country’s informed elites more broadly.\(^\text{21}\)

Opinion-makers in countries such as Mexico are the creators of published opinions; depending on their profile and recognition, they may be in a position to shape opinion trends and, by so doing, potentially influence public opinion. In Mexico, the citizenry as a whole (the Green Circle

\(^\text{19}\) The total is higher than 100 percent because the survey allowed multiple answers to a single question

\(^\text{20}\) Castañeda (2008) argues that the communicative channel between opinion-makers (the Red Circle) and the rest of the population (green circle) is the country’s political and business elite (what he calls the “brown circle”). Whether or not there is any communication between the Red Circle and the public, however, is contingent on whether the political and business elites are effectively influenced by opinion-makers.

\(^\text{21}\) According to Vicente Fox’s notion, the Red Circle encompasses more than opinion-makers, and consists of the country’s political, economic, and intellectual elites. Chapter 4 expands on this.
in Fox’s terms) is not the main audience for opinion articles, which are aimed instead at those who have decision-making capability. The link between the Red and the Green Circles is apparent when ideas or arguments from opinion articles in the print media—written by those from the Red Circle—are commented on in radio or television shows and then repeated in the evening national newscasts: that is, when arguments or issues discussed by this small, select group are potentially noticed by the rest of the population (the Green Circle).

**Democratic Transition, Democratic Consolidation, and the Press**

The literature on the role of the media in liberal democracies serves as a basis for understanding the intricacies of the print media in countries that are immersed in a transition process as well as those that face significant political, economic, and societal challenges. Critical media theory is helpful to understand the relevance of media controls in Mexico. This approach regards the power structure as a key factor determining the role of the media. The media is not a neutral agent: it “performs a function that is both ideological and political” (Oktar 2001, 320) and helps to establish and sustain relations of power. The ruling groups gain dominance through coercion and persuasion, and the media is a key institution of persuasion in modern societies. This perspective explains why social divisions do not lead to more powerful confrontations (Downing 1996, 230). The liberal democratic pluralist perspective correctly argues that the development of media markets can play a role in the process of democratization by “providing the media with an economic base apart from the state,” as well as “incentives for responsiveness to popular tastes and opinions” (Hallin 2000, 107). This approach is helpful to understand the incipient transformations in the Mexican print media since the late 1970s, which had direct consequences that led to increased press liberalization in the 1990s and progress toward more generalized

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22 This approach draws on Gramsci’s theory of hegemony: the government cannot enforce control over any particular class or structure unless other, more intellectual methods are used. Hegemony is exercised by a ruling class over allied classes and social groups in the media, which creates cultural and political consensus (Gramsci 1971). In a similar, although more centrist, perspective, economic interests can replace the function of the “ruling classes.”

23 Nevertheless, this perspective only conforms to the old notion that public are passive subjects acted upon, rather than serving as potential agents of change (O’Neil 1998, 5), and it disregards the fact that the audience can make sense of media content.
freedom of expression at the national level thereafter. As Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002, 184) argue, it is necessary to go “beyond a common dichotomy that limits the sophistication of our thinking about the political economy of the news media.”

The relationship between the media, democracy, and democratization is complex. The development of free and independent media can proceed in and take many forms. As Price and Krug (2006) argue, no specific matrix of press development is “essential” as part of the democratization project.

An increase in the plurality of opinions in the news media can contribute to an early process of democratization by providing a platform for the discussion of alternatives supported by opposition groups and civil society, providing information about the problems of a regime, or promoting political negotiations. As the democratization process continues, however, the impact of the media in democratic reforms may be less significant. If press readership is small or if there is political polarization, the press may not live up to the expectations of the more normative functions that it is supposed to fulfill in a liberal democracy, such as fostering understanding among groups with distinct political convictions and beliefs, holding governments and politicians accountable, and promoting democratic attitudes among citizens. Rawnsley (2005) found that in a transition process, the prevailing communication structures and practices of the pre-democratic regime are not necessarily conducive to the democratic ideals that the media are expected to serve in liberal democracies.

Randall (1998b, 248) argues that the media's contribution to democracy is constrained by the power alignments of which they are “to an extent an expression.” The role of the media in transition processes is contingent on factors such as the institutional environment and the legacies of the authoritarian regime, which can become “pivotal” in the struggle to attain a plural

24 Both of these two approaches, however, are quite simplistic in their explanation of the role of the print media in the post-transition stage. They ignore the legacy of the authoritarian period and the ways in which it shapes the role of the print media in a new democracy. Critical media theories assume that the media are solely instruments of power that the dominant groups use to reach their goals; mainstream liberal democratic theories presuppose certain levels of stability and consensus.

25 Because the media plays very different functions in authoritarian political systems than it does in liberal democracies, it requires time to adjust, rebuild, and find its new role in a different political system, likely still evolving itself.
press and a working democracy (O’Neil 1998, 10). Whether or not the media is capable of fostering democratic accountability largely depends on the degree to which political institutions adopt democratic structures and procedures for the media (Price, Rozumilowicz, and Verhulst 2002; Voltmer 2006). The political system is key in shaping the institutional and regulatory boundaries within which the media operates. Bennett (1998, 204) argues that without willingness to work towards “some fit between new communication forms and emerging social institutions, a free press can actually do more harm than good.”

In a context of democratic transition, the recognition of a “paramount shared interest in democratic institution building” should inform and guide governmental policies (O’Donnell 1994, 56). Linz and Stepan (1996, 15) argue that attitudinally, democracy becomes the only option when, even in a context of deep political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority believe that any further political change should “emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedures.” The media are likely to contribute to democratic consolidation by encouraging “full and fair debate” regarding the country’s development and by advancing democratic culture (Rawnsley 2005, 173).

Following a transition, the “crucial thread” that leads to a consolidated democracy is the creation or strengthening of democratic institutions to “carry out the mediation of the interests, identities and conflict mobilized in a given period” (O'Donnell 1992, 22). The absence of such basic agreements can potentially threaten a young democracy: when electoral democracies face severe conflicts over economic and social issues, it can result in the erosion of the (sometimes new) institutions and new political rules of the game that Dahl outlined as necessary for a polyarchy. This, in turn, hampers the process of democratic deepening or consolidation.

In liberal democracies (stable or consolidated) there is agreement between state and society as well as among the country’s political parties about fundamental aspects, such as the rules of the political game, and a common understanding of how the economy operates. In the earlier stages of a transition to democracy, the majority of actors find it easier to reach agreements about issues, because they share the goal of leveling the playing field to making free and fair elections

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26 In authoritarian contexts the media are essentially instruments of the state used to reproduce regime messages.
viable. There is usually cooperation between opposition parties to take the authoritarian regime out of power, driven by a desire for change in government. But as the process of democratization continues, fundamental differences among political parties on the left and the right over the legal and institutional framework, the economic model, and other structural aspects tend to deepen. For example, contending visions of democracy and the requirements for development can cause significant disagreements over poverty alleviation programs (Teichman 2009).

As Hagopian (2005) argues, the nature and quality of political representation, in particular the responsiveness of governments to citizen demands, are the key variables that mediate the relationship between government performance and citizen support for democracy. If considerable groups in the general population do not perceive that they are better off with the onset of democratization than they were in the previous period, then trust in public institutions and the belief in democracy will tend to be low. The exclusion of certain actors from the democratic process can create conditions for instability, unless some mechanism is worked out to expand the political arena and provide for the gradual inclusion of those initially excluded (Bejarano 2011).

The media are essential in countries that lack a consistent history of experiences to support the belief that, in the long run, democratic institutions do work in spite of failures such as scandals or economic decline. As democratic institutions are being put in place or strengthened, free media and open political communication can become noisy and confuse citizens who do not have experience with democracy (Bennett 1998, 201). Moreover, in transitioning contexts, the legitimacy of the new regime might be quite fragile; there is a risk of overstretching the capacities of the new government, especially when faced with mounting economic problems or the collapse of public security (Voltmer 2006, 5). In a transitioning country or a young democracy such as Mexico, the print media, in particular opinion pages, provide a channel of communication for the country’s elites, who throughout the period under study used the written press to discuss and debate political and institutional reforms, as well as other policy issues (social and economic) about which there can be intense disagreement; the print media has a relevant role to play in fostering agreements (if not consensus) on fundamental issues. This underscores the importance of the role of the media after the fall of an authoritarian regime, and suggests that it is relevant to consider whether the media in transitioning contexts should be held to a higher standard than in liberal democracies.
As Taylor (2010, 39) notes, electoral and other political reforms can be “inherently politicized,” particularly in Latin America where there are substantial inequalities. In such a context, even if competitive elections exist, political stability may be “at stake” (Álvarez 2006, 24), for example if political struggles related to the nature of the regime deepen.27 The Chilean transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1990 underscores the positive implications of bridging such differences within a country’s elite: political forces were, for the most part, successful in conciliating left-right tensions.28

The Mexican Transition to Democracy, Opinion Articles, and the 1996 Electoral Reform

The electoral sphere was a key aspect in Mexico’s shift from an authoritarian system and a hegemonic party to a plural democracy with competitive and free elections. The democratization process was long and gradual. Beginning in 1977, the Mexican political system underwent significant transformations, specifically by opening spaces to other political parties (such as the Communist Party and others on the left). Successive reforms resulted in constitutional amendments that made the electoral formulas more proportional over time (Weldon 2004, 2005) and leveled the conditions for electoral competition (Woldenberg 2002). Importantly, none of the electoral reforms approved resulted in a sudden or drastic break with the past; rather, electoral norms and institutions, as well as representative organs, were slowly modified, reflecting the country’s growing political diversity (Córdova 2007, 653).

27 This is not to say that a process of democratization will produce political polarization, although it seems to have that impact often in Latin America, where such polarization is, at the same time, a reflection of underlying social and political realities, such as the wide income inequality that among other things marginalizes important sectors of the population.

28 The “Concertación,” a coalition of parties headed by the Christian Democrats (right) and the Socialists (left), emphasized “democratizing society and the state” and re-incorporating those social sectors within the Pinochet era (Barton 2002). It was of paramount importance for the Concertación that all reform involve change within a “fourfold” conjuncture of limits: namely, the limits of the stability of the democratic transition, of the “sanctity of private property,” of fiscal prudence, and of sustained capital accumulation (Taylor 2010, 53). At the same time, the promise of Concertación governments to promote a more equitable form of national development was important in providing political legitimacy (Taylor 2010, 51).
Electoral reforms are key junctures in the relationship between the press and political reforms in Mexico. While many studies explore the role of the media in electoral processes in Mexico (Acosta and Aguayo 1997; Espino 2009; Lawson 2000, 2004; Trejo 2001, 2010) among others, my work offers a different perspective on the role of the media in the Mexican democratization process: namely, the interaction of the press and policy development, in particular the influence in democratizing reforms. The case of the Mexican democratic transition is an interesting one to examine with reference to the role of the print media and democracy, due to the gradual and incremental nature of the changes both in the Mexican political system and in the media. The focus on the 1996 and 2007 electoral reforms allows for a comparative assessment of how the press interacted with democratizing reforms: both in a context of media liberalization and an ongoing process of democratic transition, and in a context of extended press freedom at the national level in the stage of electoral democracy and growing political polarization.

One of the most important steps in the long process of democratic transition in Mexico was the approval, in 1996, of a new, wide-reaching electoral reform, which meant that the conditions for electoral competition became more equal (Brinegar, Morgenstern, and Nielson 2006, 77). A crucial aspect of this reform was removing the control of the Executive Power over electoral processes. Through this reform, the Secretario de Gobernación (Minister of the Interior) ceased to be the head of the most important body of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), which became an autonomous state institution directed by nonpartisan members. The reform also leveled campaign financing and media access for political parties, and gave IFE the power to monitor and sanction campaign expenditures (Magaloni 2005, 136). Thus, the 1996 electoral reform was crucial in that it generated equitable conditions that would allow opposition parties to attain posts; in short, it was a decisive step in the country’s “protracted transition” (Loaeza 2000) and paved the way for alternation in power.

The context was one of consensus over the general goal of democratization (defined as free and fair elections). A majority of opinion-makers promoted agreements in the negotiations and underscored the relevance of the electoral reform and its positive implications for Mexico’s democratization process. Most authors in my sample agreed that the reform was a necessary step of the transition. The Red Circle thereby facilitated the transition to electoral democracy. In turn, the democratization process, accelerated after the 1996 electoral reform, contributed to the ongoing process of press liberalization, increasing its freedom and plurality.
In addition to establishing competitive rules that facilitated opposition parties’ access to power, the 1996 electoral reform had positive implications for the liberalization of the Mexican press, which had been ongoing since the 1970s and more apparent in the 1990s. The changes to the allocation of airtime for political advertising had important implications for the media. A more equitable coverage of campaigns and elections beginning in the 1997 federal electoral process facilitated the access of non-PRI candidates to public office. The PRI lost the majority in Congress in 1997, and as more politicians from the opposition were elected at the state and municipal level, reporters turned to them for information, in turn offering more plural news coverage (Hughes 2003, 95). At the same time, the additional coverage in the media gave political actors from opposition parties more spaces to spread their messages to the public, which further stimulated greater plurality in the media. Diversity in the press followed a pattern similar to that of political opening and democratization: an increase in political options meant a more diverse spectrum in the print media.

**The 2007 Electoral Reform and the Relationship between the Press and the Political Process**

While the 1996 electoral reform minimized the possibilities for large-scale fraud and ensured the autonomy of the country’s electoral organs, for more than a decade the Electoral Legislation remained mostly unchanged. The aftermath of the 2006 presidential electoral process proved to be a difficult test for the country’s electoral institutions. Felipe Calderón, the candidate of the right-of-centre PAN (National Action Party), won the election by a minimal margin of difference (0.56%); Andrés Manuel López Obrador (leading a left-coalition) refused to accept the official results and claimed to be the victim of electoral fraud (Castañeda and Morales 2007, 2008; Estrada and Poiré 2007). Although the performance of the IFE and the Electoral Court confirmed the institutional integrity of those bodies in the 2006 electoral process (Eisenstadt 2007, 42), the polarized post-electoral conflict undermined the credibility and trust in the country’s electoral institutions among a considerable sector of the population.

The objective of the 2007 reform was to update the electoral legal framework and respond to new political challenges, address the issues made apparent in the 2006 electoral process that had eroded trust in the country’s electoral organs, and limit the power of television and radio corporations in electoral campaigns (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Córdova 2008).
The process of negotiation and approval of the 2007 Electoral Reform was different from that of 1996. Notwithstanding the post-electoral political conflict of 2006, political actors knew that an electoral reform was needed to change the status quo; as Casar (2009) writes, the 2007 reform was a sort of political pact to ensure that the next federal electoral process (2009) would be regarded as legitimate. In the negotiations leading to the 1996 electoral reform, opinion-makers pushed for agreements and consensus to ensure that the reform would be approved. In 2007, most articles were written once the reform had been approved, because the details about the reform were made public once all three main political parties had reached agreements. Opinion-makers aimed to influence the discussion regarding the reform’s implementation and secondary legislation, and they reflected the existing polarization.\(^{29}\)

The most controversial issues were the changes to the electoral advertising model and campaigns and the removal of one-third of IFE’s Electoral Councillors before the end of their tenure. The banning of political or third parties from purchasing airtime for electoral advertising in television and radio resulted in a significant loss of revenue for the television duopoly and led to an extended debate about freedom of expression.\(^{30}\) The anticipated removal of some of IFE’s Electoral Councillors before the end of their tenure, promoted by the left, was a decision that a majority of analysts criticized for what they argued would be a violation of IFE’s autonomy, and set a bad precedent for the electoral organ.

Divisions among opinion-makers (mostly on the right and left of the political spectrum) became much more politicized. Disagreements were rooted in the polarized context of the 2006 presidential election. In that context, the press, through opinion articles, reflected and at the same time contributed to the polarized opinion climate. The defeat of the left candidate in the 2006 presidential elections led many of his supporters in the press to take a tough position on the new electoral legislation and advocated for changes they deemed necessary to bring about a more level playing field (most importantly, the removal of IFE’s Electoral Councillors). At the same

\(^{29}\) Chapter 6 explains that in 2007, the discretion exercised by reform negotiators was a strategy to prevent television corporations from trying to undermine the key aspects of the reform before political parties reached agreements.

\(^{30}\) As Chapter 6 explains, the changes to the electoral advertising model meant that the media were no longer able to allocate schedules for broadcasting campaign spots in a discretionary manner, something that a majority of analysts evaluated positively.
time, because the changes to the electoral advertising model had negative implications for mass media corporations, opinion-makers with links to media conglomerates wrote opinion articles against the reform. Although a well-informed debate occurred in the press, positions remained firmly entrenched. Although there were opinion articles analyzing different aspects of the reform and thus contributing to a well-informed debate in the press, those issues and opinions were not picked up by the mass media (television and radio).

The Role of the Press in Mexico’s Democratization Process: Key Findings

The 1996 electoral reform was widely supported by opinion-makers, a significant proportion of which had been involved in the negotiation process. They opened up space to opposition viewpoints and played a positive role in pushing forward the 1996 electoral reform. By 2007, the Red Circle became increasingly divided within itself, and the print media became less of a means of communication and understanding between the two polarizing sides. My findings suggest that the influence of an increasingly plural and diverse print media is more direct in the earlier stages of a process of transition than during the stage of democratic consolidation. A press that was oriented towards and centred on the country’s informed elites is a key factor that explains both the propitious role played by the press during the democratization process in Mexico and the dynamics generated in the post-transition period.

The elitist character of the Mexican press meant that it arguably has had less impact in the policy-developing process and in holding the government accountable than the press does in liberal democracies. The role of the press is related to its ability to foster consensus among the country’s elites; however, if the public is not reading newspapers, it hampers the capability of the press to contribute to a well-informed debate that reaches a majority of the population. In a context of low press readership, the disagreements that opinion-makers affect are those within the country’s elites. The public debate is distorted because of the power of the mass media. Nevertheless, it is possible that even if the print media reached the general public, it would serve to exacerbate differences. This suggests that in contexts in which there are disagreements among elites and discontent in a large sector of the population, if polarized published opinion becomes public opinion, this may have detrimental consequences for democratic consolidation.
In earlier stages of media liberalization in a process of democratic transition, the press is likely to support liberalizing reforms, reflecting and promoting the push for broader, common goals. Nevertheless, as the democratization process continues, the analysis becomes intensely focused on details of the rules of the political game, because these have the potential of enhancing the positions of the political right or political left. The implications of further reforms or legislation are analyzed from the perspective of whether they will achieve political advantage for the right versus left positions. A plural debate, inclusive of all groups, is important as part of the democratic process; division of opinion in the print media, representative of all voices in a society, is desirable. Nevertheless, when the press reaches the educated public in a polarized context, it may contribute to a more deeply felt opinion divide that can potentially deepen the differences among a country’s elite.

My findings suggest that in a young democracy in a context of political polarization, opinion-makers may not have a large influence in political reforms that enhance progress toward the deepening of democracy. Moreover, in young democracies with low press readership, the print media may also fail to foster agreements among elites. Although polarization is not created by the media, opinions that articulate the polarized views of elites (and sometimes of society) can, at worst, exacerbate existing political polarization, and, at best, fail to mitigate it. Moreover, in a context in which the majority of the population feels that the issues that are most important to them are not being addressed or solved by politicians, if corruption remains high, and if the material wellbeing of the poor and marginalized sectors does not improve with the onset of a transition, then trust in public institutions and the belief in democracy are likely to be weak.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework to understand the role of the media in the democratic process, particularly in contexts of transition. It presents an overview of the scholarly discussion of the role of the media in democratization to set the case of Mexico comparatively in the literature. It emphasizes the importance of freedom of expression and of press freedom for democracy. It delves into the concept of opinion-makers and stresses the significant difference between published opinion and public opinion as the basis to understand the impact of opinion-makers in transitional contexts. The chapter also defines media frames and framing—central to the systematic content analysis I conduct. Finally, it describes in detail my methodological
approach, including an explanation of the functions of frames, which serve as the basis for analyzing articles and arguments.

Chapter 3 gives an account of the Mexican transition to Electoral Democracy. It begins by describing the mechanisms that defined the Mexican political system for most of the twentieth century, underscores the gradual nature of the Mexican transition, and explains the importance of the electoral aspect of the democratization process. It emphasizes the differences between 1996 (pre-transition stage), when there was consensus on the need for reform, and 2007 (electoral democracy), where there was a growing diversity of views of the necessary changes, and more conflict. This chapter provides background that is essential to understand the nature of the Mexican print media and its transformations (Chapter 4), and sets the groundwork for understanding the evolution of the electoral legislation (chapters five and six).

Chapter 4 describes the evolution of the Mexican media system. In this chapter I argue that press independence in Mexico was the consequence of several, confluent factors, most importantly structural (economic) changes and reforms. At the same time, the gradual political reforms eventually allowed other parties to access power, which in turn led to an increasingly independent press. The chapter explains the importance of internal editorial diversity within several national newspapers as a mechanism that promoted open deliberation among opinion-makers. This chapter also provides important information to understand the differences and similarities among the three newspapers that constitute the core of my analysis.

Chapter 5 covers the 1996 Electoral Reform, which was a definitive step towards electoral democracy and alternation in power. This chapter argues that the Mexican press, through opinion articles, contributed to the process of democratic transition by helping to promote a consensus and by bolstering the legitimacy of the reform. The chapter also argues that the 1996 Electoral Reform was not only crucial for the transition to electoral democracy, but had a decisive influence in the continuation of the process of media opening. It explains how the changes to electoral laws in turn fostered the process of press liberalization.

Chapter 6 analyzes the 2007 Electoral Reform and describes the context of growing political polarization. The chapter begins with an overview of the most important aspects of the Electoral Reform, and explains the different positions on the most controversial issues, as well as their implications. The second part of the chapter covers the analysis done in the opinion articles. This
Chapter argues that opinion-makers were increasingly divided by 2007, and that the print media was no longer a mechanism to achieve an understanding between the two polarizing sides.

Chapter 7 concludes by providing a comparative overview of how opinion-makers analyzed the two electoral reforms in 1996 and 2007, with emphasis on the contextual differences. It discusses the implications of my dissertation relevant to the democratization literature, in particular with regard to contexts of political polarization. It also underscores the relevance of frame analysis as a key component of my methodology. Lastly, Chapter 7 points to directions for future research.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter sets the theoretical ground for the discussion. The first section presents the normative theory of why and how a free and plural media system is important for democracy, emphasizing the importance of freedom both of expression and of the media for democracy. It explains that the normative approaches do not fully address the role of the media in contexts other than liberal democracies, particularly in countries experiencing processes of political transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime. The chapter also reviews some of the empirical arguments about the role of the media in democratic transitions in order to provide the context and set the Mexican case comparatively in the literature. Furthermore, it presents the aspects of the various theoretical approaches from which I draw to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between print media and democratizing reforms. I expand on the concept of opinion-makers and the role they play both in liberal democracies and in contexts of political transition. I emphasize the difference between public and published opinion, which is particularly relevant in cases where press readership is small. Finally, I expand on the concept of media frames, explain their relevance for highlighting issues in newspaper articles, and describe my methodological approach in detail.

The Normative Role of the Media, Freedom of Expression, and Democracy

It is generally accepted that a free and independent media is important for democracy. The most widespread view in the political communication literature is that free and open communication is necessary to foster critical practices found in democratic societies (Lichtenberg 1990a, 1990b; Ungar 1990; O’Neil 1998; Gunther and Mughan 2000; Jakubowicz 2002). In this perspective, the media in a democracy act as conduits of vital political information and provide interpretation of that information in order for citizens to be able to participate meaningfully in public political life (Mervin 1998). Beyond providing information, the media are a channel for communication among citizens and for the articulation and expression of ideas between the government and those governed, including elites, which helps society clarify its objectives (Curran 2000;
Gurevitch and Blumler 1990). Free and independent media are also regarded as a “watchdog,” that is, a critical check on government power (Blumler and Gurevitch 1990; O’Neil 1998). In liberal democracies, the media facilitates the existence of a broadly and equitably informed citizenry, which in turn can hold the government and a country’s political elite to account for the honest execution of its policies, for the lawful use of its powers, and for upholding its promises. (Brants et al. 2010). Thus, viewing the press as a public watchdog against governmental abuses of power suggests a role that at its best can serve democratic purposes well (Hackett and Zhao 1998, 181).

For the media to fulfill the functions cited above, citizens should have some sort of constitutional or statutory right to political information, and the media should be protected from arbitrary exercise of government power. Variations in the interaction, interdependence, and linkages among the different actors produce different constraints on the media and hence in their role in democracy. Thus, as Hallin and Mancini (2004, 26) state, no serious media analyst would argue that journalism is “literally neutral” anywhere in the world. The news media incorporate values influenced by ideological assumptions, journalists’ degree of professionalism, the resources available to media outlets or news organizations, issues of competition, etc. The arguments that established the normative justification for the political role of the media—such as diversity and the marketplace of ideas, information and enlightened citizenship, and public watchdog and government accountability—have the common goal of protecting the objectives and interests of the individual vis à vis the state (Voltmer 2006, 5). It is reasonable to require that the media perform to certain standards regarding the above functions, and the democratic society rests on the assumption that they do (Fog 2004; McQuail 1993).  

31 In this perspective, the media are a vehicle, not an actor, usually more passive, merely serving as a forum where groups and individuals are given the opportunity to express their views.
32 The watchdog notion ignores the power of the media themselves. The focus of the watchdog function of the media is the government, and it has not traditionally paid much systematic attention to powerful private-sector corporations.
33 Media critics increasingly argue that the mass media are not fulfilling these functions properly—for example by privileging entertainment (scandals) over important news, and thus, in general, not being conducive to serious debate.
My work is based on the premise that conveying information that is free of political control is a critical aspect of democracy, and that it can play a positive role in contexts of political liberalization. The development of free and independent media can proceed in and take many forms. No specific pattern of press development can be considered “essential” as part of the democratization process. The concepts of freedom of expression (or freedom of speech) and press freedom (or freedom of the press) are related, but are not strictly synonymous. In the following lines I clarify the differences between freedom of expression—which is closely related to freedom of speech—and freedom of the press.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” When freedom of expression exists, the media has the ability to publish or broadcast information (media freedom), and journalists and columnists can freely express their opinions without censorship or interference from the government or other groups (such as organized crime). Furthermore, ordinary individuals have the right to access a medium to publicize their viewpoints, fostering diversity and pluralism; and citizens have the right to receive information (Cook 2005; Voltmer 2006; Youm 2003).

The concept of freedom of the press or freedom of the media refers to both the degree of freedom enjoyed by the media—which should have sufficient independence to protect free and open public expression of ideas and information—and to citizens’ access to media content (McQuail 2000, 144-145). Freedom of the press is a very specific concept that refers to the possibility for the media to publish or broadcast freely (Cook 2005). For freedom of the press or of the media to exist, freedom of speech can be thought of as a necessary precondition. Nevertheless, while

34 Liberalization refers to the “loosening up” of a political system and society that creates the conditions for communications to function more freely (Rawnsley 2005, 161).
35 This particular aspect of the definition of freedom of expression is essentially the same as freedom of speech, and is the prerogative of an individual, not of an institution such as the media.
36 This aspect is related to the right to receive information that is free from state control.
37 This second aspect alludes to diversity in the media, which, as a norm, opposes concentration of ownership and monopoly of control, whether on the part of the state or private media industries.
freedom of the press requires freedom of expression, freedom of speech does not imply press freedom. Freedom of expression—encompassing freedom of speech as well as freedom of the press—is considered one of the most important values in democratic, ideologically plural countries. It is regarded as being more important than other freedoms because it guarantees that other rights and freedoms can survive (Raphael 2010). Media freedom implies obligations: the media should be responsible and accountable to the public (Richards 2004). The notion of a public interest over the mere aggregation of particularistic interests is the most important consideration (Voltmer 2006, 5). When freedom of expression and freedom of the press exist, it is reasonable to expect that the media will reflect and nurture diversity and pluralism, which serves to promote and sustain the different views that exist in a given society. This is important as it fosters critical thinking among citizens and promotes debates among groups with different views (Blumler and Gurevitch 1990).

The news media “have always been a more important forum for communication among elites (and some elites more than others) than with the general population” (Schudson 2000, 194). This is especially relevant in the case of the press. Print publications are usually much more influential in the political process in underdeveloped societies than in liberal democracies (Lichtenberg 1990a; Jones 2002), given that most of the readership in the former is among the country’s elites and decision makers. As Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue, the presence or absence of a mass circulation press has deep implications for the development of the media and for the relative roles of the press and television and radio. In countries where there has never been a mass circulation press, the public relies mostly on electronic media for information about political issues.

Voltmer (2006, xv) explains that although the market is generally viewed as supportive of a media system that is independent from the state, the confrontation of competing views in the

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38 Freedom of expression, however, does not grant the media an unconditional license to do everything; this is relevant because media owners may attempt to stop any regulation that affects their interests, using a “distorted” notion of the principle of freedom of expression.

39 As Voltmer (2006, 5) explains, since there is no objective standard to balance “particularistic and collective communicative needs,” solutions to this dilemma require journalistic rights, as well as media standards or obligations. Freedom of expression is a positive freedom; it allows the media to perform a certain role, rather than a negative freedom from restraint to do whatever the media may want.
“marketplace of ideas” is not always the best way of revealing “the truth.” In fact, it may contribute to confusion, as the argument that prevails may not necessarily be the best one but one made by those who are most capable of voicing their opinions. A market-based media system, then, is no guarantee of the media’s autonomy from the state (Curran 1991). For example, when private media owners are part of the system of power, they “muzzle” state criticism (Curran and Park 2000, 121).

The sociopolitical and economic environment in which the media operate has an important influence on their ability to pursue democratic values (Blumler and Gurevitch 1990; Lichtenberg 1990a, 1990b). In their analysis of the evolution of media and political institutions, Hallin and Mancini (2004, 19-43) propose a model based on four main aspects: the development of the media market (especially the degree of development of a mass circulation press); political parallelism (the degree to which the media system reflects the major political divisions present in a society); the development of journalistic professionalism; and the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system. Even in democratic societies, the media is never completely free from government influence; for example, governmental claims about the existence of “legitimate limits to media freedom” based on the national interest or national security (Rawnsley 2005) may result in some type of limits to making certain information public.

For the media to serve the public interest, editorial independence and a diversity of voices are necessary (Curran 2000; Price, Rozumilowicz, and Verhulst 2002; Voltmer 2006). In a democracy, the different media are “legitimized” precisely through democratic arguments that represent the interests of the public. The wider the array of represented voices—including, of course, competing voices—the more pluralism is fostered in the public sphere, leading to a richer public deliberation.

40 The liberal notion of a “marketplace of ideas” is one of the most widely extended arguments in favour of freedom of the press. It is based on the belief that, without state interference and through public exchange of argument and counter-argument, “the 'truth' eventually emerges” (Mill 1859, in Voltmer 2006, 3). In this perspective, the media are usually assigned a more passive role, as they merely serve as a forum where various groups and individuals are given the opportunity to express their views (Voltmer 2006).

41 As Dahlgren (2005) argues, the public sphere per se is no guarantee for democracy; institutional procedures that connect opinions with the decision-making process are necessary.
The pursuit of diversity in the news media is a more important consideration than mere ownership (Cook 2005), because a media corporation, for example, can aim its different outlets at various market segments.\(^{42}\) The media (including newspapers, television, and radio), however, are more than a simple intermediary between politicians and the population, including elites. Media outlets or corporations make decisions regarding allocation of coverage, can highlight one or more sides of an issue, and simplify stories. As Callaghan and Schnell (2001, 187) state, by doing so, the media “act as gatekeepers, advocates, and interpreters” of political information.

**The Role of the Media in Democratic Transitions**

Although democratizers typically champion a free press, which is understood as one of the engines of democratization, the political communication and democracy literature provide no consensus on the direction or even the existence of this relationship (McConnell and Becker 2002; Pasek 2006). As I explain in the following paragraphs, a free press can either cause or be a consequence of democratic reform.

The relationship between the media, democracy, and democratization is complex: although the media system (the press, television, and radio) is a crucial aspect in a democracy, its contribution to democratization is “constrained by the power alignments” of which the media are, to an extent, an expression. (Randall 1998, 248). As Hallin and Mancini (2004) explain, the media in democratic countries are positioned somewhere between the political system and the economic system. The same is true for transitioning countries or young democracies: the political system determines the institutional and regulatory boundaries within which the media operate, and the markets shape more and more what is possible for commercial media enterprises to do in order to survive or to be profitable (Strömbäck 2008).

The perspective that the role of media liberalization in democratic transitions is related to the role that the media play in established democracies is based on the notion that free media (full or partial media liberalization) should precede democratic transitions. As such, freedom of the press would “build” a democracy where it does not exist (Ungar 1990, 368). Similarly, O’Neil (1998)...

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\(^{42}\) There are two types of diversity: internal, or vertical, refers to the full range of relevant views being represented within a particular media outlet, and external, or horizontal, indicates the aggregate of a variety of media outlets (Napoli 1999; Voltmer 2006).
argues that without the freedom of communication that mass media provide, the foundation of democratic rule is undermined. The claim that liberalizing the media leads or contributes to democracy is supported by several international agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID 1999) and the European Commission and Court of Human Rights.

McQuail (1992) offers a different perspective: the media follow, rather than lead, efforts to affect societies. In Argentina, for example, media liberalization began only after economic and social forces alone had fostered some level of democracy (Waisbord 1998). In post-communist countries, media liberalization was an important factor for democratization; however, although plural and free media did emerge early, they did so only after autocratic breakdown. What seems clear is that once some degree of media liberalization occurs, there will be pressure on the government to expand it and to introduce democratic reforms (Rawnsley 2005, 172). Nevertheless, the end of media control by the state rarely solves problems of ownership concentration: an “open playing field” generates new public spaces exposed to both political and commercial competition, which can lead to excessive media concentration (Rawnsley 2005, 173). This, in turn, may have negative implications in terms of excessive media power and of a decrease in media diversity or plurality.

Another approach holds that liberalizing media is an integral part of a democratic transition, and thus the media and democracy are mutually supportive. In other words, media freedom and political liberalization can be part of the same interactive process. The case of Spain is a paradigmatic example of this positive relationship: the media played an important role in the democratic transition by spreading the notion that democracy was the only viable alternative to Franquismo, and in democratic consolidation by helping to legitimize the new regime as well as by contributing to the socialization of the public (Gunther, Montero, and Wert 2000).

Finally, a rather pessimistic view contends that no direct relationship exists between the media and political transition, specifically in the later stage of the process of democratization. This could be the case either because the media can encourage both democratic and undemocratic reform or because the media can play an effective role in toppling authoritarian regimes but not in fostering subsequent democratization (Bennett 1998). “The media may be able to play a stabilizing role, but it would be wrong to assume that it alone can make the difference as far as
democracy goes” (Ogundimu 2002, 234). Even if free media outlets help to undermine an authoritarian regime, they may do little to foster democracy. For example, in Indonesia the media played an important role in bringing down the autocratic regime, but did nothing to help democracy fill the void (Sen 2002). In Russia and most Eastern European countries, the overthrow of autocratic governments did not typically result in the creation of a viable “Fourth Estate” (Jakubowicz 1998; Milton 2001; O’Neil 1998). In Latin America, the “affirmation of liberal democracy” did not result in the democratization of media access; rather, there was further consolidation of market principles and media concentration (Waisbord 2000, 59).

Moreover, the traditional conception of free and unregulated media playing a uniformly positive role in democracy has come under increased scrutiny and criticism (Gunther and Mughan 2000, 5). Free media can also slow or interfere with the democratization process: for example, by serving as the voice of antidemocratic interests, or if it is used by different groups to promote their own interests. Indeed, not all media practices may be beneficial to democratic development. It is not unreasonable to suggest that unchecked media can lead to undemocratic ends, or even to deepening existing political polarization.

**Democratization and Press Liberalization**

Gunther and Mughan (2000, 2) conceptualize the role of the media in processes of political change as a “reciprocal relationship between the media and the politics of democracy and democratization.” Randall (1993, 1998) argues that in order to assess the role of the media in a process of democratization it is important to distinguish between the different stages of the process: origin or pre-transition, the phase of transition itself, and the post-transition period—democratic deepening or consolidation. I argue that structural factors, specifically economic changes, are conducive to the relaxation of media controls in an authoritarian regime; this, in

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43 For example, “Americanized” media seem to be undermining representative government in liberal democracies such as the United States, Britain, and Italy (see Putnam 2000; Swanson and Mancini 1996).
44 Some even argue that in contexts with high societal divisions, free media are likely to stimulate ethnic conflict if democratic institutions are not already in place (Bennett 1998).
45 The historical and cultural context of each process of democratic transition also shapes the role of the media: although the state, the market, or the dominant classes in the power structure may have an impact on free expression, their motives, their means, and the consequences of their controls vary significantly in different contexts, as well as in different stages of political liberalization.
turn, is likely to have an impact on the media’s evolution toward independence. Moreover, legacies of the previous period shape the role of the media during the phases of democratic transition and consolidation or deepening.

Despite the limitations the media may face under non-democratic regimes, Bennett (1998) describes two important roles it can play in the pre-transition stage: a “witness role,” which refers to bringing the transformations that are taking place in society to the public as the old regime starts to lose its hold on power (200); and a “reifying role,” that is, confirming and legitimating the changes taking place by providing information, which in effect makes the shift in society seem “real” (201). Even in authoritarian regimes, once the media begins undermining government controls, it can potentially develop significant power and shape the process of political change and the prospects for democratization (Bennett 1998), as was the case in most Eastern European countries. Hence, it is essential to understand how media operate over time after the initial phase of major societal change in their relationship and imbrications with the power structure (Downing 1996, 234). This speaks to the importance of factors such as governmental responsiveness to citizens’ demands, institutional strength, and the development of civil society.46

In transitioning contexts, the legitimacy of the new regime may be fragile; there is a risk of overstretching the capacities of the new government, especially when faced with mounting economic problems or the collapse of public security (Voltmer 2006, 5). The lack of first-hand experience may make citizens in new democracies more vulnerable to a negative and adversarial style of political reporting and commentary. This in turn can have negative consequences: after a regime change, this kind of climate can make it difficult to foster reasoned debate conducive to strengthening democratic institutions, useful information, and participation in the democratic process.

As democratic institutions are being put in place or strengthened, free media and open political communication can take on a “noisy quality” that confuses citizens, including elites, who are

46 For example, Romania lacked strong civic institutions and did not experience the same transition as did Hungary, where media liberalization actually fostered democracy in conjunction with the emerging civic society (Hall and O’Neil 1998).
new to democracy (Bennett 1998, 201). Conversely, the media can contribute positively to
democratic consolidation by promoting “full and fair debate” regarding the country’s
development and by helping foster a democratic culture (Rawnsley 2005, 173). The role of the
media in new democracies is therefore more complex than that of the watchdog role played in
well-established liberal democracies:47 the media should assist the “equitable negotiation or
arbitration of competing interests through democratic processes” (Curran 1991, 30)

In a transitional democracy with problems such as a significant income gap and its social
implications, corruption, and weak rule of law, the failure of democratic institutions to produce
policy results because of squabbling among and within parties is likely to erode public support
for those very institutions. Opportunistic politicians, for instance, may take advantage of free and
unrestricted speech to make unrealistic promises. The absence or weakness of political
institutions can have a negative impact if expectations about the pace of change and the
government’s ability to deliver results are not fulfilled (Bennett 1998). In this context, political
coverage is increasingly characterized by sensationalism and a general hostility towards
politicians, rather than by information and debate based on facts, and has the potential to lead to
political cynicism (Bennett 1998; Voltmer 2006).

As Hackett and Zhao (1998, 2) write, democracies, and perhaps more importantly countries in
transition, “require some degree of consensus and shared values.” The media, as well as
comprehensive communication strategies, are essential for building and maintaining them;
however, they not always do so. As Curran (1991, 47) explains, for a media system to be
democratic (and for it to help democracy), it should represent all significant interests in society,
facilitate their participation in the public domain, enable them to contribute to public debate, and
have an input in the framing of public policy.

Because a free press does not always produce good-quality, unbiased, or sufficient information
that is conducive for good quality deliberation, media reform should be an integral component of
the democratization process (Hackett and Zhao 1998). For Price and Rozumilowicz (2002),
liberal media create impetus in the early stages of democratization, but are also the result of a
later phase. They contend that the media themselves are a democratic institution; hence, media

47 The democratization process requires mechanisms that hold political elites accountable.
reform should be implemented as part of the democratic process. Price, Rozumilowicz, and Verhulst (2002), Price and Krug (2006), and Randall (1998) explain media reform as a succession of different stages, similar to those in a process of democratic transition. Nevertheless, different stages of a democratization process do not always go hand in hand with media reform or new media legislation. While this would be ideal, in societies that have only recently made the transition to democracy it cannot be expected that journalists and media outlets will automatically adopt “universal standards of objectivity and neutrality," balancing their newly gained freedoms and in general following standards rooted in the democratic tradition (Rawnsley 2005). 48 In a democratizing country, media markets may enhance the transition as they gain more freedom. As the media become more commercially driven, however, the potential for struggles for dominance among media outlets increases. 49 Notably, in a democratization process, the influence and interactions between the media and politicians may not follow the same direction that they do in liberal democracies, which may lead to struggles for dominance among them.

The Concept of Opinion-Makers and Their Impact

Op-ed pages in newspapers contain three types of articles: editorials, columns, and opinion pieces. Editorials normally appear at the front section of a newspaper and are the “official” voice of a media outlet; these pieces contain institutional opinions, not personal ones (Van Dijk 1995; Greenberg 2000). Columns are characterized by their periodicity and “fixed name” (Alonso 2007). Recognition of the columnist’s name is also an important feature of this particular type of article. Finally, unlike editorials, opinion articles represent the expressed opinion of a single individual, usually employed by the newspaper. Greenberg (2000, 3) explains that these pieces are public, mass-communicated types of opinion discourse, not bound by normative claims to

48 In liberal democracies, the market shapes what is possible for commercial media enterprises to do in order to survive or to be profitable. In countries experiencing processes of democratic transition, in which the media are immersed in a process of liberalization at the same time, media owners face similar concerns as those in stable democracies: they have to find ways to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

49 This is what happened in Mexico in the 1980s and more evidently in the 1990s, when traditionally pro-regime newspapers became more open and diverse in order to compete.
objectivity. All of these articles provide information, analyses, and benchmarks to help readers make decisions and take action on issues (Hynds 1994, 573).

As Wessler (2008, 16) writes, opinion and commentary articles can be thought of as “the prototypes of public deliberation.” Discussion and disagreement are essential to deliberation: they challenge points of view and foster more careful consideration and better reasoned opinions, supported by arguments. The role of opinion-makers is to interpret and analyze information. In their pieces, they go beyond news gathering: they analyze events, provide context, and interpret the reasons behind actions. As Rosenfeld (2000, 7-11) explains, opinion-makers write about and evaluate the reasons given by politicians in order to justify or legitimize their decisions.

Columnists are expected to be less superficial than journalists, more analytic and inquisitorial (Weiner 1977). Columnists infuse newspapers with an idiosyncratic style and personality; they provide readers with a human face and an alternative to the stylistically uniform news pages (Estrada 1997). Both in liberal democracies and in countries undergoing a process of political transition, the assumption regarding opinion-makers (also referred to as “pundits”) as a group is that they know something that most of their readers may not. As Nimmo and Combs (1992, 25) explain, what opinion-makers have in common is their privileged status and widespread recognition as public figures “whose opinions should be taken seriously.” Glover (1999, 291) notes that columnists make connections which individuals may not notice otherwise, attempting to provide a more complete picture to those who have seen only part of it.

Authors of columns and opinion articles may include journalists, public intellectuals, academics, and other experts (economists, lawyers, and political scientists), retired politicians or bureaucrats, and even sitting politicians. Some opinion-makers, including intellectuals and columnists, remain independent from political activity and government careers, while others may take part in public life. In all contexts, there is a relevant distinction to be made between two types of opinion-makers: analysts, who generally have academic background and/or professional expertise about the topics they write about; and advocates, who openly support a position and, as

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50 Hallin and Mancini (2004) explain that opinion is highly relevant in French journalism, which has traditionally emphasized the exposition of ideas; this is fundamentally different from Anglo-Saxon journalism, which prioritizes news over commentary.
Stein (2013, 23) argues, use arguments selectively to “convert the opposed or persuade the undecided.” This distinction, however, is not always clear in practice. Opinion-makers may have specific agendas, which can shape their arguments. Different issues can have both personal and collective implications, which may lead to one author having dual opinions: one personal and one in consonance with a particular group. As Van Dijk (1995, 10) explains, each discourse or argument expressed in columns or opinion articles is a function of both “the possibly variable individual representations” and the “social representations” that they share with members of other groups to which they belong. In sum, the position of opinion-makers in the power and social structure gives them a vantage point from which they may effectively support or resist change.

Newspapers include experts as authors of opinion articles in their commentary pages because it fosters the notion that these media outlets care about balance and objectivity. By having academics deemed “balanced” in their grasp of issues as opinion contributors, newspapers delegate the task of analyzing and interpreting the news to “savants,” as Nimmo and Combs (1992, 116) put it. Intellectuals have a “high level of knowledge” (Camp 1985, 33). Intellectuals and experts can often be a bridge between their discipline and the non-experts. Contreras (2010) explains that the job of intellectuals has been one committed to a cause that they judge to be correct according to their values; however, there are no criteria about the truth or fairness of those values per se. Contreras explains that there are four aspects that provide legitimacy to what contemporary intellectuals say: 1) their being external to politics (mainly artists and scientists) by seemingly having no particular political interest, they are more trustworthy; 2) supposed guarantee of their commitment to neutrality; 3) their ability to understand the world given their broad knowledge or success; 4) their notoriety or recognition in public life (outside of their field of expertise), which to a certain degree gives them easier access to the media—and publish opinion articles—or to political power. The same is true in the case of journalists who become “intellectual figures,” whose legitimacy is based on their supposed

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51 Advocates may include political representatives, advocacy organizations, and columnists, usually with clear political convictions or other interests.
52 They represent their identity as journalists, elites, union leaders, etc.
53 Not all of those who write in newspaper pages are intellectuals; all intellectuals may be in a position to comment, but not all of those who write commentary are intellectuals.
journalistic neutrality (Contreras 2010, 47). Assuming they are independent critics, public intellectuals are expected to offer a broader vision, regardless of the science, art, or profession they represent (Wiseman 2013, 5).

Columns and opinion articles are examples of published opinion. Published opinion is a qualitative notion; it refers to an authorized opinion, in the sense of being made by an expert or by somebody with authority in the subject in question. Published opinions are not necessarily broadly shared; they are simply published and, in this way, made known. Conversely, an opinion is public in the sense that it is a shared opinion among a wide range of people—public opinion. The distinction between public and published opinion supports the notion that the print media’s effect on public opinion in countries where the press does not have a large audience is indirect, targeting mostly informed elites.\(^\text{54}\)

Opinion discourses play a key role in forming public opinion and assume particular importance during periods in which the social and political consensus is called into question (Greenberg 2000, 9). Politicians and government officials observe (by reading editorials and columns), and, influenced by the print media, they then attempt to win support or opposition for a particular issue among the general public (Fuchs and Pfetsch 1996). When an individual with political or social influence publishes articles expressing his or her opinions, these do not automatically become public opinion, but they can potentially become an opinion trend, even if only among the elite (depending on the readership of the print media).\(^\text{55}\) Opinion pieces may or may not eventually trickle down to a large public, contingent on the reach of the media outlet publishing them or on whether other opinion-makers continue a discussion by making arguments in support of or against specific positions advanced by other authors publishing in the press.

In liberal democracies, opinion-makers play a different role than they do in transitioning countries: in the former, they generate “communicative pressure” through the articles they publish in the press and have potential impact on policy development through their influence on public opinion; for example, politicians may be hesitant to approve legislations or policies that

\(^{54}\) The term “public opinion” has been sometimes used as “elite opinion”—referring to an elite of experts—similarly to published opinion, as defined above.

\(^{55}\) Not all published opinions are necessarily representative of a trend. Conversely, not all opinion trends are reflected in opinions that are published or broadcast in the media.
are expected to be widely disapproved in the media (Wessler 2008, 6). In countries undergoing transition or in highly unequal societies where press readership is small, an important consideration regarding the potential for opinion-makers to influence the debate is the indirect effect of what is published. Opinion-makers generate a discussion space through their articles, in which they give more importance to some issues than they do to others. Depending on their profile, they may be in a position to shape opinion trends and, by so doing, potentially influence public opinion. In countries where press readership is small, published opinion has more chance of becoming public opinion when arguments made in editorials or commentary articles published in the press are repeated in the mass media. When published opinion thus trickles down to reach a wider population, it can potentially influence public opinion.

Waisbord (2006) argues that the credibility of opinion journalism does not depend as much on “professional” standards as it does on whether articles resonate ideologically with readers. Even if there is diversity of opinion in a country’s media system, selective exposure is an important factor (Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, and Walker 2008; Stroud 2008; Vraga 2012). Readers of opinion articles may discredit or dismiss information that disagrees with their preconceived opinions (Kunda 1990; Lord et al. 1979; Taber and Lodge 2006; Vraga 2011). This may lead to an echo of opinions in the pages of opinion articles, and to reinforcing attitudes instead of challenging preconceptions or bridging differences. Cooper (2006, 295) addresses the possible fragmentation of the communication community. In an extreme situation, the various groups may not recognize one another as competent stakeholders, in turn potentially harming a system of representative democracy. This situation may contribute to a prevalence of misinformation, fear, blame, and negative stereotypes about the other group, viewed as the enemy (Herzig 2001, 7). This is likely to lead to a loss of communication between polarizing sides, as well as to a loss of trust and increasingly radical positions (Maiese and Norlen 2003). As Gruzd (2012) explains, political polarization often occurs in an echo chamber environment, in which individuals are exposed only to information that supports their own views, ignoring opposing viewpoints; the lack of contact with contradictory views may result in ideas becoming more extreme.

In contexts with low press readership, the disagreements that opinion-makers affect are those within the country’s elites. Bermeo (2003) argues that elite polarization produces the breakdown
of democracy more often than polarization at the mass level.\textsuperscript{56} When expectations of a
generalized improvement of living conditions are not fulfilled in a young democracy, or when
the government fails to reach agreements and solve serious economic and social problems,
confidence in governmental or political institutions is eroded. Even if the print media reach the
general public, they might exacerbate differences. Claasen and Highton (2009, 541) found that in
liberal democracies, changes in communications among political elites will produce similar
changes across the informational strata of the mass public. This suggests that when there is
disagreement among elites and discontent in a large sector of the population, the transformation
of polarized published opinion into public opinion may have detrimental consequences for
democratic consolidation—or, at the very least, it may fail to mitigate political polarization.

There are two basic relationship dynamics between politicians and the media, including opinion-
makers: influence and interplay. The former suggests subordination, while the latter refers to
interaction and interdependence (Larsson 2002, 26). The efforts of political actors and other
elites to influence policy debates are often “at cross purposes” (Callaghan and Schnell 2001,
186). The influence of the print media is not unidirectional: among those influenced by it are the
elites and opinion-makers whose opinions appear in the media (Zaller 1992; Fog 2004).\textsuperscript{57}

Politicians and the media have different interests (Brants et al. 2010) and play different roles. In
liberal democracies, the relationship between them is rather reciprocal, based on several “morally
oriented concepts” such as respect for each other’s roles and a fair treatment (Larsson 2002,
25).\textsuperscript{58} As Van Belle (1997) states, in order to increase public support, rational leaders make
political decisions based at least partially upon the expected impact that policy alternatives will
have on the news media. Their calculations take into consideration how their decisions will be
depicted (framed) in the media, particularly because of the possible implications for them.

\textsuperscript{56} Polarization here refers to deep division of opinion, generally between two opposing positions; it
implies a decrease of moderate views and positions, and an increase of more extreme ones.
\textsuperscript{57} Political news are created by the journalists who report events, political actors and/or other political
communicators (such as professionals and spokespersons). Each set of actors depends on the performance
of the other groups, which partly shapes their own interests and objectives (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995).
\textsuperscript{58} Journalists need politicians as a source of information, and politicians need journalists to publicize their
views. This interdependent relationship involves collusion and conflicts between the two groups of actors.
In democratic and democratizing contexts, politicians commonly compete for media attention. Such competition has two dimensions: access and framing (Heafer 2001). As Wagner (2007) explains, most policy issues are multidimensional, and communicators frame them by using different thematic slants that promote specific opinions and/or actions. Framing refers to how events and issues are organized and “made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences” (Reese 2001, 7). Notwithstanding its cognitive aspects, framing suggests “intentionality on the part of the framer” (Reese 2007, 148) and can therefore be thought of as part of a strategy to bring attention to a particular interpretation of an issue. Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997, 569) explain that frames stress specific facts or values, giving greater apparent relevance to the issue being discussed than it may appear to have under a different frame, thus influencing opinions. In the following pages I expand on the most relevant aspects of media frames, which are central to my methodological approach to content analysis of opinion articles.

Media Frames: Selection and Salience

As Entman (1993, 54) explains, frames determine how people understand and evaluate an issue. The concept of framing represents an alternative to the old objectivity and bias paradigm: it is useful to get beneath the surface of news coverage and expose the hidden assumptions (Hackett 1984, cited in Tankard 2001, 96). Gamson and Modigliani (1987, 143) define a media 59 "Framing" (or "to frame") is the verb form of the concept, as distinct from the noun form (Entman et al. 2009).
60 Although my work focuses on media frames, it should be noted that there are broadly two different conceptualizations of framing: media frames and individual or audience frames, with some linkages between them (Scheufele 1999, 2000). The former are “attributes of the news itself” and the latter are “information-processing schemata” of individuals (Entman 1991, 7).
61 By framing their articles, opinion-makers potentially contribute to create opinion trends among their readers, especially when several columnists use similar frames. This can bolster support for policy aspects they endorse, or augment criticism that can undermine issues they oppose.
62 Sociologist Erving Goffman (1974, 21), credited with introducing the framing approach, defined frames as "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events or life experiences.
63 There are numerous definitions of frames and framing. As Miller and Riechert (2001) state, it is difficult to capture all the meanings in a single conceptualization. Several disciplines, including sociology, psychology, communication, and political science, use the term in various contexts. In social movement theory, for example, framing is understood as a strategy to mobilize the public (Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano 2009). In this context, frames are defined as "action oriented sets of beliefs and
frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” and argue that the frame “suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue.” Put simply, this refers to the frame of reference within which an issue is described (Pan and Kosicki 1993). The character of the causes and consequences of any issue becomes different when what is prominently displayed or what is omitted or left out changes. As Edelman (1993, 232) explains, frames exert their power “through selective description and omission.”

The core of the content analysis of opinion articles in this dissertation is based on Entman’s definition (1993, 52): “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Entman’s conceptualization recognizes both aspects of framing—audience and media—and puts the emphasis on a frame’s outcome. As he argues, selection and salience are key to understanding how the framing of news or opinion articles can affect how audiences or readers understand events. The key variable is the perceived importance of specific aspects of an issue (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Scheufell 2000). In sum, in framing their articles, opinion-makers define problems and diagnose their causes, evaluate them, propose solutions, and refer to a likely outcome. Authors’ political leaning, professional activity, and expertise or knowledge of the issue being discussed influence their interpretation of the context around the issue they write about; in turn, their perception of the context (on which they draw to explain what causes the problem) determines their assessments and recommendations.

The way a story is framed can have strong influence on people's attitudes towards the central topic being discussed. Framing a topic prescribes “its major tenets,” assigns “the roles of protagonist, antagonist, or spectator” to individuals or groups, and defines the legitimacy of an action strategy (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 147). For example, a reform of an electoral institution may be framed as an attempt to weaken such institution or as a necessary change to address gaps in an evolving electoral system; but the same reform may be framed by the party that promoted it meanings that inspire and legitimate” the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614).
as the only way to advance in the democratization process in the context of an inequitable electoral system. An article about raising the age of retirement can be framed as a measure to foster economic growth, as a broken promise and a regressive measure that will negatively impact workers, or as a necessary change in light of new demographic trends and the only way to prevent overburdening future generations. As these examples show, frames can imply an array of positions that allow a “degree of controversy” among people who share a common frame (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 3). Frames are more “narrowly construed” than ideologies: it is possible that several frames can fit within a given ideology (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 144). Because policy issues are multidimensional, there are different and competing considerations about them, each of which can be made salient by highlighting different arguments.

As Miller and Riechert (2001, 109) argue, framing can be thought of as a continuous or fluid process by which competing stakeholders’ positions generate different “interpretive mechanisms.” Stakeholders engage in framing strategically by promoting interpretations that favour their interests (Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano 2009) especially to promote a future course of action (Benford and Snow, 2000). Framing involves both the strategic communication of one's own frame and competition with other communicators' frames. As actors in the public arena—including politicians, opinion-makers, journalists, political strategists, representatives of organizations, and analysts—compete to frame issues by defining and thus attempting to shape them, public deliberation can become “an ideological contest and political struggle” more than a harmonious process (Pan and Kosicki 2001, 36).

Contentious public policy aspects are those around which opposing interests and values collide (Miller and Riechert 2001, 107). For example, an article about legislation that prohibits the purchase of airtime for electoral advertising can be framed as an attempt to restrict freedom of expression, as a necessary change to enhance the equity of electoral processes, as a measure that will not have any impact on the quality of political campaigns, or as a way to reduce publicly funded campaign spending by political parties. Such framing is likely to influence the perception

64 Stakeholders include politicians, individuals, organized interest groups, or informal groups. Miller and Riechert (2001) also use the term “claims maker” to refer to members of competing public and private stakeholder groups.
about the motives of a party that promotes such legislation as self-interested, rather than seeking further democratization.

**Methodological Approach**

The empirical chapters in this work focus on the role of opinion articles in two different periods of the process of democratization in Mexico: the transition stage (1988-2000), and electoral democracy (2000-2007). A central component of my dissertation is an analysis of the opinion articles about the 1996 and the 2007 electoral reforms; specifically, the way in which editorials, columns, and opinion pieces published in three of Mexico’s most prominent newspapers—*La Jornada, Reforma* and *El Universal*—frame the different aspects of the reforms, the negotiation process, and the actors involved, as well as the implications of each of the reforms.

A key step of my methodological approach is qualitative content analysis, that is, an “empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication” (Mayring 2000, 2). As Altheid (1996, 9) explains, the main issue in qualitative document analysis is “conceptual adequacy.” Drawing from Altheid (1996), content analysis follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, coding, and analysis interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid (Altheid 1996, 17).

The first category of data consists of the opinion articles, columns, and editorials that constitute the core of the content analysis. With the objective of assessing the range of meanings and themes representative of the process of negotiation and implementation of the electoral reforms, I retrieved editorials, columns, and opinion articles from *El Universal, Reforma*, and *La Jornada*. I selected these newspapers for two main reasons: 1) all three are available and read in the most populated cities in Mexico and distributed nationwide (Huerta and Gómez 2013); and 2) they are among the most circulated newspapers in the country (Table 2A in Appendix A shows the most important newspapers published and distributed nationwide and their reported circulation figures). My aim was to analyze newspapers with high readership, wide geographic distribution, and diverse political positions. In addition, these three newspapers were available in each of the two periods that are covered in this study, which adds a continuity component to the analysis.

In terms of editorial position, it is important to note that in the Mexican case most newspapers are not homogeneous. For the most part, there is a diversity of actors representing opinions
across the whole political spectrum writing in the editorial pages; for this reason, there is no clear
division in terms of “left” or “right” (the left-leaning La Jornada is an exception). Reforma is a
newspaper commonly described as right of centre. In 2014, it printed 141,000 copies. It belongs
to the Grupo Reforma consortium, based in Monterrey, which publishes various Mexican
newspapers. El Universal reportedly published 180,000 copies per day. Since the 1990s, the
paper has been considered as having a pluralistic orientation. In the 1990s, its close relationship
with the former ruling regime was given up in favour of a more market-driven editorial policy
(Hughes 2006). La Jornada has had a clear left-leaning orientation since its foundation in 1984;
after 2000, the paper strengthened its ties to some sectors of the Mexican left. In 2014 it
reportedly published 107,600.

The issue of circulation data in the Mexican press merits an explanation at this point. Unlike in
liberal democracies, there is no reliable information regarding newspaper circulation in Mexico,
even in the stage of electoral democracy (Carreño 2007; Pérez Espino 2004; Moreno, author’s
interview; Riva Palacio 2004; Sarmiento 2005; Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview; Warkentin,
author’s interview). The numbers are provided by the newspapers and are not verified
independently. Contradictory circulation figures are reported in different sources; the numbers
above are taken from the National Electoral Institute (INE 2014). Arguably, newspapers have no
incentive to be transparent about this information. The main source of revenue for many
newspapers is the sale of government advertising; if newspapers made these figures known, they
could appear to be less competitive than other papers and lose that revenue.

I relied mainly on the internet to retrieve the opinion articles. First, I used the search engine
embedded in each newspaper’s website to find editorials, columns, and opinion pieces. Of the
three dailies that constitute the core of this work, the only one that returned relevant results was
Reforma; by contrast, when I searched El Universal and La Jornada I obtained very few results,
some of which were not relevant to this work. In order to retrieve as many relevant articles as
possible, I also relied on mainstream search engines—namely Google—to look for the articles,

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65 As will be seen in Chapter 6, in terms of opinion articles, El Universal and Reforma are editorially
diverse, in contrast to La Jornada, which, in 2007, was rather homogeneous in terms of political
orientation.
66 No database of Mexican newspaper articles was available at the time I did my research, to the best of
my knowledge.
always specifying the newspaper domains as part of my search criteria. In the case of *El Universal*, nothing was available electronically previous to 1999. While I was in Mexico City conducting the qualitative interviews for this work, I was granted access to their national archive, where I browsed all the hardcopy newspapers they had available for 1996. I then scanned and converted each of the editorials and opinion articles I found into searchable electronic text, in order to be able to perform the same kind of content analysis on them that I had done for those I retrieved from the internet.

In total, I analyzed 427 editorials, columns, and opinion articles—156 articles written by 65 authors in 1996 and 271 articles written by 101 authors in 2007. Altheide (1996, 8) states that there is not one simple answer to how many articles should be analyzed to have confidence in the findings. The number of articles for each newspaper and for each of the two periods analyzed is different. The difference in the number of articles could not be controlled, and depended entirely on their availability. I searched using different terms to ensure the biggest possible sample. Inclusion in my dataset required that a majority of the paragraphs discussed the electoral reform or some specific aspects of it, such as its implications, negotiation process, participation, or positions of the different actors. I also included articles discussing the democratization process more broadly, such as issues related to state reform. I excluded articles that offered only passing reference to the reforms. I analyzed editorials and opinion pieces published throughout the whole year in which each of the two reforms was approved. Focusing on the same length of time for each reform allowed for a more comparable sample, as the time period of each negotiation process was different. This timeframe also allowed me to assess

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67 Table 2 in Appendix A shows the number of articles in my sample for each newspaper and time period. I recognize that the difference in sample sizes across newspapers and periods is not ideal, and I tried to reduce it as much as possible by using different search criteria.

68 The translated search terms from Spanish were “electoral reform,” “political reform,” “State reform,” “democratic transition.”

69 Although this is not an exhaustive compilation of every single article written in each of the two periods, I am confident that my sample is representative of opinions published in the Mexican press and allows me to draw conclusions about opinion-makers in the country.

70 While for the electoral reform approved in 1996 the talks began in early 1995 and the final approval in Congress did not take place until November of 1996, the negotiations for the 2007 electoral reform lasted a little less than a year.
opinions about the overall negotiation process, as well as the reactions generated after each reform was approved.\footnote{I did not have access to certain specific information to which some analysis protocols give importance to, such as number of columns, size of headline, and location of the article in the paper. Nevertheless, these aspects do not seem to be as relevant for this analysis as they can be for news articles.}

I also conducted semi-structured personal interviews with three different groups: 1) political actors and government officials; 2) representatives of the media, including columnists, news editors, and reporters; and 3) academics and researchers. I conducted 39 semi-structured, hour-long interviews in Mexico City between February and April 2011 (see Table 3A in Appendix A).\footnote{As confidentiality was a condition of several of these interviews, in those cases only descriptive characteristics are included.} I used open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to engage in wide-ranging discussions. As Aberbach and Rockman (2002) explain, this type of interview has a more conversational quality to it than the typical highly structured interview, and so it is easier to broach questions in a manner that does not follow the exact order of the original interview instrument; furthermore, open-ended questions provide a greater opportunity for respondents to organize their answers within their own frameworks, thus increasing the validity of their responses.\footnote{I recorded the interviews in order to allow for a conversational style and to minimize information loss. All of the interviewees gladly accepted the use of my digital recorder, and they did not seem to show any inhibitions in the conversation.}

I created a master interview guide and slightly adapted it for each of the interviews, depending on the interviewee’s professional activity or role in the process of democratization in Mexico.

Interviews with political actors, including government officials, party leaders, and spokespersons, provided valuable information about the evolution of the relationship between politicians and the press, with emphasis on opinion-makers, as well as their perception of the coverage and opinion articles about the two electoral reforms analyzed. Columnists, news editors, and journalists provided insight into the functioning and liberalization of the Mexican press. They also provided valuable information on politicians’ reactions to critical opinion articles in particular, and about the overall approach of Mexican politicians to the media. Journalists and newspaper editors also enriched my understanding of the goals, incentives, and values embedded in the news-making process and in the selection of opinion-makers both during
the 1990s and after 2000. Interviews with academics knowledgeable about the Mexican political system and about the electoral reforms and the media system were helpful to corroborate some of the findings from the two other groups.

No hard data is available regarding the extent to which the decision-making elite is reading the three newspapers included in my study; however, interviews with political actors and academics confirm that they regularly read several columns in different newspapers, including the ones analyzed. Indeed, all of my interviewees mentioned that they follow columnists that publish in different print media outlets.

Frame Analysis

In order to determine the positions of the different authors in the press systematically and consistently across the two periods, the qualitative content analysis of opinion articles that I conducted is informed by framing theory, particularly media frames. As Reese (2007, xi) asserts, the way that certain attributes come to be associated with particular issues is what concerns frame analysis. Frame analysis is much more than the analysis of article topics or themes. It permits the researcher to convert conceptualized news texts into empirically operationalizable dimensions (Pan and Kosicki 1993, 55). A frame, however, is an abstract variable. As Van Gorp (2007) argues, it is often not clear which elements should be present in an article or news story to signify the existence of a frame. Although several definitions of framing are important to understand the significance of media frames and their implications, they do not lead to an applicable operationalization of media frames (Matthes and Kohring 2008, 264; Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano 2009, 175).

I draw from Entman’s widely cited definition (1993), which provides a clear operational concept of the elements that constitute a frame: a problem definition, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation, and a treatment recommendation. I added one more element to the four at the core of Entman’s definition: perspective. In line with Matthes and Kohring (2008), I operationalized media frames by coding for each of the different frame elements, rather than a single article frame. Frame elements refer to or represent the functions of frames: they define problems

74 Perspective is not part of Entman’s definition of a frame, and it is thus not included in Matthes’ and Kohring’s operationalization of frames.
(determine what actors are doing) and their costs and benefits, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman 1993; Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano 2009).

The frame elements I use are defined below as follows:

- Problem definition consists of the issue or issues that define the content of the debate, similar to Matthes and Kohring (2008, 266); it refers to the central problem of a news or opinion article.\textsuperscript{75}

- Causal interpretation refers to the background or the reasons that led to a specific situation, proposal, or policy: that is, contextual explanations for the issue or issues being discussed.\textsuperscript{76} It should be stressed that the causal interpretation or the context highlighted in each article is very relevant, as it determines the evaluation, solution, and perspective of the issue analyzed, according to each author.

- Evaluation represents the actual assessment or position of the article’s author about general or specific aspects of the issue being discussed in the article. This allows for a more systematic classification and understanding of how each aspect was portrayed in editorials and opinion articles, beyond positive, negative, or mixed/neutral. In my code, I do not use the qualifier “moral” from Entman’s definition.

- Treatment recommendation refers to a call for or against a certain action; it can be very specific or encompass more general recommendations.

- Perspective refers to the implications or likely outcome of the issue being discussed in the article; it shows the author’s expectation and is different from treatment recommendation in that it is not a course of action. I argue that there is value in this element as it indicates what the author of an article thinks will follow.

\textsuperscript{75} Matthes and Kohring also include the most relevant actors. Unlike them, I do not use the same codes as the actor variable for this frame element.

\textsuperscript{76} In my analysis, this frame element refers to the context made salient by the author of the article, and hence differs from Matthes and Kohring (2008), for whom causal interpretation is an attribution of failure or success regarding a specific outcome.
An article may have all or some of the elements above. The articles in my sample have one “problem definition” and one “causal interpretation” frame element, but may have more than one evaluation and treatment recommendation. In both my 1996 and 2007 samples, several authors have more than one article, so the number of authors is different from the number of opinion pieces analyzed. Similarly, the number of frame elements is different from the number of articles (I specify whether numbers and percentages refer to authors, articles, or references to frame elements in the tables that illustrate the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.). There may be instances of texts in which not all the functions of one frame are included: for example, some articles may not propose solutions (treatment recommendation), but may talk about likely outcomes of the issue they discuss (perspective), which I added to the four elements that are part of Entman’s definition.77 There may also be articles that evaluate more than one aspect or propose more than one solution, particularly those articles that analyze several issues. Although the presentation of numbers of references to frame elements is quantitative, those numbers are helpful to elucidate the opinions among the different authors and how profoundly opposed they may be. The numbers and proportions of authors and articles, on their own, do not demonstrate the prevalence of a particular viewpoint, but they indicate the extent of support or rejection for the different issues.

A single frame is the sum of its parts—that is, the frame elements. Matthes and Kohring (2002, 2008) explain that a frame is a certain pattern that is composed of several different text elements (specifically the elements identified in any frame definition that can be operationalized in this way, such as Entman’s). They assume that some of those text elements group together systematically in a specific way, forming a certain pattern that can be identified across several texts in a sample, and they call these patterns frames.78 Single frames are generally determined subjectively before beginning the coding process. Methodological approaches for the

77 In the case of articles that do not include one or more frame elements, the corresponding variable in my coding becomes “N.A.”.
78 In order to determine single frames, Matthes and Kohring (2008) perform hierarchical cluster analysis to the frame elements in each article, looking for co-occurrence patterns of the variables, and media frames emerge from these clusters. The use of cluster algorithms to identify frames has the advantage of a more objective frame extraction, but the problem is that categories that occur less frequently, even if they are relevant, can be lost or rendered less important by cluster analysis, which is influenced by how often a particular word occurs in the code.
measurement of media frames include hermeneutic, manual holistic, linguistic, and computer-assisted methods.\(^79\) Although these methods inform our understanding of how to measure media frames, they are not free from concerns regarding validity and reliability (Matthes and Kohring 2008, 258).\(^80\) In sum, as Matthes and Kohring (2008, 264) explain, by coding frame elements rather than single frames, which are generally more abstract and need to be determined beforehand, the problem of reliability in frame analysis is shifted to the analytical content assessment of single frame elements. For illustration purposes, see Table 2.1, which presents a few examples of single frames, as well as the frame elements of some of the articles in my sample.

**Table 2.1 Examples of Single Frames and Corresponding Frame Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Single frame</th>
<th>Problem definition</th>
<th>Causal interpretation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Treatment recommendation</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>An electoral reform is necessary</td>
<td>Democratic transition</td>
<td>Long and gradual transition process</td>
<td>PRI does not want a true reform</td>
<td>Meaningful changes are necessary</td>
<td>Consensus is necessary/should foster consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>State reform is necessary</td>
<td>Negotiation process</td>
<td>PAN’s strategy</td>
<td>Hard-line positions do not help</td>
<td>Parties should reach agreements</td>
<td>Consensus is necessary/should foster consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Complex negotiation process</td>
<td>Party interests</td>
<td>Conditions are more propitious</td>
<td>President/government committed to democratization/the reform</td>
<td>Wrong strategy of opposition parties</td>
<td>Parties should reach agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Democratization process in place</td>
<td>Democratic transition</td>
<td>New reality</td>
<td>Current system no longer works</td>
<td>Consensus is necessary/should foster consensus</td>
<td>Uncertain future of the reform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^79\) The hermeneutic approach aims to identify frames through an interpretative account of texts, linking frames to broader cultural elements. In the manual holistic method, frames are generated first through a qualitative analysis of the text and then coded as holistic variables in a manual content analysis. The linguistic method analyzes the selection, placement, and structure of specific words and sentences in a text in order to identify a frame. The computer-assisted method refers to frame mapping, which, through cluster algorithms, identify frames by finding particular words that occur together in some texts and not in others (Miller 1997).

\(^80\) The hermeneutic and the manual holistic approaches encompass small samples, and frames are described in depth. Although these analyses are well documented and detailed in their discussion of media frames, their inherent subjectivity results in that the extraction of frames may differ across researchers and coders, as Matthes and Kohring (2008, 262) explain. Tankard (2001, 98) goes further, arguing that there is “a danger in this kind of lone-scholar analysis that the identification of a set of possible frames can be done arbitrarily.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Single frame</th>
<th>Problem definition</th>
<th>Causal interpretation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Treatment recommendation</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Mass media aim to protect their economic interests</td>
<td>Prohibition of purchasing air time for electoral advertising</td>
<td>Inequitable access to the mass media</td>
<td>The reform does not limit freedom of expression</td>
<td>New media legislation is necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Negative implications/ Limits to freedom of expression</td>
<td>Prohibition of purchasing air time for electoral advertising</td>
<td>Excessive spending in electoral advertising</td>
<td>The reform limits freedom of expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Positive implications</td>
<td>False criticisms about the reform</td>
<td>2003 selection of IFE Councillors was problematic</td>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors = not revenge</td>
<td>Selection process should be transparent/not based on quotas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Partyarchy</td>
<td>Citizen interests disregarded by partisan ones</td>
<td>Party interests</td>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors = revenge</td>
<td>Change in electoral advertising model is positive</td>
<td>Political parties should be accountable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, 1996 and 2007

An integral step of the structured content analysis I conducted was the creation of a model based on the elements representing the functions of frames, which can be coded as variables. Frame elements, specifically each of their functions, are thus the base for a systematic analysis of the arguments found in each opinion article. Without questioning or minimizing the significance of single, holistic frames, I argue that there is value in considering frame elements as the main variable in content analysis of texts. Entman, Matthes and Pellicano (2009, 176) explain that drawing on functional specifications (of frame elements) permits “clearer measurements and inferences” that distinguish framing from themes, arguments, and assertions.
elements. In addition, this permits the identification of new emerging frames, and the analysis is comprehensive.

In sum, an analysis of the elements that constitute a frame separately helps identify and clarify the common elements in a sample of articles; such elements then inform the analysis of different issues and lead to conclusions regarding how specific aspects are analyzed by different authors or in different newspapers. Moreover, this is conducive to identifying the connections between the explanation of different aspects (causal interpretation), evaluation, and/or recommendation advanced by different authors, and their background, group affiliation and/or agenda. Indeed, the context highlighted by the different authors is one of the key aspects of framing, as it determines how authors evaluate a situation, attribute responsibility to specific actors, or arrive at their proposed solutions.

I coded the different frame elements corresponding to the arguments presented in each article. I did this progressively: as I was interacting with the code, I constantly compared arguments to identify frame elements and refine categories. I grouped and aggregated the different frame elements according to the particular issue they referred to before obtaining their frequency counts. The coding was done entirely by me. The unit of analysis is the newspaper opinion article, column, or editorial. The analysis is text-based; I determined the categories inductively, and I did the coding manually. I left the variables in text form (rather than numerical codes) to be able to continue revising them.

In line with Altheide (1996), in order to verify or confirm hypothesized relationships, I then quantified the variables that resulted from the qualitative content analysis within each category in my code, and did several cross-tabulations to find relationships between the different authors and the characteristics of the articles analyzed. The coding variables are represented in the data analysis as frequency counts, expressed in percentage forms relative to the total number of articles, or the total number of arguments (frame elements) corresponding to a specific issue.\footnote{In the cases of articles that include more than one frame element for evaluation and treatment recommendation, each one was counted separately.} This reveals the pervasiveness of certain frame elements and how they are distributed across newspapers or time periods, as well as among different professions or political leanings.
I then assessed the quality of each piece, in terms of its contribution to the debate. By deconstructing the general notion of quality into different criteria, I defined the following list of characteristics to rate newspaper articles: clarity; relevance of context; correctness; transparency; credibility; and impartiality. I assigned a binary response for each of those characteristics as follows:

- Clarity: Is the argument clearly presented? (no = 0, yes = 1);
- Relevance of context: Is the context presented in the article relevant for the topic being discussed? (no = 0, yes = 1);
- Correctness: Are the arguments accurate/true? (no = 0, yes = 1),\(^3\)
- Transparency: Is the article based on rumors or on proven facts? (an article based on rumours = 0; based on sources or facts = 1);
- Credibility: Does the article’s author have direct expertise regarding the topic? (no = 0, yes = 1),\(^4\)
- Impartiality: Does the author support something in which he/she has a vested interest? (no = 1, yes = 0).

I then added the values for each of those criteria to rate each article: 1-2 = low; 3-4 = moderate; 5-6 = high.

I also classified each editorial or opinion piece on the following basis, regardless of the newspaper where it was published:

- Article’s political position: centre, left, or right. Definitions of left, centre and right mostly refer to social or economic issues; however, they are not always very explicit in

\(^3\) For example, an evaluation frame element regarding the removal of some electoral councillors in 2007 as revenge (for their role in the 2006 elections) is assessed by comparing it with academic analysis of that particular change in the 2007 electoral reform.

\(^4\) Authors with direct professional experience or academic background relevant to electoral issues are in a better position and can be considered as having more authority than other authors to evaluate specific aspects of the electoral reforms and discuss possible solutions/perspective.
the Mexican case, particularly before the transition to electoral democracy. I operationalized article position by considering an author’s affiliation or explicit support for a political party or political actors, as well as support for issues closer to the right or to the left in the Mexican context, as follows:

A. Left: articles authored by members or supporters of political parties on the left (PRD, PT, and their partners), as well as articles that allude to social issues.

B. Right: those articles whose authors are either members of the PAN or support the party’s positions, as well as articles supportive of the interests of big businesses (such as mass media corporations).

C. Centre: articles that do not explicitly support political actors or positions aligned to the left or to the right, as specified above.

- Article’s tone. This reveals the attitudes and presuppositions of the author that may have an effect on people. There are four categories:

  A. Prescriptive or propositional: most of the paragraphs are normative rather than analytical or descriptive.

  B. Optimistic: the author describes a positive prospective outcome.

  C. Neutral or mixed: these articles consider positive and negative aspects/positions.

  D. Critical: these articles are marked by a tendency to find and call attention to errors and flaws. In my code, articles classified as having a critical tone are those in which a majority of the paragraphs criticize one or more issues or actors. I also accounted for the object of criticism, their potential effect concerning the credibility of a political actor, and perception about a particular reform or policy issue.

The rest of the categories in the article coding include a number of standard variables such as name of publication, date, author, general topic, and article title.

My methodological approach, in particular the content analysis and comparison of the arguments used by opinion-makers in their editorials and columns, can be applied to the analysis of
newspaper and magazine articles virtually in any context, or to almost any type of written communication, regardless of the format.

**Final Remarks**

This chapter presented key concepts and emphasized the normative principles that account for why the media are so important in a democratic society. The key factors that shape the role of the print media in a transition process include its reach to a wider public as well as the political and economic context. In countries such as Mexico, where the print media has a small audience, the effect of these published opinions in the press is indirect, mostly on elites. I also explained the relevant distinction between published and public opinion. The former is produced by opinion-makers: in their articles, they frame issues by selecting and highlighting those aspects that are most relevant to them, and by so doing they may either bolster or resist political change. As I noted in the methodology section, the arguments adduced to support or reject policy proposals in opinion articles are better appreciated through content analysis with an emphasis on framing. The most important step in the content analysis of opinion articles I conducted was the creation of a model based on frame elements (representing the functions of frames), which includes the following: diagnose problems, explain causes or provide context, evaluate, and prescribe solutions. A systematic analysis of the elements that represent the functions of frames is conducive to making connections between the authors of opinion pieces and their arguments beyond a simple classification into positive or negative, and sheds light on how some published opinions may become more consequential than others.
Chapter 3
Mexico’s Transition to Electoral Democracy

Mexico’s political transition involved distinct phases in which the role of the press changed. In this chapter, I present the political context that shaped the development and liberalization of the Mexican press, as well as the discussions about the 1996 and 2007 electoral reforms. In the first section, I explain the mechanisms that allowed Mexico’s post-revolutionary regime to comfortably remain in power for most of the twentieth century. I then discuss the events that weakened the regime and the political decisions that led to electoral reforms. I argue that recurrent economic crises (1976, 1982, 1987, 1994-1995) led the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to experience a legitimacy crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, the economic crises and the subsequent reforms contributed to the transition of the regime and the liberalization of the press. Gradual and incremental changes to the country’s electoral laws beginning in 1977, and notably that of 1996, opened spaces for opposition parties and generated the conditions that permitted the Mexican transition to electoral democracy. I explain how the Zapatista demands in 1994 contributed to electoral reforms and how the differences between the opposition parties became more important after the ousting of the PRI regime in 2000. I analyze some of the difficulties of the Fox Administration and its failure to promote agreements in Congress and approve further reforms conducive to deepening the country’s young democracy, and the polarization around the 2006 presidential elections.

Throughout this chapter, I highlight the most important characteristics of the media system in Mexico and its evolution, in particular its role in politics during the authoritarian regime and the elitist character of the print media. Electoral reforms not only opened more spaces for political competition, but also accelerated the liberalization of an incipient independent press. I also explain the significant influence of electronic media, in particular television, both during the authoritarian period and in the transition. This context is relevant to understanding the emphasis of the 1996 and 2007 electoral reforms on the nature of electoral advertising in radio and television.

For most of the twentieth century, Mexico's political system ensured governability and social peace through a complex structure of rigid control mechanisms combined with discretionary authoritarian measures, invoked by the political leadership (Blum 1997, 31). The Revolutionary
Institutional Party (PRI) was the pillar of an effective and unique authoritarian system (Blum 1997; Domínguez 1999) that controlled Mexican political life from 1929 until the party lost its majority in Congress in 1997 and the presidency in 2000. As Wiarda and Guajardo (1988) state, the PRI regime was authoritarian, corporatist, and bureaucratic. Clientelistic arrangements, electoral manipulation, and the reliance on legitimating myths stemming from the 1910 Revolution buttressed the regime (Bailey and Valenzuela 1997; Teichman 1997). The boundaries between the ruling party and the state were “blurred” (Domínguez 1999, 3). One of the most distinctive and enduring aspects of the Mexican political system was its strong presidentialist character (Carpizo 1978; Domínguez 1999; Weldon 1997).

The power of the Mexican presidency was based on the operation of the regime’s various mechanisms of political control and containment, which centralized power on the country’s president (Middlebrook 2004; Olvera 1997).

The electoral process has played a stabilizing and legitimizing role since 1946 (Loaeza 2000, 103). The absolute prohibition of presidential re-election prevented the incumbent from becoming entrenched and frustrated the ambitions of other leaders. The institutionalized mechanisms for power transfer ensured no succession problems. For the most part, periodic changes in government meant that opposition groups could not sustain protests against the

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85 One of the most important strengths of the PRI regime were its corporatist and clientelistic practices; the major corporate or functional groups,”—workers, peasants, and the so-called ”popular” sector, including all others,”—were incorporated within the PRI.

86 In his seminal 1978 analysis, Carpizo used the word “presidencialismo” referring to what he described as a “deformed” presidential regime, not rooted in the country’s Constitution. Carpizo explains that the political supremacy of a single individual,”—the president”—became a central operating principle of the regime: it ensured discipline, loyalty, and unified government, where the ruling party controlled the presidency and both chambers of Congress. An example of the president’s “meta-constitutional” powers is that, in practice, Mexican presidents chose their own successors (Domínguez 1999, 3) through the famous “dedazo” or finger pointing, and were allowed great influence in designating local functionaries, from municipal presidents to state governors. Strong discipline within the ruling party and presidential leadership of the PRI enabled Mexican presidentialism to flourish (Weldon 1997).

87 The president controlled the official party, the legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, and the PRI won elections at the federal and local levels; the PRI's control of elected executive positions gave party leaders access to governmental resources and facilitated “particularist arrangements” (Olvera 1997,? 109) and made “clientelism easy” (Klesner 2005, 6).

88 The electoral law of 1918 was replaced by a completely new law in 1946; it centralized electoral administration and monitoring in the hands of the federal government, consistent with the objectives of the authoritarian regime.
system claiming lack of democracy.\textsuperscript{89} Despite its authoritarian character, the post-revolutionary elite wanted to keep an image of plurality as a way to prevent the regime from being deemed a totalitarian single-party one (López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 753).\textsuperscript{90} The media helped create an aura of suspense, drama, and participation around the unveiling of the PRI's chosen presidential candidate who, of course, was sure to win the election (Adler 1993a, 1993b; Lawson 2002, 54). As Domínguez (1999, 3) states, over the years, the government and the PRI committed electoral fraud with impunity.\textsuperscript{91} PRI legislators did not have incentives to protect the legislature’s sphere of authority.\textsuperscript{92} The party’s congressional majorities delegated the lawmaking authority to the president. With the guaranteed support of the Mexican Congress, the executive branch became \textit{de facto} “the principal legislative organ, with the president as supreme legislator” (Cosío and Zamora 2006, 415).\textsuperscript{93}

The media had an important role to play in the PRI regime (Carreño 2007; Hallin 2000; Lawson 2002; Orme 1997; Riva Palacio 2004). Hallin (2000, 99) describes Mexican journalism as “traditionally oficialista—passive and self-censored, with most political coverage based on official press releases.” For the most part, private ownership of the media did not mean autonomy from the government. Between the 1940s and the early 1990s, the government established a wide array of controls—including subsidies, governmental monopoly on newsprint paper, and official advertising—that largely determined the role of the country’s media: it served

\textsuperscript{89} The PRI was ideologically diverse, and incorporated a wide range of political tendencies under its umbrella. The “shifts of political direction” coincided with the transition from one president to the next, which helped the PRI maintain the loyalty of its different political currents (Hallin 2000, 99-100).

\textsuperscript{90} This explains the existence of other political parties in the post-revolutionary era, albeit in a hegemonic party system.

\textsuperscript{91} Among the tactics that the PRI used were stuffing of ballot boxes, intimidation of opposition candidates, manipulation of voter registration lists, last-minute relocation of voting places, manipulation of voting results, and even nullifying adverse electoral outcomes.

\textsuperscript{92} The prohibition against re-election of governors, representatives, and all elected officials served to strengthen presidential authority.

\textsuperscript{93} Corruption at all levels of government became widespread; high-ranking PRI politicians enjoyed remarkable levels of personal impunity and corrupted the democratic institutions embedded in the Constitution (Gómez Tagle 2008). Political stability was a goal privileged by the government. Besides relying on cooptation, the regime also exerted selective repression. Strictly “social” protests were sometimes tolerated, but if they were perceived as “political”—as challenging the hegemony of the ruling party”—the usual mix of partial concessions with repression shifted toward the latter (Bailey and Valenzuela 1997; Teichman 1997).
as a legitimizing instrument for the PRI regime. In Rockwell’s words, the media acted “as public relations agent for the central government” (2002, 111). The development of the media system was also shaped by informal politics, such as clientelism (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). The government distributed selective benefits to newspapers and journalists in exchange for political support. The government refrained from openly intimidating the press (Orme 1997), and there were mutual understandings about the extent to which certain issues, institutions, and people could be criticized and challenged (Carreño 2007; Hallin 2000).

There were, however, some exceptions: spaces within a few print media outlets where it was possible to criticize the government. Notwithstanding the wide array of media controls that prevailed during the authoritarian regime, critical-left intellectuals found some small outlets in the print media to voice their discontent. This gave the PRI regime a veneer of allowing criticism and helped bolster its legitimacy; in turn, it permitted a small contingent of opinion-makers to maintain a modicum of independence, and eventually to emerge and make a contribution towards electoral democratization in the 1990s.

Since the authoritarian period, the Mexican press has been more important for the country’s elites than for the majority of the population. Riva Palacio (2004) explains that Mexican print media never worked as a bridge between those who govern and the rest of the population, and has always been a medium through which elites communicate with each other. Conversely, the country’s electronic media (radio and especially television) exercised a much greater influence on the general population (Carreño 2007; Fromson 1996; Hallin 2000; Lawson 2002; Trejo Delarbre 2001). Televisa, the powerful Mexican broadcaster and the world's largest Spanish language media conglomerate, traditionally enjoyed a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the ruling elite (Carreño 2007; Hallin 2000; Lawson 2000; Trejo Delarbre 2001; 2005). The corporation operated in favour of the regime by enhancing its legitimacy and contributing to build public support for the president and the government (Fernández and Paxman 2000). In sum, the officialist character of the Mexican media system was, as Hallin (2000, 101) explains, the result not only of government pressure, but of “collusion between economic and political elites based on social ties and shared interests.”

All the elements described above reinforced each other, allowing the PRI to comfortably remain in power. As Cosío and Zamora (2006, 415) argue, the regime functioned with “flexible
authoritarianism” through which it was possible to respond “opportunistically to political forces without undermining the basic power structure.” In this context, the PRI succeeded in managing several decades of steady economic growth, which legitimized the regime. From 1940 to 1970, the state-led economic policies implemented resulted in an average annual growth rate of six percent, and living standards for the bulk of Mexico's population improved (Lawson 2000, 271). This period, commonly known as “the Mexican miracle,” brought rapid industrialization, and with it social transformation: cities grew, urbanization and growth brought better public health and longer life expectancy, and literacy rates increased. These changes would begin to challenge the fundamentals of the Mexican model of development (Bailey and Valenzuela 1997, 46; Blum 1997, 136; Lawson 2000, 271).94

The End of the “Mexican Miracle” and the Weakening of the PRI Regime (1970-1994)

The “mass support for the regime,” a central pillar of the PRI's hegemony (Magaloni 2005, 137), started to diminish considerably as a consequence of the economic downturn that began in the late 1960s. Urbanization, education, and recurrent economic crises in the country had significant implications, as they eroded the social bases of support for the PRI. As Olvera (1997, 109; 2004, 412) argues, the country’s economic development, which had brought extensive social change, “gradually undermined the regime's foundations.” By the 1970s, the import-substitution industrialization model had outlived its usefulness (Bailey and Valenzuela 1997; Pastor 1990).95 During the administrations of José López Portillo (1976-1982), Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), and Carlos Salinas (1988-1994), the country suffered important economic crises.

The government faced a discontented urban middle class, disaffection with the import-substitution industrialization strategy, the emergence of new opposition movements outside the

94 In 1968, a student-led rebellion in Mexico City was a direct challenge to the fundamentals of the Mexican model. Several scholars situate the beginning of the transition in this year, given the dimension of the movement and the repression itself, which became an epitome of the regime’s abuse of power.

95 The country began facing governmental deficits, imbalances in its current accounts, as well as a stagnant economy. As world oil prices dropped in 1981, the reduction of oil revenues, the country’s debt obligations, and a surge in capital flight generated a severe financial crisis. The government began to rely on foreign borrowing to finance internal development policies.
officially recognized party system, and the emergence of guerrilla movements.\textsuperscript{96} Statism, an important aspect of PRI hegemony, caused tension between political managers and most members of the country's business community (Teichman 1997, 127).\textsuperscript{97}

Mexico’s economic crises and subsequent economic reforms would have important consequences for the legitimacy and the stability of the PRI regime, as well as for the country’s political transition (Camp 2007; Loaeza 2000; Lawson 2000; Middlebrook 2004; Morton 2003). Since the legitimacy crisis that followed the repression of the 1968 student movement, Mexico's ruling political class sought ways to accommodate change without ceding power (Fox 1994, 159). In this context, the government introduced controlled political reforms to channel some of the discontent and support the idea that the regime was an open one. This contradiction between “formal legalization of democracy and the de facto institution of authoritarian rule” defined politics (Olvera 2004, 410). Starting in 1977 and up until the 1990s, a constant process of political-electoral reform permitted the PRI to deal with internal factionalism and the rise of political opposition (Molinar 1996, 237, in Weldon 2001, 210). The cumulative effect of these gradual reforms facilitated the transition to electoral democracy in 2000 (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000; Córdova 2008; Weldon 2001; Woldenberg 2002).

The transformation began when the Secretario de Gobernación (Minister of the Interior) in the López Portillo Administration, Jesús Reyes Heroles, issued \textit{The Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes (LOPPE)} (Carpizo 1991; Córdova 2007; Klesner 2005; Loaeza 2000; López Leyva and Labastida 2004; Peschard 1993; Woldenberg 2000). Although the new legislation did not change any of the president’s prerogatives or transform the presidential system, it did open spaces for other political parties and improved representation in

\textsuperscript{96} Independent unions engaged in insurgency, questioning the lack of autonomy and democracy of official unions, and articulated demands across a variety of issues beyond purely economic concerns (Morton 2003, 641). Between 1976 and 1979, the dynamism of the labour insurgency faded and the themes of economic crisis and austerity took its place, after a nearly 100 percent devaluation of the peso in late 1976.

\textsuperscript{97} As the alliance that had existed between state and national capital deteriorated, the private sector began articulating its opposition, notably with the founding of the Business Co-coordinating Council (CCE) in 1975. The CCE proposed economic policies in opposition to the government, following the impact of the 1973 oil crisis on Mexico’s economic performance. This tension would climax during the last year of the López Portillo Administration, when the country’s banks were nationalized (Morton 2003, 635; Teichman 1997, 127).
the lower chamber of Congress. After the student massacre of 1968 and the guerrilla movements of the 1970s, it became clear that it was necessary to integrate the left into the political system (Molinar and Weldon 2001, 212). The 1977 reform became an attempt to manage political liberalization by enlarging the arena for party competition and integrating leftist political organizations while inducing them to renounce extra-legal forms of action (Crespo 2004, 68). The reform gave legal standing to several leftist parties—notably the Mexican Communist Party—which until then had led a clandestine or marginal political existence (Woldenberg 2002, 23; Crespo 2004, 68; López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 759; Molinar and Weldon 2001, 212). The reform thus conditioned the institutional context of opposition movements (Crespo 2004, 68; Morton 2003, 641). Although the PRI’s hegemony was still guaranteed, the reform ensured that the PRI’s presidential candidate would not run unopposed, as had occurred in 1976 (Crespo 2004, 69). This law also increased the number of members in the lower chamber of the Mexican Congress from 300 to 400, 100 of them elected under the proportional representation principle, thus increasing spaces for the opposition and allowing at least a minimum of plurality (Crespo 2000, 18; López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 756).

By defining the terms and fixing the boundaries of representation and social struggle, the authoritarian political leadership believed it was possible to contain popular demands and at the same time offer a sense of wider competition by “revitalizing the party system” (Crespo 2004, 69). The 1977 political reform thus meant an important move towards the creation of the modern party system (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 81). In sum, although the 1977 reform meant a limited political opening, it responded to the erosion of PRI support caused by social changes, economic problems, and political tensions in the country. These changes were necessary in order to give expression to political minorities, and attract and retain their participation within the system (Loaeza 2000, 103).

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98 Before this major political reform, only three opposition parties existed legally, one of which, the PAN, was cast by the PRI as the conservative opposition to the “institutionalized revolution” (Klesner 2005, 106).
99 After the student massacre of 1968 and the guerrilla movements of the 1970s, it was necessary to integrate the left into the political system.
100 In the 1976 presidential elections, the only candidate was that of the PRI, José López Portillo; this made evident that there was no competitive multi-party system in place.
101 After the 1979 mid-term elections, the PRI controlled 74% of the Lower Chamber.
The nationalization of the banks in 1982 reinforced private-sector opposition and caused capital flight, inflation, and balance of payments problems. These were difficult years for the country: the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita fell each year of the De la Madrid administration (a cumulative drop of 12.4 percent) and inflation was never below 60 percent per year, exceeding 100 percent in some years (Domínguez 1999, 4). The economic collapse of the 1980s had important consequences for the PRI regime, as it reduced its economic capacity to reward its supporters (Díaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast 2000, 281; López Leyva and Labastida and López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 755). The austerity program implemented involved reductions in government subsidies, increases in taxes over consumption, and tight wage controls aimed to curb inflation (Camp 2007, 277; Morton 2003, 638). The economic reform program implemented in 1985 sought to transform “the highly protected Mexican economy,” based on extensive state intervention and dependent on oil exports, into an open economy, successful in exporting manufactured goods (Teichman 1997, 127). Mexico began lowering trade barriers, joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and increased privatization efforts (Bruhn 1996, 154).

Demographic shifts were also undermining the PRI's instruments of social control; urbanization and the growth of the service sector created new social classes that were not linked to the PRI's state-corporatist apparatus (Lawson 2000, 271). The emergence of new social actors that could not be co-opted through traditional means made it impossible to maintain the “fusion between state and society” (Olvera 2004, 412). Urban popular movements consolidated and expanded their sphere of action. The oldest urban groups opened an “urban reorganization” process following the 1985 Mexico City earthquake (Olvera 1997, 111; 2004, 414), and the realization that a viable civil society existed in Mexico emerged (Kirkwood 2003).

102 To face the country’s economic crisis, the De la Madrid Administration followed the orthodox economic guidelines recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
103 The magnitude 8.1 earthquake that occurred on September 19, 1985, off the Pacific coast, caused thousands of casualties and widespread catastrophic damage. Organizations and eye-witnesses argued that the death toll was much higher than the official tally of ten thousand. Mexican society and organizations outside of the PRI played a key role in rescue efforts and helping victims.
104 The government’s response to the earthquake was widely criticized at various levels of Mexican society as authoritarian and incompetent, and the relief efforts of non-PRI organizations also took a toll on the reputation of the official party.
In response to the PRI’s abandonment of the state-dominated economic model, labour unionists and social movements began supporting left-wing parties. Disaffection with the PRI also led urban voters to support left-wing parties (Bruhn 1999). Simultaneously, businessmen began to support the right-of-centre National Action Party (PAN) in opposition to governmental measures—such as the 1982 bank nationalization—and the party began to win elections for various municipal-level offices in the 1980s. In this context, the PRI resorted to the "doctoring" of vote counts (Camp 2007, 286). For example, in 1986, the Catholic hierarchy and the country's leading intellectuals proclaimed disbelief in government vote counts in the local elections in the Northern state of Chihuahua (Camp 2007, 286; Preston and Dillon 2004, 137).

In 1987, the “reformist” wing of the PRI, represented by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and others who would form the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in 1989, began pushing for internal democratization within the PRI to open up the presidential nomination process. When Carlos Salinas de Gortari was announced as the party’s candidate, these dissident members left the party and nominated Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas—who was also backed by a coalition of leftist parties—as their own candidate for the 1988 presidential elections.

The presidential contest of 1988 represented a shift towards competitive elections and a key turning point for Mexico's political system and for the process of democratic transition. (Lawson 2000; Magaloni 2005). The electoral process—both presidential and legislative—modified the party system (Carpizo 1991). The PRI resorted to inflating its electoral totals (Reding 1989); the official count gave Salinas 51 percent of the vote, Cárdenas 31 percent, and Manuel Clouthier, the National Action Party's candidate, 17 percent (Camp 2007, 287). Although Carlos Salinas de Gortari was the official winner, allegations of electoral fraud “could not be dispelled”

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105 As Camp (2007, 278) points out, competition among contenders within the PRI represented a conflict between a more traditional economic philosophy”—favouring state control and deficit-spending budget strategies”—and the more orthodox private-sector emphasis that De la Madrid had reintroduced.
106 The selection of the PRI’s presidential candidate”—commonly known as “dedazo”—was an unwritten, “meta-constitutional” prerogative of the country’s president (see Carpizo 1978).
107 Between 1988 and 1991, the PAN, as well as the parties that constituted the electoral coalition that had supported Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988, held an unprecedented 240 of the 500 seats in the Lower Chamber of Congress.
Election oversight was conducted under direct executive supervision by a pro-PRI federal electoral commission headed by the Minister of the Interior (Córdova 2007, 662; Eisenstadt 2004a, 728). As Peschard (2000, 88) states, the electoral authorities could never prove the legitimacy of the results.

The difficulty for opposition candidates to gain access to the media was a clear example of the inequity in electoral processes. One of the main demands of opposition parties was the opening of the media (newspapers, radio and television). As Buendía and Aspiroz (2011, 41) write, the 1988 electoral campaign was characterized by “silencing the opposition in the media.” While the PRI obtained 83.1 percent of coverage in television newscasts, the leftist Democratic National Front (FDN) only got 1.6 percent (Arredondo, Trejo and Fragoso 1990, cited in Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 41).

President Carlos Salinas took office with “only a minimal level of political legitimacy” (Camp 2007, 299). Opposition parties refused to recognize him as the winner, but after the protests wore down they took their seats in Congress and demanded from the Salinas government a serious electoral reform (Molinar and Weldon 2001, 216-217). In the 1988 legislative elections the PRI lost its two-thirds majority in the Lower Chamber of Congress required to make constitutional amendments. As Molinar and Weldon (2001, 217) explain, for the first time in its history, the PRI needed support from another party. By the early 1990s, the PAN and the PRI shared economic and market goals, as well as open disdain for the PRD and its social movement roots (Eisenstadt 2004a, 728). This paved the way for the approval of several constitutional changes with support from the PAN.

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108 Many voices argued that there was evidence to substantiate the claim that Salinas’ victory had been the result of fraudulent practices (Aguayo 1995). On the night of July 6, 1988, the computerized vote tabulation system mysteriously crashed, when early returns showed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, candidate of the center-left National Democratic Front coalition (FDN), leading the race for the presidency (Dillon and Preston 2004, 149). The electoral results led to some violent incidents and opposition protests.

109 During the Salinas administration, the PRD was “ostracized”; the party opposed Salinas’ legitimacy and economic policy (Magaloni 2005).

110 The PAN’s approach was pragmatic; it backed all of Salinas' major constitutional reforms, most of which had originally been proposed by the PAN itself. This practice became known as “concertación” (Mexican slang for concert plus concession).
The economic reforms initiated in the De la Madrid administration continued. Key neoliberal policies of the Salinas Presidency included privatization, a shift toward free markets, integration into the world economy, and a reduction of the role of the state in the economy (Olvera 1997; 2004). The objective was to strengthen the regime and regain support for the PRI through renewed economic growth (Morton 2003).

President Salinas’ political strategy “sought not to democratize the political system but to explicitly redefine the nature of Mexican authoritarianism” (Teichman 1997, 123) in order to retain power (Lawson 2000, 273; Preston and Dillon 2004, 14). The Salinas government implemented highly visible social programs. The most salient one was the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), “designed to win back popular support for the government” (Bruhn 1996, 152) and aimed at politically targeted communities (Cornelius 1994, 60; Fox 1994, 163). Magaloni (2005, 130) explains that the changes related to the privatization of the banking system and the restructuring of property rights in the countryside involved the modification of the country’s Constitution. The Salinas Administration negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which meant the abandonment of Mexico’s nationalist development model (Lawson 2000, 273). These factors “drove the constitutional reforms that legalized the state's retreat from its established role in the economy” (Olvera 2004, 416), which in turn exacerbated the regime's legitimacy crisis. Several politicians and many bureaucrats perceived these changes as a “betrayal of the Revolution” (Blum 1997, 38).

For most of the Salinas presidency, the conventional wisdom was that as long as the Mexican government obtained good macroeconomic results (inflation control, a steady flow of foreign investment, and real economic growth), it would not be necessary to take the risk of making “drastic changes in political structures and arrangements” (Cornelius 1994, 54). During the first half of the presidential six-year term, consumer price inflation decelerated toward the low two-

111 As Fox (1994, 166) notes, the PRI’s political motivations for the Solidarity Program are apparent in that “it skillfully allocated disproportionate amounts of resources” to recover areas of strong center-left electoral opposition. Although these new distributive programs were either captured by traditional authoritarian elements or delivered through semi-clientelistic channels, they did involve small, but significant openings to the autonomous organizations of civil society (Fox 1994, 162).

112 In addition, the Salinas’s government “unilaterally abrogated the corporativist agreements” prevalent since the 1930s between the government and the unions of workers and peasants (Blum 1997, 38); land redistribution ended and the PRI changed its traditional anti-clericalism.
digit range and GDP per capita began to recover (Domínguez 1999, 4). In the 1991 midterm legislative elections, the PRI obtained 61 percent of the vote (Lawson 2000, 273).

The economic downturn of the 1980s and the resulting reforms aimed at economic liberalization were key factors that increased media independence (Coyne and Leeson 1999). The privatization of state enterprises in the Salinas Administration meant more advertising revenue for newspapers; at the same time, consumer demand for independent coverage of reforms and changes in the political and economic spheres reinforced the liberalization of the print media (Coyne and Leeson 1999; Lawson 2002).

Electoral competition at the local level had significantly increased since the 1980s. Nevertheless, the PRI controlled virtually all campaign resources, and races were openly unequal (Olvera 2004, 417). In this context, the PAN won the first recognized opposition victory in a gubernatorial race in Baja California in 1989. From 1989 to 1993, many states and municipalities saw post-electoral struggles (Díaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001; Preston and Dillon 2004; Olvera 1997). The federal government recognized other opposition victories in gubernatorial races (Guanajuato in 1991, Chihuahua in 1992). From then on, the PRI began facing real electoral competition in virtually every state. Precisely the increase in electoral competition that was taking place in the 1980s and early 1990s helps explain why Mexicans became more interested in politics and more willing to participate (Domínguez and McCan 1996. 113

Such electoral competition had consequences in terms of party preferences. As the dominant party, the PRI was considered to be more at the centre of the political spectrum, due to its eclectic nature. Its hegemony had been “cemented on poverty and underdevelopment” (Magaloni 2005, 140). The ruling party’s base, mostly composed of voters from traditional sectors—especially peasants, unions, the poor, and the less educated—had diminished significantly by the 1980s, as a result of growing urbanization and modernization (Klesner 2004; Molinar 1991). 114

While the ruling party continued being supported in the poorest states, support for the PAN increased in the most prosperous regions. During the Salinas Administration, the newly created

113 By July 2, 2000, opposition parties governed almost half of the country’s population at the level of states and municipalities.
114 Despite the growth of the Mexican economy between 1940 and 1970, inequality increased.
PRD gained support in the southern states, attracting the urban poor as well as left-wing intellectuals, who increasingly defected from the PRI’s traditional base. During the Zedillo Administration, the PRD thus benefited greatly from ruling party splits and grew significantly at the local level (Magaloni 2005, 141). By the mid-1990s, the shifts in the partisan composition of the electorate were evident. Although there were three major political parties at the national level with representation in Congress, most of the electoral competition took place between the PRI and one of the two other major parties: PAN vs. PRI in the more affluent north and centre-west of the country, and PRD vs. PRI in the poorer south (Klesner 2004; Klesner 2005). Of course, the distinct social bases of the PAN and the PRD conditioned some of their ideological and programmatic orientations (Klesner 2004, 107).

Persisting public doubts about the validity of the 1988 elections (Camp 2007; Eisenstadt 2004a; Peschard 2000) forced Salinas to accept a number of electoral reforms.115 The reform of 1989-1990 brought an important change to the country’s electoral institutions: it created the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) to conduct and oversee elections, autonomous from the government (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000 122; Córdova 2007, 662; Molinar and Weldon 2001, 219).116 After 1988, it was necessary to instill trust and certainty in the country’s electoral processes, and the creation of a state organ independent from the government to conduct elections, an old opposition demand, could no longer be postponed (Córdova 2007, 661). The 1990 electoral reform thus began a trend that would continue in subsequent reforms: the increased control of the IFE by citizens with no party affiliation, from the Institute’s executive bodies to those who would directly manage ballots and check voter lists on Election Day (Córdova 2007, 662).117

Although the IFE was formally autonomous from the government since its creation in 1990, it was headed by the Secretario de Gobernación (Minister of the Interior) until the 1996 electoral reform. In 1990, the PRI retained majority representation in the organ, and the government kept

115 Salinas maintained a “discretional liberalization,” opening only the spaces that were strictly necessary (Curzio, personal interview).
116 The IFE replaced the Federal Electoral Commission (Comisión Federal Electoral), which had been in the realm of the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación).
117 This process is known in Mexico as “ciudadanización,” a term that does not exist in English; its meaning can be roughly translated as “giving citizens (not affiliated to any political party) control.”
control of IFE’s General Council (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 227; Crespo 2004, 71; Magaloni 2005, 243; Molinar and Weldon 2001, 219). Thereafter, the reform of the IFE as “the institutional mechanism to ensure clean elections” (Molinar and Weldon 2001, 219) became a crucial aspect of the electoral reform agenda until it was achieved in 1996.

The 1990 electoral reform also established clearer norms and controls that were included in the new Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales, COFIPE). The reform also created a Federal Electoral Court to resolve electoral disputes, one of the PAN’s demands (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 248). Moreover, the reform mandated a full verification and revision of the entire voters’ list in order to guarantee its accuracy (Córdova 2007, 663). Based on this list, the IFE issued photo-voter-IDs that were used to verify the identity of voters and protect elections from potential fraud.

A new electoral reform was passed in Congress in 1993. As Magaloni (2005) explains, the reform eliminated the "self-certification" by the Electoral College and granted authority to the IFE to certify electoral results. Within the Electoral Tribunal, a second legal body for appeals was created whose decisions could not be appealed or reversed. The reform also introduced new rules for the translation of votes into seats in the Chamber of Deputies (the so-called governability clause) and changed the formula for distributing the proportional representation seats that would be allocated according to each party's share of the overall vote. It gave a “more than proportional share of seats” to the party that obtained most votes, as long as it finished above some threshold with respect to the party with the second largest share of the vote (Magaloni 2005, 130), regardless of the number of relative-majority seats each party had won. It was set at a maximum of 315 seats in the Chamber going to any one party (Crespo 2000, 2004; 2004; 2005, 243).

118 IFE’s Consejo General (board) was composed of the Minister of the Interior (Secretario de Gobernación), who presided the Institute, four members of Congress (two from the largest party and two from the second largest party), party representatives (whose number varied according to the percentage of votes received by each party), and six councillors or commissioners (Consejeros Magistrados), who were elected from a list proposed by the president and ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Lower Chamber (Magaloni 2005, 243).

119 The voter’s photo IDs issued by the IFE became an official identification document.
The ruling political elite aimed to preserve the PRI’s majority in Congress against the rising opposition parties (Crespo 2000, 18; Middlebrook 2004, 5). This permitted the PRI to maintain an absolute majority in the Lower Chamber of Congress with an increasingly lower number of votes (Crespo 2000, 18-19). The 1993 reform also changed the electoral rules for the composition of the Senate: three senators were to be elected by plurality, and one seat would go to the second place party in each state (Weldon 2004, 8).

The Zapatista Uprising and the Unavoidable Need for Democratization

On January 1, 1994, as Mexico was being inaugurated into the "First World" by joining the United States and Canada in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an armed rebellion broke out in the impoverished state of Chiapas, in the southeast of the country. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) declared war on the Mexican government and seized four municipalities in Chiapas. The Zapatistas advocated bottom-up democratization. Their vision contrasted with the PRI’s policy of a managed transition to electoral democracy and radical free-market reforms that had a negative impact on peasant life (Gilbreth and Otero 2001, 8). The federal army regained control within ten days of combat. Nevertheless, deep divisions within the ruling political class, the mobilization of external civil-society allies at the national and international levels (Fox 1996), and overwhelming pressure from Mexican and international public opinion prompted President Salinas to declare a unilateral cease-fire on January 12, 1994. Manuel Camacho, former Mayor of Mexico City, was appointed as Peace Commissioner, and just three months after the uprising began, EZLN representatives and government officials were meeting. Although the first round of peace negotiations broke down in June 1994 as the

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120 This refers to the "governability clause," highly controversial and widely rejected among the opposition.
121 The movement’s name derives from Emiliano Zapata, a peasant leader, socially the most radical figure of the Mexican Revolution.
122 The changes to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution made during the Salinas administration meant the end of the agrarian reform program, one of the most important revolutionary projects, and had effectively put an end to the “ejido,” a communal land holding whereby communal farmers had the legal right to hold title to land and hence could sell or rent it, or form joint ventures with agribusiness, be it foreign or domestic (Teichman 1997, 129). Furthermore, the prospect of importing cheaper corn from the United States through NAFTA posed a serious threat to farmers’ traditional way of life and their capacity to maintain subsistence production (Gilbreth and Otero 2001, 12).
presidential elections approached, the process was re-established in the spring of 1995 in response to a military action by the federal government to arrest the EZLN leadership (Gilbreth and Otero 2001, 15). As Domínguez (1999, 5) states, the government combined repression and negotiation in its policies toward the EZLN in the following weeks, months, and years.

The Zapatista movement exposed the multiple failures of the PRI regime: exclusion of large segments of the population from economic development; a growing gap between rich and poor; denial of basic political rights that would provide meaningful participation in the shaping of policies and legislation; and brutal repression of dissents by the armed forces and the police (Reading 1994, 12). The EZLN thus opened up the possibility for a “more radical understanding of citizenship and democracy” (Harvey 1998, 12, cited in Washbrook 2005, 423). Although the rebellion was restricted to Chiapas, it would remain as “a symbol of both the injustices of the social system and the inability of the national government to address local problems effectively” (Domínguez 1999, 5).

Shortly after the uprising in Chiapas began, the PRI presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was assassinated on March 23, midway through his campaign. The fear of political instability became widespread among all social classes (Camp 2007, 210). As Lawson (2002) explains, the urgency and scale of the 1994 political crises increased the demand for reliable and independent information, which had an undeniable impact on the survival and expansion of existing independent print media outlets. The Zapatista uprising, for example, contributed to change the status quo. Manuel Camacho, the government’s Peace Commissioner for Chiapas, told me in an interview that the role of some print media outlets was very important: articles published in some print media publications systematically opposed an outcome other than political negotiation, which, arguably, helped stop military escalation (Author’s interview, March 4, 2011).

This complex context posed a difficult dilemma for Carlos Salinas: a genuine reform of the Mexican political system, a Zapatista demand, would entail an end to the hegemony of the PRI regime. At the same time, the Chiapas rebellion showed that the failure to pursue such a reform

123 This was the first such high-profile assassination occurred in the country since the killing of Álvaro Obregón in 1928.
could eventually lead to the same result. As Magaloni (2005, 145) writes, the uprising in Chiapas was thus a “precipitating event” for the process of democratization in Mexico: "The dangers of fraud, post-electoral protests, and a second round were not the same before and after Chiapas. After January 1, weapons were involved—and the example of what could be accomplished with them" (Castañeda 1995, 95, cited in Magaloni 2005, 135). One of the most significant demands of the Zapatista movement was for clean elections. Carlos Salinas “needed to neutralize the Zapatistas with a nationwide political opening” that included the PRD in particular (Magaloni 2005, 135). In that context, on January 27, 1994, the "Pact for Peace, Justice, and Democracy" was signed by all presidential candidates, who stated the need to follow a democratic process. As Manuel Camacho (former government negotiator for Chiapas) and Leonardo Curzio (news anchor) told me in separate interviews, the accord “paved the way for the 1994 electoral reform,” which was part of its mandate.

The first civic response to electoral fraud in the 1988 elections was the creation of citizen groups formed by important political and cultural figures. Opposition and civic mobilizations became common throughout the country. Moreover, civic-cultural movements established a civil society focused on the struggle for political rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Since the 1990s, various non-governmental organizations fostered civic engagement, promoted the importance of voting, and monitored elections. Various groups and organizations, notably Alianza Cívica and the Grupo San Ángel—which included important Mexican intellectuals and politicians, the great majority of whom did not belong to any political party—emphasized the promotion of democracy (Aguayo 1995), particularly free and fair elections.

The arrival of Jorge Carpizo to the Secretaría de Gobernación (Interior Ministry) in 1994 was significant: he had no party affiliation and thus was able to negotiate agreements with the three

124 Carlos Salinas was determined not to repeat the experience of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, where political reform led to rapid disintegration of communist rule.
125 There was a risk that the PRD would join the EZLN and perhaps create a united front against the regime, and call the legitimacy of the upcoming elections into question.
126 Olvera (2004) explains that a stronger civil society emerged in the form of NGO networks and pro-democracy social movements. The increasing number of NGOs dealing with a wide variety of issues and the perceived threats from the government in the early 1990s led most NGOs to organize collectively as networks, grouped by both thematic interest and political affinity (Olvera 2004, 418).
The new electoral law was negotiated in just two months. By May 1994, three months before Election Day, Congress passed the new rules. The negotiations in 1994 included issues related to the goals of “clean elections and fair play” (Molinar and Weldon 2001, 223-224).

The reform substantially modified the decision-making structures of the Federal Electoral Institute: it gave majority control of IFE’s General Council to six non-partisan citizen representatives called “consejeros ciudadanos” (“citizen counselors”), selected by a two-thirds majority vote in the Lower Chamber of Congress. Each of the major parties—PRI, PAN, and PRD—had the right to propose two councillors. The new General Council of the IFE also had four representatives of the legislative branch, two from the PRI, and two from the opposition parties, and each party had one nonvoting representative in the Council (Molinar and Weldon 2001, 223). The chairperson of the General Council remained the Minister of the Interior, as had been the case since 1946. With this new arrangement, the PRI government “lost control of the Federal Electoral Institute's board” (Magaloni 2005, 131), and it became more difficult for the government to guarantee victory for the “official” party or to “easily impose its will upon that body” (Crespo 2004, 73). Other changes introduced with the reform allowed independent audits of the electoral registry of voters, instituted some sanctions for improper use of state resources and other electoral crimes, expanded rights for domestic election observers, and permitted “international visitors” to observe the August 1994 election (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 330; Crespo 2004, 92). Nevertheless, the 1994 electoral legislation left several other issues unchanged: opposition parties had very limited fundraising capacities, and the mass media remained extraordinarily biased in favour of the PRI (Aguayo 1994).

In August 1994, Ernesto Zedillo, the PRI candidate, was elected president with 48.8 percent of the vote (Gómez Tagle 2004, 91), by a margin of 23 percent over the closest competitor, Diego Fernández de Cevallos, the PAN candidate. The presence of international and national observers from several civic and nongovernmental organizations helped validate the outcome (Camp 2007, 127). Whereas the electoral reforms of 1990 and 1993 had been negotiated by a bipartisan coalition between the PRI and the PAN, the reforms negotiated in 1994 and 1996 included the three main parties—PAN, PRD, and PRI.

There were thus eleven voting members; of them, six were nonpartisan councillors and two were members of the opposition from Congress.
The voter turnout, 78 percent of registered voters, was the highest in contemporary Mexican history (Peschard 2006; Camp 2007). The 1994 presidential election “was free, legal, transparent, and fully supervised” (Peschard 2006, 86). Nevertheless, most critics agreed that although the voting on Election Day was among the cleanest in recent Mexican history, the broader electoral process, in particular funding for political parties and access to the mass media, created an unfair playing field that favoured the PRI (Aguayo 1994). An analysis of the campaign finance reports (submitted by the parties) concluded that the election had been an unequal contest because the PRI had spent 71.4 percent of the total campaign resources (Peschard 2006, 86).

Notably, the 1994 electoral process was the first one in which candidates of the three strongest electoral parties faced each other in a televised debate. Nevertheless, qualitatively there were important differences in the coverage of the candidates: news anchors offered positive comments when it came to the PRI, and negative ones in the case of the PAN and PRD candidates (Aguayo 1994; Acosta 1995, in Espino 2009, 236). Despite the differences, the fact that the main newscasts in Mexico City covered the three most important presidential campaigns at relatively similar levels contrasted with the coverage in the 1988 Presidential Election (Trejo, 1995, 59–86). It was the first time that opposition parties had significant impact in the media, despite the differences in coverage with regards to the ruling party (Espino 2009, 236). The problems that remained in the equity of the administration of the electoral process had much more to do with the need for tighter regulation of campaign spending than with the active perpetration of election-day fraud (Eisenstadt 2004b, 8).

1994-2000: The Prelude to Alternation in Power

The Zedillo Administration (1994–2000) continued the free-market policies of the Salinas Administration, but was also forced to implement a number of austerity measures to emerge from the economic crisis that began with the sharp peso devaluation of December 1994. In

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129 For instance, the image of the PRI presidential candidate was included in the introductory program segments while any information related to the other two major parties was included in a segment that covered all of the eight opposition parties together (Aguayo 1994; Acosta 1995 XX??XX).

130 These would be addressed in the 1996 electoral reform.

131 After December 1994, the peso continued falling and was devalued by around 250% overall.
early 1995, President Zedillo had to seek the support of the United States and the IMF to face the country’s economic crisis. At the same time, his promises for a new electoral reform limited his political margin of action (IMEP 1995). The value of the national currency declined rapidly, reducing both the ability of the middle class to repay dollar-denominated debts and the purchasing power of the poor (Pastor and Weis 2005, 40). In 1995, GDP per capita fell 8.2 percent and the level of consumer price inflation was seven times that of 1994 (Domínguez 1999, 7). There was also an increase in crime (Shelley 2001). In short, the financial crisis played a key role in untying the PRI from middle class supporters, further weakening the president and the PRI. It was clear that the party had lost one crucial aspect of its legitimacy, namely success in managing many decades of steady economic growth.

In early 1995, former president Salinas and his brother were implicated in corruption scandals; Carlos Salinas went into self-imposed exile to Ireland and his brother was sent to jail. The end of the PRI’s era of dominance was near (Brinegar, Morgenstern, and Nielson 2006, 80). In sum, the newly inaugurated president faced problems within the ruling elite, mass unrest, and mounting violence (Lawson 2000, 274). As the title of journalist Andres Oppenheimer’s book (1996) put it, Mexico was “bordering on chaos.”

As Camp (1996 1) explains, President Zedillo confronted “a more aggressive media, both domestic and international” than his predecessor did. Besides the ongoing liberalization of the press, the country’s electronic media also saw some changes and, to a certain degree, more plurality. Televisa faced new competition: in 1993, Imevisión, a government-owned television chain, was privatized, and TV Azteca, a new television network, took its place. Televisa thus began to incorporate a greater degree of plurality into its political reporting. Meanwhile, since the 1980s and increasingly in the 1990s, the radio included more extensive and balanced political coverage.

By the mid-1990s, some experts gradually began to describe Mexico as a country “in transition” to democracy (Camp 1996, 1; Shirk 2005, 1). The political system was no longer “a tightly controlled structure,” but a “mass of disorderly institutions, organizations, and groupings” with

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132 Mexico had not experienced a crisis of such magnitude even in the difficult days of the 1980s (Camp 2007).
little to hold them together (Rubio 1997, 8). President Zedillo encouraged the strengthening of
the other government branches and allowed increasing autonomy to the states (Camp 1996;
2007). Nevertheless, in the country’s conjuncture, he had little space to act, and his ability to
see his administration through the six-year term was severely questioned (Camp 1996). The
perception among many Mexicans was that President Zedillo and his cabinet were not
sufficiently skillful (Rubio 1997, 6).

The Zedillo administration negotiated a new series of political reforms with the country's main
opposition parties between 1995 and 1996. One of the most significant aspects of the reform is
that it guaranteed the autonomy of the IFE: the chair of the Institute’s Board, the General
Council, was no longer the Minister of the Interior, but rather an independent, non-partisan
citizen. Broadly, the 1996 changes to the electoral legislation evened the conditions for electoral
competition among all political parties, particularly campaign financing and media access. Public
funding of political parties increased, limiting private sources of financing to just 10 percent of
total campaign expenditures. Access of political parties to the mass media also increased
(Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 373). In sum, the reforms in public financing and
access to the mass media made it much more likely that the opposition political parties could
design effective campaigns to challenge the PRI.

The 1996 electoral reform was particularly
important for the ongoing liberalization of the news media, in a context of increased
independence of newspapers and competition for ratings in radio and television. At the same
time, the more equitable coverage of campaigns and elections beginning in the 1997 federal
electoral process had implications in the political landscape, as the PRI lost its majority in

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133 This does not mean, however, that there was no presidential involvement in resolving local political
disputes to the detriment of decentralization, albeit justified. For example, in the case of Guerrero,
President Zedillo had the Supreme Court weigh in with a legal decision charging the governor with
negligence in the killing of a group of peasants at the hands of state police, thus supporting the Zedillo
administration’s political decision to remove the governor (Camp 1996, 5).

134 Since the 1996 electoral reform is the central topic of chapter six, some of its main aspects will only be
briefly mentioned here.

135 The reform also limited the level of overrepresentation in the Lower Chamber of Congress; the
overrepresentation ceiling was established at 8% of the total vote obtained by the majority party: it was
necessary to receive at least 42.2% of the total valid votes in order to obtain an absolute majority in the
Lower Chamber (Crespo 2000, 20? ?).
Congress, the left won the mayoralty of Mexico City, and the PAN candidate won the presidency in 2000.

The changes introduced with the 1996 electoral reform clearly made a PRI defeat possible. The three major contending political parties entered the campaign for the 1997 mid-term elections under much more even financial conditions: combined generous public funding with strict limits on private financing, campaign-spending ceilings, rigorous accounting requirements, and oversight of party finances by the IFE (Schedler 2000, 12). Mexican political parties—except for the PRI—had never had so many resources at their disposal, these resources had never been so well distributed, and the media environment had never before been as receptive as it was in 1997 (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 457). This sheds light on the growing competitiveness of political parties.

The results of the 1997 Congressional and State Gubernatorial Elections evidenced the declining support for the PRI, which obtained the most adverse result ever in federal elections: the “official” party fell 12 seats short of a majority in the Lower Chamber. The four opposition parties (PAN, PRD, Partido del Trabajo, or PT, and Partido Verde Ecologista de México, or PVEM) thus controlled 262 of the 500 seats (Camp 2007, 212). Hence, in 1997, the representativity map changed. Mexico took a decisive step towards a republican and democratic reality of power sharing (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 468). The 1997 elections established the precedent that a cleaner and more open electoral process could lead to an opposition majority in Congress, and allowed a left-wing party to win the first local election in Mexico City (Levy and Brun 2006, 3). It was the beginning of shared responsibility in the legislative power. Divided government transformed Congress. Legislators began to take a more proactive approach to policy making, and delegation to the executive receded significantly. The 1996 electoral reform not only balanced the electoral process among political parties, but in turn

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136 These new conditions constituted one of the distinctive, emblematic characteristics of the 1997 federal elections (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000).

137 The comparison of media coverage is revealing: while the PRI commanded 88 percent of television time devoted to the 1988 presidential campaign and 51 percent in 1994 (Lawson 1997), its 1997 share fell below 30 percent. All political parties shared free access to a total of 200 television hours and 250 radio hours (Schedler 2000, 12).

138 Since September 1, 1997, no political party has had absolute majority in the Lower Chamber of Congress.
produced a new balance in the exercise of political power in Mexico (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 478).

By the late 1990s, the country had reached a "critical juncture" in its political development (Klesner 2004, 91). The era of single party dominance was coming to an end in a democratic manner, without violence and through votes. Another crucial outcome of the 1997 electoral process was the victory of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the Party of the Democratic Revolution as mayor of Mexico City. He won with 48 percent of the vote, becoming the first elected head of government of the Federal District (Bruhn 1999, 89). This meant that the PRD was responsible for managing the country’s second-largest budget (Blum 1997, 38). Also remarkable was that almost a decade earlier, the PRI had allegedly stolen the presidency from Cárdenas in the 1998 presidential election.

The 2000 Presidential Elections: Alternation in Power and Electoral Democracy

The presidential campaign for the 2000 electoral process took off immediately after the 1997 midterm elections (Schedler 2000, 9). Ernesto Zedillo was the first president after the Mexican revolution who did not appoint his own successor, in line with his professed democratic convictions (Schedler 2000, 10). After some months of hesitation, the PRI held an open primary to select their candidate in which Francisco Labastida was chosen. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the so-called “moral leader” of the PRD, was the “natural candidate” of that political party, and Vicente Fox, a former businessman that had won the governorship of his home state of Guanajuato in 1995, had captivated the PAN with an early media campaign that put him well ahead of any other potential candidate (Shedler 2000, 9; Preston and Dillon 2004, 191).

An electoral alliance of all opposition parties—in order to defeat the PRI—had failed to materialize,139 and the voters who were against the PRI had to decide which presidential candidate was most likely to overthrow the “official” party. A “proregime-antiregime cleavage”

139 In order to prevent the historical differences between the PAN and the PRD from helping the PRI to hang onto the presidency, in 1999 the two parties negotiated an electoral coalition. After several months of talks, at last the PAN and the PRD agreed on a common policy platform and a formula for assigning legislative candidates. Nevertheless, ultimately there was no agreement among the two parties regarding the selection of a common presidential candidate, and there was no big electoral coalition.
came to dominate the Mexican party system (Klesner 2005, 23). Vicente Fox capitalized on the prospects of ousting the PRI from power, continuously appealing to Mexicans to vote for a change. Importantly, by “change,” voters and opposition politicians alike meant evicting the PRI from Los Pinos, the presidential residence (Moreno 2007, 16). Vicente Fox showed a resolute will to win. His consistent lead over Cárdenas in the polls convinced opposition voters not to “waste” their votes, and many thought that their vote would indeed make a difference this time (Pastor 2000, 22).  

Political campaigning played a very important role in the 2000 elections. The three major candidates ran intensive media campaigns, held large rallies all over the country, and participated in two televised debates. The perception that Vicente Fox had won the first debate contributed to the declining support for Francisco Labastida and helped frame the election as a referendum on PRI's rule (Lawson 2004). Two effects produced by the candidates were important in shaping the voting choice of strategic voters (Magaloni and Poiré 2004, 303): first, the expectation that a given candidate was capable of defeating the PRI, and second, the perception of the candidate’s competence (Klesner 2004). Partisanship had weakened compared to previous elections, and prospective economic assessments outweighed retrospective ones (Domínguez 2004, p.329). Furthermore, economic considerations were secondary to the historic symbolism associated with the ousting of the PRI from the presidency (Magaloni and Poiré 2004).

Television and radio election coverage reached equitable levels for the first time in a presidential race, and IFE and Alianza Cívica were monitoring media coverage. The polling data was favourable to a candidate from an opposition party (Espino 2009). The campaigns included intense advertising in television spots. The IFE news monitoring of national and regional radio and television indicated that between mid-January and early June 2000, the PRI received 39.8 percent of news coverage, the PAN-led Alliance for Change (right/centre) received 27.4 percent with Vicente Fox as presidential candidate, and the PRD-led Alliance for Mexico (left/centre),

140 By starting his campaign as early as he did, Vicente Fox had gained a wide lead in the opinion polls before his competitors entered the race.
which had Cárdenas as its candidate, received 20.18 percent of the largely neutral coverage on nationwide radio and television news (Trejo 2001, 447).141

The election itself was a "masterpiece of logistical and administrative efficiency" (Schedler 2000, 14). Although the exact percentages varied, all exit polls and preliminary results of quick counts coincided in giving Vicente Fox a clear lead over Francisco Labastida. At 11:00 PM, IFE’s President, José Woldenberg, presented the official quick counts that confirmed Fox’s victory beyond the margin of statistical error. Immediately after, President Zedillo appeared on national television and acknowledged the opposition’s victory, and a few minutes later, the PRI candidate did the same (Shedler 2000, 15; Preston and Dillon 2004, 500). According to the final results of the presidential election, Vicente Fox obtained 43.5 percent, Francisco Labastida 36.9 percent, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas 17.0 percent of the vote (Schedler 2000, 16).142

Vicente Fox’s victory was, in part, the result of declining PRI legitimacy and his ability to appeal to a broad array of voters (Klesner 2004; Rubio 2004). But the existence of independent electoral institutions was crucial for the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.143 Although corruption charges and the effects of the economic crisis were important factors that led to the loss of support for the PRI, the country’s transition to electoral democracy was possible because of the compounded effects of successive electoral reforms, most recently that of 1996. Vicente Fox’s victory legitimized the electoral process and demonstrated that “the will of the electorate” could be achieved at the ballot box (Camp 2007, 290). Mexico's July 2, 2000, Presidential Election was widely regarded as the triumph of democracy and the coming of a new era in Mexican politics. Given the widespread expectations of a new and better future, at that moment Mexico appeared to be full of possibility and promise (Shirk 2005, 1).

After 2000, the country’s strengthened electoral management bodies “emerged as true legal guardians, willing to pursue legitimate entry points into complex investigations” (Eisenstadt

141 For more on the campaigns and electoral process of 2000, see Domínguez and Lawson (2004); Eisenstadt (2004a, 2004b); Shedler (2000); Trejo Delarbre (2001).
142 There were a total of five candidates.
143 The Mexican case cannot easily be classified in any specific transition type, given the lack of a “foundational pact” or the collapse of a regime; Loaeza (2000) has used the concept of protracted transition, in which a central feature is the length of time taken by political actors to negotiate rules that were accepted by all parties concerned.
2004a, 739). Both the PRI and the PAN had engaged in undeclared campaign spending during the 2000 electoral process. The electoral court ruled against the PAN for excessive campaign spending and fined both the party and the PVEM, its coalition partner in 2000.\(^{144}\) The PRI was fined $100 million for illegal campaign spending, and although critics argued that the fine and the “lukewarm criminal investigations” were insufficient, the scandal was handled more sternly than observers imagined possible (Eisenstadt 2004a, 739).

The changes in the Mexican political system, triggered by gradual reforms to the electoral legislation, for the most part were not followed by an integral transformation of the country’s political institutions (Córdova 2007, 680).\(^{145}\) Mauricio Merino’s characterization of the process of democratization in Mexico as a “voted transition” (2003) depicts the peaceful nature of the transition—the country did not suffer the collapse of an unsustainable regime, as happened in former communist countries. At the same time, this notion of the Mexican democratization process also recognizes that there were no pacts or agreements among elites regarding broader reforms in order to adapt or reconfigure the country’s political and institutional framework as a whole (Dresser 2008, 242).\(^{146}\) In sum, notwithstanding the importance of the changes to the country’s electoral legislation from the 1970s to 1996, in the stage of electoral democracy Mexico suffered the consequences of overemphasizing the vote as the means, and even as the end, of political activity (Merino 2003, 45).

The successive and gradual electoral reforms had produced independent electoral institutions and a quite well-developed party system (Crespo 2007); however, the norms of the new political game and the lack of agreements regarding other policy aspects still presented important

\(^{144}\) Vicente Fox’s campaign coordinator, businessman Lino Korrodi, and a network of other supporters, had laundered $9 million pesos through “parallel” donor agencies; the money was in turn sent back to Mexico into “Friends of Fox” campaign coffers, outside the regulatory purview of Mexico’s electoral management body (Eisenstadt 2004a, 738).

\(^{145}\) The most important changes since 1990 include the creation of the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH) in 1989 (it was incorporated into the Constitution in 1992); the reforms to the judicial power during the Zedillo Administration, which gave the Supreme Court the final say in constitutional controversies; and the creation of the Federal Institute of Access to Public Information (IFAI) in 2002.

\(^{146}\) The Mexican case cannot easily be classified as any specific transition type, given the lack of a “foundational pact” or the collapse of a regime; Loaeza (2000) has used the concept of protracted transition, in which a central feature is the length of time taken by political actors to negotiate rules that were acceptable and accepted to all parties concerned.
challenges to fulfill the demands of a more plural and heterogeneous society. With the PRI out of the presidency, Mexico experienced a shift from a virtually omnipotent president to a weakening executive, and from a hegemonic party system to multi-party competition (Eisenstadt and Poiré 2005; Pastor and Wise 2005; Weldon 2005). Since 1997, and most notably after 2000, one of the most binding constraints to Mexico’s democratic consolidation was the need to manage executive-legislative relations in a presidential system in which the president’s party was the minority in the Legislature, in the context of a divided Congress.  

Without the “metaconstitutional” trappings of a unity government led by a highly disciplined hegemonic party, the president’s constitutional authority over legislation turned out to be rather minimal (Weldon 2004, 154). In this context, the absence of executive control of the legislative power largely led to gridlock and partisan infighting, rather than to any widespread changes in the relations between the executive and legislative branches. As Ochoa (2005) states, articles in the press emphasized the institutional and political culture deficiencies during the Fox Administration.

Since 1997, the divisions among and within the three major political parties and their refusal to bridge them created “a state of governmental deadlock” (Krause 2006). Although competitive elections do exist, the structures of a presidentialist system made it difficult to reach agreements in the context of growing pluralism (Córdova 2008; Dresser 2008). President Fox’s failure to work closely with his own party’s caucus in Congress and his inability to negotiate majorities “doomed” the ambitious reform agenda that he had promised (Eisenstadt and Poiré 2005, 5).

147 It is not uncommon for presidential democracies with divided governments to face difficulties in reaching agreements, given the lack of incentives for political parties to cooperate with one another when formulating policies; Mainwaring (1993) argued that presidentialism with a multi-party legislature often leads to gridlock.

148 The National Freedom of Information Law, approved in Congress in 2002, was one notable exception; it was a landmark legislation guaranteeing the public’s right to request and receive information from the executive branch of government. This legislation rests on a premise of disclosure, defining all government information as public, and directing government agencies and entities to favour “the principle of publicity of information” over secrecy (Federal Transparency and Access to Public Government Information Law 2002). Notwithstanding its importance, this law stopped short of addressing some aspects: although the legislation is explicit about the executive’s obligations to transparency, it does not establish the same kind of standards for the legislative and the judiciary branches or for local governments.

149 Although President Fox’s reforms to strengthen regulation of the stock market, banking, insurance, mortgages and other financial services were approved, as Eisenstadt and Poiré (2005) argue, those were
Opposition parties in Congress rejected his proposals for fiscal, energy, and labour reforms, as well as other initiatives related to the so-called reform of the state (including consecutive re-election of legislators and rules to foster the politicians’ political accountability) and of the judiciary (Dresser 2008, 249; Peschard 2006b, 61). Notwithstanding the existence of an increasingly competitive party system, the expectations for better democratic governance and government accountability were not fulfilled. National political parties, in particular their leaders, emerged as the key actors in Mexican politics (IMEP 2007b). This was a logical step towards the configuration of a more competitive party system, in which political parties had gained autonomy from the executive branch and from the government. Although this was a positive aspect of the process of democratization from a dominant-party authoritarian regime, the lack of updated legislation to promote party and legislators’ accountability arguably meant that political parties privileged their own political interests, above those of the citizens who elect them to power (IMEP 2007b).

In a country such as Mexico, where there is no consensus among political parties regarding the nature of reforms in other areas, this had negative implications: every political decision and negotiation appeared to be guided by the aim to privilege party interests (Dresser 2008), no less of which were electoral considerations. This complicated agreements in Congress, as politicians failed to promote stronger political institutions capable of delivering on the expectations of the general public. Although it can be argued that lack of agreements can be expected in a democracy, the consequences of this are more negative in a transitional country such as Mexico, where political institutions either are weak, outdated, or simply do not exist. The absence or weakness of democratic institutions has detrimental implications for dealing with social and economic problems, and, as Camp (2007) argues, can even hamper the success of democracy.

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only low-cost reforms that technocrats at the finance secretariat (Hacienda) executed with key legislators from the PRI and the PAN.

150 The scope of the analysis for this work ends in 2007, but it should be noted that in the first two years of the Enrique Peña Nieto Administration, who took office in December 2012, various structural reforms (including education, tax, and telecommunications, among others) were approved.
In the stage of electoral democracy, the power of the mass media, in particular that of the television duopoly (Televisa and TV Azteca), vis-à-vis the government increased significantly (Carreño 2007; Dorce et al. 2014; Esteinou 2010; Trejo Delarbre 2001, 2005, 2007). Trejo Delarbre (2001) elaborates on the power of mass media corporations compared to the government and describes the situation as a “mediacracy,” with a television duopoly entirely driven by commercial interests and having little regard for the quality of information. Critics also argued that the power of the mass media could even determine the fortunes of politicians (Carreño 2007; Córdova 2008; Esteinou 2010; Trejo Delarbre 2001). Although this characterization of big mass media corporations is not very different from that in other contexts, the problem in Mexico was compounded because no changes had been made to the Federal Law of Radio and Television of 1960 to adapt it to the new context.\footnote{This resulted in gaps in the regulation of key aspects, such as clear rules to obtain or renew broadcasting licenses and the right of citizens to reply to information that concerned them directly. An updated legal framework for the media in the process of democratic deepening is important in order to foster internal and external plurality and diversity of the media system for an inclusive representation of all viewpoints.} Legislators—potentially candidates to other elected positions in the future—were reluctant to approve legislation that would hurt the interests of media corporations, whose support they would need (Author’s interviews with two Mexican legislators 2011). This fact supports the notion of a mediacracy.

Even before the 2006 elections, politicians and academics were concerned about the influence of the television duopoly, particularly in relation to electoral processes: political parties were paying increasingly large sums to the duopoly to buy spaces for electoral advertising, which put them at a disadvantage to negotiate rates and time slots to allocate their electoral spots (Becerra 2008; Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Córdova 2008; Trejo Delarbre 2010). The central role of the mass media (radio and television) corporations in electoral campaigns allowed owners of big media corporations to influence policy decisions that would affect their interests. Perhaps the most emblematic example of the power of the mass media was the so-called Televisa Law. In 2005, mass media corporations successfully exerted pressure on political parties and legislators to swiftly approve a bill to reform the Federal Law of Radio and Television. The new legislation dealt with the licensing process and gave priority and preference to Televisa and TV Azteca regarding the duration and renewal of the licenses (Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2011; Trejo
Delarbre 2010). Nevertheless, the constitutionality of the law was questioned, and one year later the Supreme Court overturned the bill. Approval of new media legislation regarding the allocation and contest for broadcasting licenses to generate more competition was elusive until 2013.152

The failure to come up with new legislation had implications. The increasing influence of the television duopoly in specific campaigns became a contentious issue in the 2006 electoral process. This issue was addressed afterward in the discussions and outcome of the 2007 electoral reform, as I explain in Chapter 6.153

The 2006 Presidential Election and Its Aftermath: Polarization and a New Electoral Reform

The context of the first post-transition election was completely different from that of 2000, when an important sector of the citizenry had the common objective of ousting the PRI from the presidency. In 2006, the central cleavage that had defined Mexican politics in the 1990s—pro-regime versus anti-regime—could no longer guide voters (Klesner 2007). These turned their attention to non-regime issues, such as economic policy, social policy, and crime control. The 2006 race was a choice between policy programs (Moreno 2007, 15).

Andrés Manuel López Obrador was the presidential candidate for the leftist Coalition for the Good of All (Coalición por el Bien de Todos), led by the PRD. As mayor of Mexico City since 2000, López Obrador was a national political figure. His lead in the polls made him “the natural candidate” for the PRD (Moreno 2007, 15). His 10- to 12-point advantage in vote intention for most of 2005 and early 2006 seemed insurmountable.154 Felipe Calderón Hinojosa was selected

152 When Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI took office in December 2012, PRI, PAN, and PRD agreed to push forth ambitious legal reforms, including constitutional amendments regarding the media. The most important aspects of the reform include the addition of two commercial broadcasters (to put an end to the predominance of the duopoly of Televisa and TV Azteca), a public broadcaster, as well as more diverse cable television options.

153 This is a relevant aspect that helps to understand the two opposing positions regarding electoral advertising and the role of electronic media corporations in the discussions about the 2007 electoral reform (which was partly about reducing the influence of mass media corporations).

154 López Obrador had frequently used the word “hope” when referring to his programs, his intentions and himself (Moreno 2007, 18).
as the PAN’s candidate in a party primary. The PRI presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo, was nominated after a virtually uncontested primary election open to all voters. His image was perceived quite negatively by the electorate as a whole, as well as by many in his own party (Langston 2007, 3; Moreno 2007, 15).

The political context surrounding López Obrador’s candidacy set much of the tone of the campaign. In 2005, a prosecution started by the Federal Attorney General’s Office accused him of allegedly having disobeyed a court order in a land-use case (Estrada and Poiré 2006, 76). As a result, he was subject to impeachment (desafuero) by Congress. The heated public debate that took place from 2004 to mid-2005 was the first sign of political polarization, with those supporting impeachment and the rule of law on one side, and those opposing impeachment and espousing arguments of injustice and conspiracy on the other (Moreno 2007, 15). Fiery public protests forced federal authorities to back down and drop the charges (Estrada and Poiré 2006, 76), thus enabling him to run for president in 2006. Nevertheless, the issue of the desafuero remained polarizing and deepened distrust in the electoral process (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, pg. 13). For López Obrador’s supporters, that episode was a blatant indication that the government would do everything possible to prevent him from becoming the next president.

In previous presidential elections, the differences between the PAN and the PRD candidates were less obvious, as both parties challenged the hegemonic PRI with broad pro-democracy appeals. In 2006, however, the two leading contenders, Felipe Calderón and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, represented markedly different positions on key economic issues: the former promised continuity for the country’s free-market reforms and focused on investment to promote growth; by contrast, the latter advocated for alleviating poverty through state spending on infrastructure and social welfare (Bruhn and Green 2007, 33) and continued his criticism of neoliberal policies.

Party elites were the main “source of political polarization” in the country (Lawson 2007, 47). Bruhn and Green (2007) agree, arguing that ideological polarization in Mexico remained mostly confined to political elites. In 2006 they found strong ideological differences between party elites

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155 Because of the legal timing and the possibility of being jailed, if López Obrador had been stripped of his immunity as an elected official, he would have been prevented from running for president.
156 Although Mexico’s 2006 presidential election was the first post-PRI-regime confrontation of left against right, the effects of class, in comparison to ideology, were small (See Moreno 2007).
in the PAN and the PRD: whereas PAN congressional candidates believed in investment and individual responsibility to reduce poverty, their PRD counterparts endorsed an expanded social safety net with greater government responsibility in providing for the poor. As Bruhn and Greene (2007) explain, there were important divisions among Mexican political elites on issues such as economic and social policy, crime control, and relations with the United States of America, while the views of their bases were not that far apart.

The campaigns lasted a little over five months, and the three main candidates were constantly present in increasingly confrontational spots in television and radio. The close race between Felipe Calderón and Andrés Manuel López Obrador “unleashed a negative campaign” in which both sides sought to disqualify the opponent (Parás and Coleman 2006, 10). There were claims of corruption, nepotism, dishonesty, and irresponsibility (Serra 2009a, 11). Several of PAN’s spots portrayed López Obrador as a “danger for the country,” a risk to economic stability, and a return to Mexico’s past of crisis, inflation, and debt (Moreno 2007, 18).

Business organizations, through controversial advertisements in the mass media, warned against the prospect of authoritarianism and populism, referring to López Obrador; this led the left-wing candidate and the PRD to denounce a conspiracy by the Mexican oligarchy (Serra 2009a, 12). President Fox openly asked voters to endorse his party, promoting the idea that it would provide stability. This was highly controversial, as the electoral legislation in place prevented the president from campaigning for his party’s candidates; hence, Fox’s critics viewed it as an unlawful intrusion in the process (Espino 2009, 240). López Obrador’s tactics during the

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157 Television was the main outlet through which the candidates promoted their proposals and attacks. The electoral authorities had several difficulties in auditing the parties’ media spending (Murayama 2006; Buendía and Azpiroz 2011). For more on the media coverage of the 2006 presidential campaigns, see Trejo’s analysis (2010).

158 The Coalition for the Good of All complained that Calderón’s ads were impugning López Obrador’s character with lies. Although in a divided decision, the IFE originally took a more moderate stance to avoid censoring campaign advertising, the electoral court forced the IFE to remove objectionable PAN ads. This prompted the IFE to intervene and censor spots from both the PRD and the PAN for “smearing” competitors without evidence (Eisenstadt 2007, 41).

159 Despite poor economic performance in the first three years of the Fox administration, there was economic growth during the two years before the election, bolstered by unprecedented high oil prices, which helped Calderón’s campaign.

160 President Fox openly told voters to “continue on this road” and that “we have to change the rider but not the horse” (Moreno 2007, 16)
campaign, such as his decision not to participate in the first presidential debate, as well as his famous recrimination of President Fox for his statements of support to the PAN candidate with a “¡Cállate chachalaca!” (“shut up jungle parrot!”), had a strong negative effect on his position in the polls. He initiated a counter-attack in May, but it appeared to be too late, as he had not only lost his considerable advantage, but was behind in the public opinion polls for the first time in two years (Espino 2009, 241).

In what is deemed to be the most competitive election of all times in Mexico, the margin of Felipe Calderón’s victory in 2006 was very narrow. According to the IFE’s tally, the PAN candidate had won the highest share of the votes, at 36.7 percent, López Obrador’s Coalition for the Good of All obtained 36.1 percent, and the PRI only 22.7 percent (IFE 2006). Calderón had received only 233,831 votes more than López Obrador, out of over 41,700,000 cast (Eisenstadt 2007, 39), a mere 0.56 percent difference (Eisenstadt 2007; IFE 2006). López Obrador never accepted the result of the election. His coalition rebuked the entire electoral process based on claims of lack of a level playing field of party finance, accused President Fox of actively campaigning for Calderón, and blamed the federal government of “buying votes” by tying the provision of social services to partisan support. López Obrador also made other procedural claims: that the IFE manipulated the preliminary results program (PREP), botched district-level vote tallying and reporting, and replaced poll-station workers at the polls (Eisenstadt 2007, 42). Although the Electoral Court conducted an unprecedented recount of some 9 percent of the ballot boxes, a third of those “called out” in the complaint of the Coalition for the Good of All, the recounts did not reveal a widespread pattern of electoral fraud that was deliberate and “determinant” in the outcome, and thus did not invoke the “generic cause of annulment” demanded by López Obrador (Eisenstadt 2007, 42). In the ruling and declaration of validity of the election, the Federal Electoral Court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF) rejected the idea of a “manufactured fraud” (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 14). The TEPJF concluded that issues such as the degree of the impact of “negative campaigns” in the result of the election were not sufficiently proven, or their impact could not be measured (TEPJF 2006, 472). Although several irregularities did occur, they did not seem to have been orchestrated by

161 Later that year, López Obrador proclaimed himself as the country’s “legitimate president” in a ceremony in Mexico City's Zócalo (central plaza) in the anniversary of the Mexican Revolution.
any government institution, and they were too small to have changed the results (Serra 2009a, 78).

The small margin of Felipe Calderón’s victory, added to the polarization observed before and during the campaign, contributed to post-electoral battles that ranged from demonstrations and street blockades in the name of “civil resistance” to fist fights in Congress (Bruhn and Green 2007, 33). Several months after the election, the parties that formed the defeated Coalition for the Good of All continued criticizing the electoral arbiter, as well as third parties—namely business groups—that allegedly had intervened in the campaign by purchasing electoral spots. This also fed a climate of growing animosity toward the mass media; those political parties that constituted López Obrador’s coalition accused the mass media of being biased (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 14). The post-electoral conflict evidenced considerable partisan polarization, mostly confined to political elites (Bruhn and Green 2007). The climate was one of political confrontation and electoral controversies.

Such political context fostered the “old discourse of distrust” (Córdova 2007, 676). The PRD and its allies held almost a third of the seats in Congress, and had decided not to enter into any agreements with the new government. However, the political crisis was not long-lasting, as all major political parties wanted to prevent a similar post-electoral conflict in the future and thus agreed to talk about a new electoral reform. Compromise seemed to emerge in Congress: the need to strengthen political institutions was recognized with the approval in 2006 of a law that mandated legislators to negotiate a new state reform.

The aftermath of the 2006 Presidential Elections was, no doubt, a difficult test for the young Mexican democracy and underscored the difficulties for the democratic deepening process. The difference between the margins of victory in 2000 and 2006 proved to be a difficult test for the country’s electoral organs and underscored the need for new electoral reforms. It was clear that the existing legislation was not sufficient to avoid political conflict and to ensure an orderly

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162 Several academics examined the claims of foul play, concluding that convincing evidence of a fraud could not be found (see for example Poiré and Estrada 2006; Pliego 2007).

163 Felipe Calderón was accompanied by a military escort as he took the oath of office before Congress, while some PRD legislators tried to force their way onto the stage to prevent his inauguration.
power change acceptable to all. Hence, the need to reform the existing electoral legislation gained traction.

As I explain in Chapter 6, the 2007 electoral reform introduced significant changes to the electoral legislation of 1996, some of which were highly controversial. The reform established a new model for electoral advertising, which prohibited the purchase of airtime by political parties; instead, it mandated that electoral spots should be broadcast through official government-allocated airtimes. This meant an important loss of revenue for mass media corporations, which were very vocal in their opposition to the reform. The new legislation also modified part of the structure of the Federal Electoral Institute: it removed two-thirds of the then electoral councillors, who were appointed in 2003 and were supposed to finish their tenure in 2010. It also created an additional internal comptrollership. In addition to these controversial aspects of the legislation (extensively discussed among opinion-makers), the reform also reduced funding for political parties and established new rules for electoral coalitions. The 2007 reform not only aimed to prevent some of the challenges observed in the 2006 elections, it also addressed issues that had been previously discussed by academics and other specialists. The extent of the post-electoral crisis of 2006 meant that the reform was not only necessary, it was also urgent. As Córdova (2007, 676) writes, given the distrust of an important portion of the electorate, it was clear that unless changes were made to the electoral legislation, the IFE would not be able to successfully organize a new election.

Final Remarks

In this chapter I covered the historical background to understand the role and the evolution of the Mexican press, as well as the process of democratization. For much of the twentieth century, the media played a legitimizing role for the PRI regime. In the context of a deep economic crisis, the PRI, since 1977, had introduced gradual and incremental changes to Mexican electoral laws. By the 1990s, political opening and print media liberalization were building on each other. There was an interaction between, on the one hand, a regime that, albeit slowly and gradually, implemented political reforms that eventually allowed other parties to access power, and, on the other hand, an increasingly independent and assertive press that provided an outlet for a growing number of critical opinion-makers, including opposition voices.
The transition to electoral democracy in 2000 did not fulfill citizens’ expectations or increase confidence in governmental or political institutions. Beyond the electoral sphere, the political changes did not produce mechanisms to enhance the democratic process in other areas, in the context of a weak presidential system in a divided Congress. Serious economic and social problems, the most widespread of which are poverty and inequality, corruption, and a weak rule of law, were not solved. In this chapter I highlighted the differences between 1996, when there was broad support for electoral reform, and 2007, which saw deeper disagreements about what the necessary changes were in a context of political polarization. The political stalemate that for the most part prevailed in Mexico since 2000, the difficulties in adapting to a new policy-making process, and the problems of passing much-needed reforms underscore the challenges for democratic consolidation in Mexico. In this context, the media becomes more important, as it can either contribute to these problems or help solve them. The role of the Red Circle in guiding opinion among the country’s elites in the stage of electoral democracy in Mexico is not very different from what it was under PRI rule. Only a small minority of the public reads the print media, which does not appear to respond to popular needs; by contrast, the mass media (television and radio), given their wider reach, can influence the public independently.

The changes to Mexican electoral laws in 1996 and 2007 had important implications for the media system. Electoral reforms not only opened more spaces for political competition, but also accelerated the liberalization of the media (television, radio, and newspapers). Chapter 4 explains how the press became increasingly plural and competitive, Chapters 5 and 6 address the interaction between democratizing reforms and the opinions published in the press, and Chapter 6 underscores the importance of electronic media (television and radio) in the electoral sphere.
Chapter 4
The Mexican Press and Opinion-Makers

The development and functioning of the media in Mexico for most of the twentieth century was shaped by a broad and comprehensive system of media controls. Despite this, critical intellectuals (mostly on the left) found a few outlets where they could publish their opinions. This provided a façade of press “freedom” for the regime—helping to bolster its legitimacy. This also allowed a small contingent of critical journalists to survive and expand once greater opportunity became available.

The economic crisis of the 1980s and the subsequent economic reforms generated the liberalization of the Mexican political system and, almost simultaneously, of the press. I argue in this chapter that these two processes reinforced each other, but both were caused by structural (economic) reasons. The gradual transition process was the perfect context for opinion-makers—a group that continued growing in size, independence, and diversity—to make a contribution towards electoral democratization in the 1990s. In the stage of electoral democracy, however, polarization increased within this group.

Authoritarianism and Press Controls

For most of the twentieth century, the media—including newspapers, radio, and television—played the same function in Mexico that they do under any authoritarian regime: that is, functioning as a voice of the ruling elite (Carreño 2007; Hallin 2000; Hughes 2003, 2006; Lawson 2002) and were central in legitimizing the PRI regime. Although the media was officially independent, they were highly controlled by the government through a comprehensive and wide set of mechanisms, which were crucial for the economic survival of media enterprises. The mass media were an important part of the system of political power. Journalism was passive and controversial topics were off limits (Hallin 2000).

Freedom of expression was incorporated in the Mexican Constitution of 1917. The PRI regime, however, also justified the subordination of the media to the requirements of the post-

164 Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the Constitution. Article 6 states that: free expression of ideas is limited only in the case of moral attack; the rights of third parties being affected; provocations of crime
revolutionary nationalism (Carreño 2007). Indeed, the informal practices of the PRI, such as
clientelism, were extended to gain control of the media (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002).
The links between the media and political power in Mexico during the twentieth century can be
better understood, as Hallin (2000) put it, through an instrumentalist political economy approach,
which considers the media as instruments of private owners with political ties. For the most part,
private ownership of the media did not mean autonomy from the government during the
authoritarian regime. The officialist character of the Mexican press was the result not only of
government pressure, but of “collusion between economic and political elites based on social ties
and shared interests” (Hallin 2000, 101). As Lawson (2002, 30) recounts, while the government
did manage Mexico's news agency, Notimex (created in 1968), as well as the daily newspaper El
Nacional, direct state ownership of the media was relatively limited. The government supported
sympathetic private media and, when necessary, replaced independent owners with pro-regime
individuals.

Press control was rarely based on repression (Orme 1997; Riva Palacio 1997; Castañeda 1997;
Lawson 2002). Rather, the government and the media were intertwined in a rent-seeking system
that limited the latter’s freedom and independence. As Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002,
176) explain, these arrangements, in particular a clientelistic type of relationship between the
government, reporters and media owners, generated a “dependent group of journalists, far from
the characteristic horizontal solidarity of journalists,” and resulted in favorable coverage for the
regime. Clientelism was most evident in the newspaper industry, which received benefits “in
return for political loyalty” to the state (Hallin 2000, 100). For the most part, press coverage

and the disturbance of public order. Article 7 states that “the liberty to write and publish on any subject is
inviolate”; it forbids prior censorship and establishes that press freedom has no limitation except respect
for private life, morality and the public peace (Constitution Política).

165 Most newspapers disappeared during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920).

166 Hallin and Mancini (2004) explain that clientelism permits the political instrumentalization of both
public and private media for particularistic purposes. The media is controlled by external actors (the
government, political parties, politicians, economic, or social groups) who disperse resources or other
favours to media owners or journalists, who in turn say what those patrons want. This dependency
hampers journalism as an independent and autonomous profession. Any hierarchical and dependence type
of relationship causes journalists or media owners to be guided by particular interests, rather than by an
aim to present factual information to the general public.
reflected the official agenda, for which public officials usually were the main sources of information (Riva Palacio 1997, 2004; Lawson 2002; Carreño 2007). Until the 1970s, the access of the general population to information was limited to what the government was willing to share; as Granados Chapa, a well-respected Mexican journalist recounted in an interview, it was a common practice among many reporters to only collect press releases from their sources and write news reports based solely on that information.

Among the important instruments of formal governmental control of the press was the Productora e Importadora de Papel, S.A. (Producer and Importer of Paper), better known as PIPSA. It was created in 1935, as an instrument to import, produce, and distribute great quantities of paper (newsprint), and was the only agency authorized by the government to import newsprint in Mexico.\(^{167}\) PIPSA helped publishers keep their costs low (Benavides 2000) and provided adequate supplies during periods of scarcity (Cole 1975, 68). This led to the government’s use of newsprint as a mechanism of control (Lawson 2000; Riva Palacio 2004; Trejo Delarbre 1991). Since it would threaten to withhold newsprint from anti-government periodicals, PIPSA assured support for the PRI regime.\(^{168}\) PIPSA was the “archetype” of the state instrument to control and censor the press and a symbol of the lack of freedom of expression in Mexico (Riva Palacio 2004, 181).

As Benavides (2000) explains, *gacetillas*\(^{169}\)—advertising disguised as news—illustrate the historical importance of government advertising as a key element of press control in Mexico. Gacetillas were, in the words of Rockwell (2002, 111), “planted stories that are paid for just like an ad.” These spaces, however, were not labeled as advertising, which made them indistinguishable from news (Cole 1975, 70). *Gacetillas* were used by politicians and

\(^{167}\) This monopoly ended in the 1990s. Control of newsprint was a very effective way of media control in the authoritarian period. In the twenty-first century, however, this mechanism is obsolete given the transformations in communications and information technologies.

\(^{168}\) When the news magazine *Proceso* was about to start publication in 1976, PIPSA refused to provide it with newsprint. However, the publisher was able to buy it on the black market and *Proceso* started publication on time. Also in the 1970s, PIPSA reduced the supply of newsprint to the newspaper *El Norte* from Monterrey by more than 80%; nevertheless, as the paper gained readers, it started importing newsprint and a few years later it doubled its circulation (Palmeri 1995).

\(^{169}\) The term *gacetilla* may be translated as “news brief”; it is used as such in most of the Spanish-speaking world. *Gacetilla* means: “reading notice” only in Mexico (Benavides 2000, 91).
government officials for several purposes: to receive positive coverage, to show their support for the president or for candidates of the ruling party, to deny negative reports or rumours, and to discredit their political enemies or social groups that threatened to disrupt the status quo (Benavides 2000, 95). The revenue coming from Gacetillas thus was a form of subsidy from the government to the press. Gacetillas, along with revenue from other governmental advertising, are key to explain why newspapers with very low circulation figures could survive: in contrast to newspapers in liberal democracies, primarily driven by high circulation rates, in Mexico the revenue from gacetillas meant that there was no need for newspapers to increase sales. Gacetillas made it possible for many pro-government newspapers to operate without serious regard to circulation, commercial advertising, or other mechanisms of financial viability (Lawson 2002, 32).

Other instruments used by the government to entice compliant newspaper owners included tax exemptions, subsidized utilities, free service from the government-owned news agency (Notimex), bulk purchases by government agencies, and credit at below market rates (Lawson 2002, 32). Reporters frequently accepted favours from politicians. Moreover, journalists’ salaries were typically very low and most of them received regular cash payments from the government agencies they covered (Rockwell 2002; Hallin 2000; Lawson 2002; Riva Palacio 1997, 1998, 2004; Granados Chapa, author’s interview; Moreno, author’s interview). These payments were known as “chayotes” or “embutes” (kickbacks) and were generally higher than the monthly salary of an average reporter. Moreover, editors and reporters commonly received payoffs from news sources.

The heavy dependence of newspapers on state patronage had a detrimental impact on their work, and it also limited the levels of development of journalism as a differentiated and autonomous profession (Carreño 2007). Although there were exceptions, the quality of much news reporting was poor. The nature of the relationship between the government and the majority of the press led to low levels of professionalism among journalists, who received little training and were paid poorly. All of this hampered investigative reporting and discouraged critical news articles. As a well-known Mexican veteran journalist and news anchor put it in an interview, “journalists’ self-

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170 This type of payment was prevalent until the early 1990s.
censorship resulted in favorable news coverage for the regime.” Positive coverage would then bring in a monthly payment from that particular government agency or more gacetilla revenue for the newspaper (Lawson 2002, 31).

The government’s influence on editorial decisions relied on an understanding among print media owners and reporters regarding the limits to criticism of the government, as well as agreement on those policy issues and institutions that should not be subject to any form of adverse commentary (Carreño 2007). Newspaper editors and government press offices worked closely together (Orme 1997), which further limited the opportunities or incentives to develop an independent news media at the national level.

All the mechanisms described above had a role in shaping the relationship that the PRI regime established with the country’s media, including newspapers, television, and radio: as Adler (1993) explains, the traditional positive treatment of the President and the PRI presidential candidates is a clear example. Positive media coverage served to legitimize single-party rule, maintain the image of the omnipotent president, create the image of a ruling party presidential candidate capable of solving problems, provide a space for a façade of competitive elections to play out before a nonparticipating public, and label regime critics as outcasts or radicals (Hughes 2003, 2006).

When the government failed to secure newspapers’ compliance with official demands through the instruments described above, it applied more traditional forms of censorship and press control: manipulation of access to information, blacklisting, intimidation tactics, harassment, and sometimes outright repression (Conger 1997; Lawson 2002). One of the most paradigmatic cases of governmental censorship is that of daily Excélsior. Julio Scherer, the paper’s director from 1968 to 1976, was arbitrarily removed from his position and expelled from the daily in an assembly of the cooperative in 1976. This was widely seen as a coup orchestrated by the then president, Luis Echeverría, who then replaced the entire editorial board with more pro-government staff (Hughes 2006, 83; Lawson 2002, 66-67). An additional 250 journalists left the

\footnote{A partisan bias in favour of the PRI during election campaigns prevailed until changes to the electoral legislation were approved as part of the 1996 electoral reform.}
paper in solidarity with Scherer, and many of them founded several publications that would become the core of the country’s independent print media sector (Riva Palacio 2004, 161).

The print media played a different role than did television and radio: since the 1930s, the latter two exercised the greatest influence on the general population (Fromson 1996). Televisa—the powerful Mexican broadcaster—had a mutually beneficial relationship with the government during the twentieth century. Hallin (2000, 102) has pointed to the significant “interpenetration” and “convergence of interests” between political and economic elites, and Sarmiento (2005) notes that the system permitted Televisa to absorb several broadcast operators. Fernández and Paxman (2002) explain that it was easier for the government to deal with a single large corporation instead of several smaller ones. Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, owner of Televisa, famously stated on more than one occasion that he was a “soldier of the PRI” (Fernández and Paxman 2000). Televisa operated in favour of the government by enhancing its legitimacy and contributing to build public support.

A Press for the Elite

Since the authoritarian period, the Mexican press was more important for the country’s elites than for the rest of the population. Newspaper circulation in Mexico is small in proportion to the population, and readership is low. In his 2007 study of the Mexican media, Carreño (2007, 32) provides figures that help put the Mexican numbers in perspective: he estimates that newspaper circulation in Mexico is between 40 and 20 copies per 1000 people, in contrast to 300 in the United States, and 600 copies per 1000 people in Denmark. The study of Mexico's communications market has been hampered by the tradition of many media operators to hide their circulation and audience figures, as well as their financial results; most newspapers keep their daily circulation figures as “a well-guarded secret” (Sarmiento 2005, 286).  

172 In Mexico, radio and television function under a system of licenses that are both allocated and taken away by the government in a discretionary manner. Until 2013, attempts to modify such system were controversial and elusive.

173 Sarmiento (2005, 287) estimates that even with more than 20 dailies in the Mexico City metropolitan area, their total everyday circulation was less than 1 million copies, and in the entire country newspapers have a total daily circulation of about 2 million (including Mexico City).
In the Mexican case there is a very marked distinction between published opinion and public opinion. Columns and opinion articles are examples of published opinion; authors of this type of genre, or opinion-makers, include journalists, academics or other experts, and political actors.\(^{174}\) Given that only a small proportion of the population is actually exposed to the print media, published opinion in Mexico does not necessarily permeate to the rest of the population; rather, its impact is on political elites. By contrast, television and radio, given their wider reach, are in a position to influence public opinion more directly.

As Trejo Delarbre (2015) explains, political columns in Mexico have been more relevant than in other countries. In the second half of the twentieth century, these columns were largely a messaging instrument for political elites (Carreño, author’s interview; Hughes 2006; Trejo Delarbre 1991, 2015). It was not uncommon that some political columns would contain information—essentially messages between elite groups within the government and the ruling party—to help them interpret the strength of competing factions, as well as to promote or obstruct career ascendance (Hughes 2006, 50). Manuel Camacho, a politician who left the PRI in the 1990s and later joined the PRD, told me in an interview that some politicians ventured into the business of the written press, trying to establish their opinion-forming leadership by investing in some of the many newspapers (Author’s interview, March 4, 2011).

Intellectuals who were critical of the PRI regime were able to publish their opinion pieces in a few spaces in the press—specifically columns and cultural supplements and magazines (Riva Palacio 1997, 2004; Trejo Delarbre 1991), but these articles were only read by a small number of people. The spaces for the critics of the regime to voice their discontent served as an outlet to “let off steam” (Rockwell 2002, 111). An illusion of free media was important to bolster the regime’s legitimacy: in order to hold on to power, the PRI did not want to appear repressive of critical thought (Brewster 2002). This, in fact, fostered a certain selective toleration of print media freedom in some opinion spaces—arguably with the aim of keeping the oppositional intellectual elite from outward revolt. As Lawson (2002, 16) writes, Mexico’s critical intellectuals were ”allowed to play the role of domesticated critics […], distracted attention from

\(^{174}\) As I mentioned in the introduction, the broad group of opinion-makers in Mexico is sometimes referred to as “Red Circle”. Throughout this chapter, I will expand on the evolution of this group in Mexico.
the real nature of the Mexican regime and helped the political establishment to frame every issue in terms of ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ (with the PRI, of course, near the center).” In this regard, it is worth mentioning the famous characterization that Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa made of the PRI regime as the “perfect dictatorship.” Although elections were held regularly, the PRI always won the presidency. While, to a certain extent, the government tolerated opposition parties and allowed certain space for critics—not perceiving newspapers read by intellectuals as a great threat—it did not allow critiques that jeopardized its political hegemony through direct criticism of the president or exposure of official corruption.

Voices of Dissent: Late 1970s and Early 1980s

Until the late 1970s, the relationship between the print media and other political parties was virtually insignificant, except for some marginal left publications. The absence of real political competition rendered meaningless any explicit support for political parties other than the PRI; notably, the Communist Party was not legally recognized before the 1977 political reform, and it was not until the 1980s that the right-of-centre National Action Party (PAN) began to win local elections. As Demers (2004) and Wallis (2004) explain, for decades, the Mexican press could be better defined with reference to a pro-regime/anti-regime axis, rather than in terms of a left–right divide. There was no clear distinction among most newspapers in terms of editorial position: for the most part, the range of opinion in the press reflected the broad extent of the PRI’s membership. By the 1980s, some newspapers could be somewhat aligned on a right–left continuum (La Jornada’s critique of privatizations and free trade on the left, in contrast with El Financiero's support for such policies and business-oriented approach (Wallis 2004). Notably, left-leaning opinions were much more prevalent than were those on the right of the political spectrum.

The low level of plurality that existed in the Mexican press (Brewster 2002) began to increase in the late 1970s. Some independent newspapers could operate without interference from the

175 Talking about the PRI in a debate among national and international intellectuals, Vargas Llosa stated: “I don’t think that in Latin America exists any case of dictatorial system that has recruited intellectuals as efficiently.” He described a “camouflaged dictatorship” that gave space to critics in order to show that the PRI was a democratic party, adding that the PRI recruited some intellectuals, “bribing” them through appointments or public posts. In return, it did not demand adulation, but rather asked them to be critical, because that was the best way to ensure its permanence in power (El País 1990).
government if they refrained from direct challenges to the political system (Lawson 2002, 58). Sometimes, even explicitly political critics were tolerated, if the scope of the medium in question was sufficiently limited (Lawson 2002, chapter 4). Although always subject to pressure and financial constraints, several print media outlets published stories and opinions critical of the government: *Excelsior* from 1969 through 1976; *Proceso* from 1976 onward; *Unomasuno* 1977-1993; *La Jornada* beginning in 1984; *El Financiero* since 1981; and *Reforma*, beginning in 1993 (Trejo Delarbre 1998a, 1998b).

After his retreat from *Excésior*, Julio Scherer formed the weekly magazine *Proceso*. For over three decades, its “denunciatory” character sharply contrasted with a press mainly content to cooperate with the political power. The government let it do business as long as it had no impact in encouraging actual political opposition to the regime (Trejo Delarbre 1998). *Proceso* became the country’s “premier newsmagazine” and, until the appearance of the daily *Reforma*, it was the only medium that investigated and reported consistently on what the regime regarded as "closed" topics (Lawson 2002, 67). The left-leaning newspaper *Unomasuno*, founded by former *Excésior* journalists was published for the first time on November 14, 1977. The creation of this newspaper had the support of President López Portillo and his Minister of the Interior, Jesús Reyes Heroles (Riva Palacio 2004, 67). The 1977 political reform had been approved shortly before, legitimizing the Mexican Communist Party, and at least opening the possibility for the left to participate meaningfully in politics. In that context, *Unomasuno* provided a space for leftist voices in the country’s press.

Until the 1980s, however, government officials continued threatening to withdraw paid stories and inserts if a newspaper or journalist refused to publish a particular story or, more commonly, suppress certain facts. On Freedom of the Press Day, June 7, 1982, President José López Portillo announced the withdrawal of government advertising from independent periodicals (Lawson 2002, 31; Riva Palacio 2004, 74). His famous phrase “I don’t pay them to beat me up” became paradigmatic of that control mechanism. His administration ended all paid ads to *Proceso* and *Crítica Política* because they criticized his policies. *Proceso* managed to survive on commercial advertising, but *Crítica Política* did not (Lawson 2002, 31). Similarly, President Miguel de la
Madrid withdrew the government's paid inserts to *El Financiero* because officials disagreed with its coverage of foreign debt negotiations, but the publication survived with private-sector advertising (Hughes 2003, 99). The Banco Nacional de México (Banamex), which at the time was a public enterprise (after the nationalization of national banks in 1982), withdrew advertising from *El Economista* after the paper criticized government economic policies on its front page (Lawson 2002, 32). In this context, independent publications had to learn to operate without financial support from the state, to find alternate advertisers, and to obtain paper somewhere else when the state-owned PIPSA would not supply it (Riva Palacio 2004). This increased their independence and, at the same time, paved the way for more publications to follow along similar lines.

**Increasing Liberalization of the Mexican Press: 1980s and 1990s**

No specific watershed marks the liberalization or independence of the Mexican press. As Trejo Delarbre (1991) writes, particularly in the aftermath of tragic events, the hegemonic role of television was partially displaced by newspapers. The September 19, 1985, earthquake in Mexico City propelled the importance of the country’s news media—particularly the radio—as intermediaries between the government and the population. The inadequate governmental response to such a catastrophic event evidenced the inefficiency of the communication structures and strategies in place: the government was clearly not capable of addressing the information needs either inside or outside the country (Preston and Dillon 2004). The events of 1994, including the Zapatista uprising, political assassinations, and economic crisis, did increase the demand for independent information. It was apparent that many of the previous media controls were not as strong as they had been in the past. By the mid-1990s, the availability of independent news and information was clearly growing, and by the late 1990s, the incipient editorial plurality of the 1970s was becoming widespread, at least in the big newspapers

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176 *El Financiero* was founded in 1981. It incorporated some former *Excélsior* staff members and became part of the growing independent press.

177 For several analysts and politicians, 1994 was the year in which the press began to “break free of its historic patterns of conformity and control” (Orme 1997, 4; Camacho, personal interview; Curzio, personal interview).

178 The role of radio newscasts (mostly in Mexico City), particularly of opinion segments was also important. Notably, since the earthquake of 1985, several radio outlets and news-shows in Mexico City began opening to broadcast critical voices, and even opened some spaces for political analysis.
published in Mexico City. At the same time, the generalized political dependence on the government was decreasing (Trejo Delarbre 1998).

As I explain in the following pages, the opening of the Mexican press in Mexico was the consequence of several, confluent factors. The liberalization of the print media not only built on the country’s incipient political opening, but both processes can also be attributed to structural—economic—factors, social changes, and competition among print media outlets. In 1988, the “traditional structures” of press controls in Mexico were still largely in place: collusion was more important than coercion and bribery was “institutionalized” among most political reporters (Orme 1997, 8).

As before, the government used television and radio to communicate with the masses, and the press to communicate with the country’s elites—in particular, the political columns of the main dailies in Mexico City (Riva Palacio 1997, 2004). President Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) had less political incentive to liberalize the country’s media—including the press, television, and radio—than previous administrations (Castañeda 1997, 133; former government official, personal interview). In fact, he had considerable incentives to maintain control of the press in order to prevent it from providing space for his political enemies (Riva Palacio 1997, 25). Control of information was crucial to overcoming the aftermath of the 1988 elections (which the PRI had nearly lost), the consequences of the lack of economic growth for nearly a decade, and the fractures in the political system: in sum, to prevent the weakening of Carlos Salinas’ presidency.

In addition, in order to avoid accusations of electoral manipulation in the future—as had been the case in 1988—the government felt it was necessary to keep the media away from information on polls, recounts, and observers, as well as to make sure that few media outlets would attempt to generate their own electoral information in the form of quick counts (Castañeda 1997, 134).179

Notwithstanding President Salinas’ intentions for the news media, and although he had compelling reasons to maintain control of information, the economic reforms implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s had an unintended effect: they further enhanced the media’s

179 This meant releasing information slowly; even the final, detailed results of the 1991 elections were only released to the public in late 1993 (Castañeda 1997).
independence. Although the reforms had the objective of fortifying Mexico's ruling party, they had inadvertent positive consequences for press freedom (Orme 1997; Lawson 2002). Paradoxically, economic reforms, in particular the privatization of several state-run enterprises, helped enhance the financial independence achieved by some newspapers; as public enterprises were privatized, government’s expenditures on advertising decreased. This, in turn, meant that the government had less power to help friends or punish critics (Lawson 2002; Riva Palacio 2004). At the same time, the process of economic liberalization fostered the reliance of some newspapers on more commercial sources of revenue, increasingly available from private enterprises, which meant more competition in the broader media industry. All of this had important consequences within the media: owners and journalists entered a re-composition and readjustment process to face what they considered would be a fierce competition in the following years (Riva Palacio 2004, 87). At the same time, consumers began demanding more coverage of economic and political reforms and changes. This shifted the focus of reporting and reinforced the political liberalization that was taking place.

The Salinas Administration implemented a number of changes that would, eventually, transform the conditions in which the Mexican press functioned (Lawson 2002; Riva Palacio 2004). Among the most important changes were the elimination of tax benefits and the de facto end to PIPSA’s monopoly. The government also restricted the practice of paying for reporters’ accommodations on presidential trips, mandated a minimum wage for journalists, and cut several long-standing subsidies such as tax deferments, (Lawson 2002, 76; Riva Palacio 2004, 115). It is relevant to note that there is no evidence that these initiatives had the expressed goal of democratizing the press; rather, those changes were part of President Salinas’ overall strategic

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180 As explained in Chapter 3, since the De la Madrid Administration, economic liberalization was meant to solve the economic crisis of the 1980s.
181 In 1989, when President Salinas first proposed dissolving PIPSA, publishers and editors from various newspapers asked him to reconsider, arguing that the publishing sector would suffer considerably if abandoned to the free market (Riva Palacio 1997, 25; Trejo 1991, 46). PIPSA was not closed, but its monopoly was eliminated and restrictions that prevented individual publishing companies from importing their own newsprint were abolished (Riva Palacio 2004, 26).
182 New guidelines on the operation of the press, that should have been the norm in early 1993, were not always implemented, mainly due to a lack of consensus in the Salinas’ Cabinet regarding costs and benefits of doing so. Riva Palacio argues that this conflict was not about different conceptions of the press, but a battle for costs and political territories among groups and factions of the Mexican political system, for whom the loss of spaces in the press meant the loss of their power (Riva Palacio 2004, 112).
project of opening the economy and its integration into the North American market (Orme 1997, 29; Riva Palacio 2004, 180). The official discourse was that such measures should eliminate corruption and promote better journalism; however, as Daniel Moreno, a Mexican journalist told me in an interview, journalists’ salaries were not increased in all media outlets and corruption did not disappear either. Pervasive preoccupation with the president's image and agenda still called for a meticulous "management" of the news media (Lawson 2002, 27). Doubts about the government's intentions for a more open press continued: in the aftermath of the rebellion in Chiapas, newspaper editors were allegedly pressured to rely on government communiqués exclusively (Cornelius 1994, 63).

Human agency was an important factor that stimulated press opening (Lawson 2002). The leadership provided by new journalists who sought change in professional practices (Hughes 2003, 2006) within news organizations, as well as changing norms among reporters and journalists, which promoted new styles of reporting (Lawson 2002), were key for the creation and expansion of more independent newspapers and for the transformation of news coverage. Since the 1970s, a growing group of independent journalists began to push back the boundaries to critical and assertive reporting by adhering to different journalistic norms. The independent newspapers they created in turn permitted them to displace traditional media, expanding their financial base (Lawson 2002, 65). Already by the mid-1980s, there was some open opposition to the use of “gacetillas” in the Mexican press, and some newspapers, such as La Jornada, began distinguishing them typographically from news articles (Benavides 2000; Keenan 1997). Furthermore, in the 1980s El Financiero and La Jornada were the first print publications, besides Proceso, that began publishing their own investigative, uncensored pieces. In the 1990s, Reforma and El Universal (after it was restructured) began doing the same. The changes described above helped extend more independent, or “civic oriented” ideas among journalists, and this fostered further transformations within their organizations (Hughes 2006, 40).

Influence from abroad also had an impact on journalistic standards and norms in Mexico (Hughes 2003, 2006; Lawson 2002): several journalists had spent time in the United States and Europe, where they observed and learned from journalistic practices and brought them back with
Moreover, economic liberalization, particularly the negotiations and signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada, opened up Mexican borders to outside sources of information, from which journalists gained different perspectives (Hughes 2006, 41). Deepening integration with the international market (after the country’s incorporation to the GATT and the signing of NAFTA) also facilitated the import of essential inputs, particularly newsprint (Lawson 2002, 77; Orme 1997, 116). With NAFTA in place, concerns about press freedom in Mexico were no longer a mere domestic issue, since Canadians and Americans were also interested in the free flow of information between the three countries (Lawson 2002, 77; Orme 1997, 12). Moreover, it was important for President Salinas to convince the U.S. that there was a “democratization will” within his administration (Demers 2004, 8).

The increased coverage of Mexico in the North American press helped ease pressure on Mexican print media outlets that sought to cover controversial topics. It was possible for Mexican newspapers to run controversial stories published by the international wire services or follow up on investigative reports in the foreign press (Lawson 2002, 77). Increasing availability of information from foreign outlets also drove some reporters to diversify their sources of news. The higher U.S. “investment stake in Mexico after NAFTA” led to more thorough and aggressive reporting about Mexico in that country, in turn fostering more independent coverage in Mexican news organizations (Orme 1997, 9).

By the early 1990s, the two most important newspapers were *La Jornada* and *El Financiero*. Together, they were able to influence government decisions (Riva Palacio 2004, 75). Both newspapers were highly critical of the government, and enjoyed growing prestige and credibility among their readers (Riva Palacio 2004, 34). Together with *Proceso*, they were a permanent nuisance for the government, which had attempted several mechanisms to reduce their readership (Lawson 2002, 35; Riva Palacio 2004, 76). By the mid-1990s, *La Jornada, El Financiero*, and

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183 Lawson (2002) and Hughes (2006) provide very thorough accounts about the role played by a new and educated generation of journalists in the changes within the media.

184 The most important case was the papers’ opposition to the changes to the national history textbooks, which made a conservative revision of the country’s history. With a combative editorial line, both papers were pivotal in mobilizing the National teachers union which opposed the changes, in turn leading to the cancellation of the new texts in 1993.
*Proceso* were able to galvanize social concerns and mobilize some sectors of the population (Riva Palacio 2004).\textsuperscript{185}

The daily *Reforma*, an offshoot of the successful *El Norte*,\textsuperscript{186} was launched on November 20, 1993. It joined the set of publications that maintained an independent editorial line. Practices that were prevalent in other print media outlets were forbidden in *Reforma*: for example, journalists could not sell publicity or accept payments from political sources. The paper’s style was refreshing in contrast to many of the old, stale newspapers. *Reforma’s* journalists were better educated than most Mexican journalists and hence could approach government officials on a more equal basis (Hallin 2000, 104). The paper’s positive reception in Mexico City demonstrated that commercial success of the press was related to its journalists’ “assertive and critical position” and professional quality; moreover, *Reforma* showed that good quality journalism was “profitable” (Granados Chapa, author’s interview, March 14, 2011).\textsuperscript{187}

Since 1993, with the launch of *Reforma*, independent papers were generally more successful at competing for readers than the official press, which continued relying on various forms of state support and whose journalists depended on state payments. In order to compete with independent newspapers in a context of decreased media controls, other newspapers began to change. By the mid-1990s, the most visible protagonists of a “new battle” in which many newspapers participated were *El Universal* and *Reforma*, both of which aimed to gain a broader audience and better reflect the moment of political transition (Pérez Espino 2002; Riva Palacio 2004). *El Universal* is a very clear example of the transition from a very orthodox type of paper to one that

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\textsuperscript{185} The perception of these media outlets as independent vehicles seemed to be confirmed after the Zapatista uprising, when Subcomandante Marcos chose them as the depositaries of his messages and “communiqués,” along with the periodical *El Tiempo* of San Cristobal de las Casas (Riva Palacio 2004, 62).

\textsuperscript{186} *El Norte*, published in the northern city of Monterrey since 1972, was modeled on North American newspapers. Hallin (2002) explains that *El Norte* had always been far more independent of the PRI than Mexico City newspapers. Monterrey is known for a business sector that is more independent of the state than the business sector of Mexico city, and more oriented toward the U.S.

\textsuperscript{187} An additional factor that enhanced *Reforma’s* independence was the fact that one year after its creation, the paper implemented its own distribution system in response to a dispute with the union of official newspaper distributors.
asserted its own political independence in order to survive (Orme 1997, 3). Conversely, newspapers such as *Excélsior*, a daily that had served as a reference for the national and the foreign elites, did not adapt to the changes, mostly falling into insignificance (Demers 2004, 7).

The ability of independent publications to successfully compete was crucial for their long-term survival (Coyne and Leeson 1999; Lawson 2002/2005); strong consumer demand for independent reporting increased private advertising. The number of non-pro-regime newspapers continued to grow in the 1990s: “in a sort of cascade effect, the initial success of independent publications encouraged the gradual transformation of the press as a whole” (Lawson 2002, 89). As independent newspapers became profitable, they were able to open “sister” publications in other cities under the same civic frameworks, as in the case of *El Norte* and *Reforma*.189 The independent papers created in the 1970s and 1980s had largely been conceived as journalistic, more than business enterprises. As Hallin (2000) notes, *Proceso* and *La Jornada* were founded by journalists interested in having a public voice and in democratizing the country’s press, rather than building “commercial media empires.”; whereas *Reforma* was started primarily on the initiative of a capitalist.

As Lawson (2002, 70) explains, several catalytic events in the country also contributed to boost Mexico’s emerging independent press. The urgency and magnitude of the 1994 political crises—similar to the cases of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, the contested gubernatorial election of Chihuahua State, and the 1988 allegedly fraudulent presidential election—increased the demand for reliable and independent information.190 Although this was temporary, it had an undeniable impact on the survival and expansion of existing independent print media.191 When the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) took arms against the government in 1994,

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188 In September 1996, El Universal’s director, Francisco Ealy Ortiz, was accused of tax evasion; this was interpreted as a sign of rupture with the PRI regime.
189 New independent publications flourished: among them were *Mural*—another offshoot of *El Norte* and *Reforma*—and *Público* in Guadalajara, *Frontera* in Tijuana, *Milenio Diario* in Mexico City, and *El Sur* in Acapulco (Lawson 2002, 79).
190 In the weeks following the assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, sales of independent publications surged 200–300% (Lawson 2002, 79).
191 See Lawson (2002, 79) for other cases in which independent reporting of accidents, natural disasters or political events that reflected the incompetence of public officials changed the fate of small independent newspapers just when they were at the brink of bankruptcy.
it developed a coherent communications strategy, outside of the traditional media. The EZLN was one of the first groups that effectively used the internet as an independent means of communication, and hence established a direct link to society as a whole.192 By contrast, the disorganized and inexperienced way in which the press informed the public about the rebellion in Chiapas, the assassination of the PRI’s presidential candidate and of the General Secretary of that same party a few months later, and the peso crisis at the end of the year showed some of the major flaws of mainstream Mexican journalism at the time (Riva Palacio 1997, 27). Despite the increase in press liberalization, lack of experience was common among many reporters; Riva Palacio (1997, 27-28; 2004, 91) mentions lack of ability to develop a story, lack of direction given to young journalists, and lack of journalistic technique as some of the failures that characterized news reporting in the press in 1994-1995. According to Riva Palacio, in covering the Chiapas war, journalists could not keep their feelings out of their stories and frequently produced biased and contradictory pieces. Often the same edition of a newspaper contained several stories on the same topic with contradictory information and/or statements, fragmented and out of context. Accustomed to reporting declarations instead of facts, journalists turned every statement into a news story. Reporters quoted anyone and everyone without determining who was a reliable, authoritative source (Riva Palacio 1997, 28; 2004), producing abundant rhetoric and scarcity of facts (Riva Palacio 2004). Nevertheless, the importance of the role played by some media outlets was undeniable: the critical reports—in particular of the dailies La Jornada, El Financiero, and Reforma, as well as the weekly Proceso—helped stop the military escalation in Chiapas, because they systematically opposed an outcome other than political negotiation (Riva Palacio 2004, 94; Camacho, author’s interview, March 3, 2011). As such, the uprising in Chiapas also contributed to change the status quo, importantly because of the role played by the press, including international outlets.193

By the mid-1990s, independent newspapers, radio shows, and even television programs began to cover sensitive topics such as drug trafficking, corruption, and repression.194 Several of these

192 Notably, one of the EZLN’s main complaints was against “biased” television news reporting; Zapatistas even prohibited Televisa reporters from entering their territory.
193 CNN, the New York Times, and El País in turn became important sources of information for Mexicans.
194 The death in 1997 of Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, Televisa’s CEO and owner, led to a more pragmatic and open approach of that powerful corporation.
issues became political scandals, which further hampered the regime’s legitimacy (Lawson 2002, 137). At the same time, radio stations (most based in Mexico City and several of which had national reach) incorporated spaces for debate and reflection among political analysts or experts in their morning newscasts. By the end of that decade, the government no longer had the “monopoly of the primary definition of the public agenda” (Carreño 2007). The Mexican press had gotten rid of its former inhibitions; as Jorge Fernández, a veteran Mexican journalist, told me in an interview, journalists began to write about actors “who were previously untouchable, such as the army, the president, and the Virgin of Guadalupe.” The Mexican government significantly decreased the pressure that for several decades it had exerted on the press. Nevertheless, as Trejo Delarbre (1998) argues, it did so more due to fear of being criticized for interference with the press, not because it did not have the capability to do it. There was progress in liberalization in other forms of media, apparent through an increase in critical reports (first on radio and then on television); however, the changes were at first not so marked as they were in the press. While television newsrooms responded to the “changing cues” in the 1990s, they did not do so in a way that helped citizens hold the government accountable or foster deliberation and debate (Hughes 2006, 32).

Opinion-Makers, Press Opening, and Political Reforms

There is no doubt that political columns played an important role in guiding opinion during the PRI regime. As Trejo Delarbre (2015, 37) explains, the information that newspaper columns sometimes revealed was refreshing, in a context in which political information was not transparent or where it was simply lacking. Since the 1970s, and increasingly since the 1990s and until today, have been able to express their points of view about economic, political, or social issues deemed of interest. Since the ousting of Excelsior’s director (which came during a period when newspapers carrying critical columns were censored), opinion-makers have usually been able to find spaces in another media outlet (Castañeda 1997, 88). A small group of critical journalists and columnists survived and expanded in a propitious context of social transformations, economic, and political reforms.

195 For example, the shooting of a group of peasants by the military in July 1995 in Aguas Blancas, Guerrero, apparently with the complicity of the PRI Governor. After a video of these killings was broadcast on Televisa, Governor Figueroa was eventually forced to step down.
Opinion-makers have played an important role since the outset of the transition. As Camp (2002, 16) recounts, Mexican intellectuals—from educational or cultural institutions—“constantly reinforced the liberalizing political direction” that began in the 1970s through books, the print media, and the classroom. The growing number of higher education institutions, in addition to increasing competition in the print media, meant more opportunities for prominent cultural figures, which in turn contributed to greater intellectual autonomy (Camp 2002). In the 1980s, an increasing number of sociologists, political scientists, and other academics in the social sciences began researching and studying the country’s political system and the electoral framework (Contreras 2010, 58; Woldenberg 2002, 25). Their academic credentials and theoretical and specialized knowledge of the subject, as well as the fact that they were not affiliated to any political party, made them, in theory at least, more prone to being politically “neutral” and trustworthy. They were thus in a unique position to understand the transformations that were taking place in the country’s political system and electoral laws, and to explain them to a lay audience: as Contreras (2010, 60) writes, to “introduce Mexicans to the democratic political culture.” In the 1990s, writers such as Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, and Carlos Monsivais published newspaper articles expressing opinions in favour of a peaceful solution to the conflict in Chiapas and of electoral reforms. In turn, many more figures—including representatives of civil society organizations that were actively promoting a democratic transition—followed suit. After the electoral reform of 1996 was approved, a group of these authors, and some new ones, became regular contributors of opinion articles in several newspapers in a context of increasing press liberalization and competition. They continued providing the core body of analytical work on the topic of elections, including legislation and processes. This group of what some call “electorólogos” (election experts) comprises academics, electoral councilors (federal or local), consultants, and advisors and other specialists in electoral issues. When eventually opposition parties began taking office in the late 1990s and the PRI lost its majority in Congress in 1997, different perspectives on public policy issues and politics were published in an increasing number of newspapers. In addition, politicians from different political parties became regular contributors of opinion articles.

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196 Camp (1985) notes that the modern Mexican intellectual understands his or her specialty and communicates the contents of that specialty to others.

197 These characteristics also rendered them as good candidates to head the country’s electoral institutions.
In the 1990s, political opening and print media liberalization were building on each other. Structural factors, including economic crisis and reforms as well as social changes, had produced gradual electoral reforms that slowly allowed other parties to access power. At the same time, those factors contributed to an increasingly assertive press, where a larger number of voices critical of the PRI regime could be heard. As opposition parties and civil society found outlets for their criticism of the government in an increasingly plural press, the growing attention to their viewpoints and activities reinforced Mexico's civic awakening. There was a positive interaction between civil society, intellectuals, and the independent print media; as (Lawson 2002, 137) explains, a new political discourse gained momentum, challenged the old regime, encouraged opposition collaboration, and legitimized popular organizing. This contributed to the existence of a new and more open space to express different viewpoints, with representation from civil society. These opinions were favourable to a peaceful and democratic solution to the Chiapas conflict—in short, in support of a democratic transition.198

Both phenomena—media opening and political reform—reinforced each other. The on-going process of political reforms also had consequences for the media. One of the key aspects of the 1996 electoral reform was the increase of media coverage for opposition parties. This is an important causal factor in the process that deepened the on-going liberalization of the Mexican news media, specifically the implications of the reform in the political landscape. The more equitable coverage of campaigns and elections beginning in the 1997 federal electoral process did not respond to the priorities of more independent and competitive media alone, but were the result of the new electoral legislation approved in 1996. The rules and amount of media coverage had been agreed by all political parties, and an autonomous Federal Electoral Institute oversaw compliance with those standards. As opposition parties gained more power positions in the 1990s, and as a result of the PRI losing their majority in Congress in 1997, different perspectives on public policy issues and politics were increasingly published in newspapers. Reporters covering those issues had to turn to non-PRI politicians for information, in turn offering more plural news coverage (Hughes 2003, 101). This situation underscored the importance of editorial

198 The analysis of columns and opinion articles discussing the 1996 reform negotiations presented in Chapter 5 illustrates this interaction.
diversity, which became a significant aspect of the renewal process of several newspapers, as I further explain below.

The use of the term “Red Circle” to refer to opinion-makers began to gain some traction in the early 2000s after an apparently anecdotal comment during the 2000 presidential campaign made by the candidate of the Alliance for Change, Vicente Fox Quesada. Speaking about his critics, he stated,

Well, I heard it (the term) on one occasion somewhere. The Red Circle consists of those persons that are much immersed in the news, in reading newspapers and the press, in the critique, and in the political debate; they represent, I would say the 2 or 3 percent of the population. And there is also the “green circle”—98 millions of Mexicans that get up and go to work every day, that want to be hopeful, that want to see their country growing and improving, that want to see achievements and results so that their children live better.199

The most recognizable representatives of the Red Circle generally have an outlet in the media, through which they express their opinions, particularly the press, and increasingly radio and television. Levy and Bruhn (2006, 141), in their discussion of democracy in Mexico, point to a significant difference between the Mexican elites, who "are more likely to enjoy access to media freedom, organize effectively in autonomous interest groups and in elections, and become part of the decision-making leadership," and the rest of the population. Hence, for arguments or issues discussed by this small and select group of opinion-makers (the Red Circle) to be potentially noticed by the rest of the population (the Green Circle), they must be commented on in radio or television shows, and then repeated in the night national newscasts. It is important to note that published opinion in Mexico does not necessarily permeate the rest of the population; its impact

199 In 2000, Mexico’s population was roughly 100 million.
is on political elites. Depending on the profile of opinion-makers, they may be in a position to shape opinion trends and potentially influence public opinion.

Diversity of Opinion in the Mexican Press: 1990s and 2000s

Editorial diversity within newspapers was an important element that characterized the transformation of several print media outlets. Indeed, in the period of liberalization of the Mexican press, diversity of opinion became a strategy to raise their profile and build a reputation of being independent and reliable, while arguably satisfying a wide array of readers. In the print media, and to a lesser degree in radio, “fears of competition” resulted in the airing of different viewpoints, thus providing access to a large variety of opinions (Sarmiento 2005, 292).

Since the 1990s, several national newspapers—including Reforma, since it was created and El Universal in the second half of the decade—sought diversity of opinion as a desirable and positive characteristic in the sense that would help promote an image of plurality and independence from the government. This served to attract a wider readership and thus bring more advertising revenue (Coyne and Leeson 1999; Lawson 2002), and at the same time promoted an image of openness and impartiality.

By the early 2000s, the former control mechanisms for the press were no longer in place at the national level (Carreño 2007; Granados Chapa, author’s interview, March 14, 2011; Moreno, author’s interview, March 1, 2011; Riva Palacio 2004). In the stage of electoral democracy, the most important national newspapers (including the ones I analyzed in this dissertation) had achieved greater financial success and relied increasingly on actual sales and commercial, rather than government advertising.

Castañeda (2008) argues that the communicative channel between opinion-makers (the Red Circle) and the rest of the population (Green Circle) is the country’s political and business elite (what he calls the “Brown Circle”). Whether or not there is any communication between the Red Circle and the public, however, is contingent on whether the political and business elites are effectively influenced by opinion-makers.

There is a difference between internal diversity—which refers to a wide range of views or opinions expressed within the same media outlet—and external diversity—which concerns the actual ownership of the media.

More than one decade after the transition to electoral democracy, several national newspapers (El Universal, Reforma, Milenio, and Crónica, among others) include columnists with different ideologies who publish articles regularly in their opinion pages.
In the stage of electoral democracy, editorial positions became more clearly distinguishable than they were during the authoritarian regime; as Demers (2004, 4) states, the alignment of the daily press on left-center-right positions, according to issues became more apparent since 2000. All positions in the political spectrum have spaces in the press and are reasonably represented. The print media is quite diverse insofar as there are media outlets representative of the entire political spectrum. All the interviewees for this work—including journalists, politicians and academics—agreed that there is no longer a systemic denial of space in the media as a whole to politicians or to other groups that do not agree with the government’s agenda, as was the case in the past.

Figure 4.1 below shows all the opinion articles in my 1996 and 2007 samples, classified by article position. It illustrates an increase in editorial diversity overall in 2007, in comparison to 1996.

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**Figure 4.1 Article Position Compared**

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles, Jan.-Dec. 1996; Jan.-Dec. 2007

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203 Conversely, in the case of television, the duopolistic market concentration—beyond cable services—on the part of Televisa and TV Azteca results in an important reduction of the potential for diversity in television. Although there are analysis spaces in Televisa that showcase diverse opinions, they are few and are generally broadcast in low rating slots.

204 After 2000, the cases in which politicians have been “vetoed” and their activities have not been reported—mostly in the mass media—are due to commercial and political interests of media owners.

205 In Chapter 2 (p 53) I explain how I classified the opinion articles in my sample, according to the political leaning of the authors, as well as their support for issues and political actors.
Figure 4.1 represents the more apparent left-right divide according to specific issues and policies after 2000. In comparison to 1996, by 2007 centre articles published in the three newspapers included in my sample decreased 8 percent, left articles decreased 5 percent, and right articles increased 17 percent. This suggests that the liberalization of the country’s press did in fact lead to more editorial diversity.

The 1996 electoral reform had positive implications for diversity in the press. As the Mexican political system became more plural, it was necessary to have representation of the viewpoints of different sectors of society. This, compounded with the PRI losing its majority in Congress and the increase of opposition parties taking office, led to different perspectives on public policy issues and politics being published in an increasing number of newspapers. It became more common for newspapers to recruit opinion contributors from among political actors with a variety of different political leanings, which increased the space for opposition voices.

For the most part, editorial decisions appear to respond to (public) demand in an aim to increase newspaper sales. In interviews with two newspaper editors and two academics who specialize in the media, they emphasized that plurality is very important for business considerations of national newspapers. By presenting diverse points of view, newspapers appeal to a wider audience (Author’s interviews with two newspaper editors, 2011; Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview; Warkentin, author’s interview). Most newspapers—perhaps with the exception of those that only have one editorial director—exhibit internal tensions regarding content. The editors of two national newspapers explained that their editorial policies emphasize the need to find “a middle ground,” for which the inclusion of diverse positions is important. Because of the diversity among authors within the opinion pages of individual newspapers, in the same day there might be articles analyzing one topic from two opposite points of view, reflective of different sides of the political spectrum, although not necessarily partisan. In Reforma for example, Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa (left) and Sergio Sarmiento (right).
contracting a plurality of personalities with different political affiliations as commentators or panelists.

*Reforma* is a good example of a daily with internal diversity in its opinion pages. Although it has been traditionally thought of as a newspaper to the right of centre, it publishes a wide spectrum of opinions: across ideologies—right, centre, and left (as seen through the authors’ support of political parties or issues). Reforma seeks to have well-known and reputable opinion-makers among their regular contributors, particularly those who may disagree with the government (Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview). *El Universal* also fosters editorial diversity in its opinion pages (as seen in Figure 4.2 below).

On the other hand, some publications have a very particular editorial line, where opinions are much more homogeneous. An example of this is *La Jornada*: since its founding in 1984 and until the late 1990s, *La Jornada*’s editorial pages were characterized by a great diversity of contributors from all sides of the political spectrum, with the aim to give space to opposition voices. Nevertheless, since the popular leader of the left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), Andrés Manuel López Obrador, announced his intentions to become the PRD candidate for mayor in Mexico City in 2000, *La Jornada* has invariably supported him (Sarmiento, 2005, 292). José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti, a veteran columnist of *La Jornada*, and long-time supporter and collaborator of López Obrador, explained to me in an interview that the change towards a more “hard line left position (of La Jornada) became apparent when Carmen Lira took over the paper’s direction in 2002.” Ricardo Alemán, a former columnist of *La Jornada* who later left that paper, told me that since the early 2000s, the selection of the type of writers in *La Jornada* is, for the most part, based on their political convictions, and determined by specific editorial goals of the leadership (Author’s interview, April 12, 2011).

Figure 4.2 below shows cross-tabulations of article position of all the articles in my sample and the three newspapers for 1996 and 2007 (see Chapter 2 for the classification criteria). It illustrates the change observed between both years across the newspapers in my sample, including an increase in editorial diversity in two of the three papers from 1996 to 2007. As can be seen by comparing the two years, *La Jornada* had a higher proportion of centre articles in

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207 The paper also seeks cross-generational diversity.
1996, with 55 percent of the articles in my sample; that paper moved markedly towards the left, increasing from 43 percent to 88 percent in left-leaning articles. *El Universal*, which is a centrist paper, had the highest proportion of centre articles in 2007. 208 *Reforma* had a similar proportion of left articles in both years, with centre articles decreasing close to 10 percent, and right articles increasing from 7 percent to 23 percent. 209

**Figure 4.2 Article Position by Newspaper 1996-2007**

In order to compare the three newspapers in 1996 and 2007, I assessed each article in terms of its contribution to the debate on electoral reforms and assigned a rating to each article to indicate its overall quality in terms of high, moderate, and low. To operationalize article quality, I defined the following list of characteristics: clarity of the argument; relevance of the context; correctness or accuracy of arguments; transparency (rumours vs. facts); credibility (expertise of the article’s author); and impartiality (Chapter 2 provides a more thorough explanation of how I assessed article quality).

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208 As will be explained in chapter five, many centre articles were written by PRI authors in 1996—which is not surprising, given the party’s “comfortable” position considered as being near the centre of the political spectrum.

209 Overall, the number of right articles in both years is rather small.
Figure 4.3 above represents the quality of the articles within each paper. The proportion of articles rated as being of high quality in *La Jornada* decreased by 21 percent, and within *Reforma* by 17 percent. Conversely, the proportion of high quality articles in *El Universal* increased by 10 percent: this is indicative of its liberalizing objectives to transform the paper into a competitive one.

My analysis found that the quality of opinion articles published in the press (beyond specifics of individual newspapers) slightly diminished in 2007. In that year, *Reforma* still had the largest proportion of high quality articles (65%). *El Universal* and *Reforma* had a similar proportion of high quality articles, indicating that increased competition and diversity in the press meant more homogenization in terms of quality of these two papers. This also responds to the market of opinion mentioned above, in which it is rather common for opinion-makers to move across newspapers: several authors who published articles in *Reforma* in 1996 were publishing in other papers in 2007.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ See tables A12 and A13 in appendix A, which show all of the authors included in my sample, the newspapers in which they published, and the number of articles in 1996 and 2007.
My findings indicate that the quality of left and right articles decreased in 2007, and that of centre articles increased, as Figure 4.4 below shows. The increase of the number of left and right articles overall does not appear to have had much of an impact on the quality overall, without breaking it down by newspaper; however, it does make a difference when analyzing each paper separately, as shown in figure 4.3 above.

**Figure 4.4 Article Position and Article Quality 1996-2007**

![Article Quality and Position](image)

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles, Jan.-Dec. 1996; Jan.-Dec. 2007

### Evolution of the Red Circle

Since the late 1990s, an increasing proportion of professional opinion-makers found a growing number of independent spaces to publish their articles, which fostered more competition among newspapers. In the stage of electoral democracy, editorial leadership and type of writer appear to be equally important for the quality of newspapers. This underscores the relevance of having a diversity of voices representative of a range of positions along the political spectrum, which is likely to improve the quality of a newspaper overall. This was relevant in the Mexican democratization process because it allowed opposition voices to be heard in the 1990s and promote further democracy. Nevertheless, after 2000, that diversity of voices did not have an influence on democratic reforms.
In the following pages I explain some of the most important characteristics of a broad set of opinion-makers, namely, the authors of the columns and opinion articles included in my 1996 and 2007 samples, according to their main professional activity.\footnote{In my 1996 sample, there were 65 authors who wrote 156 articles; in my 2007 sample, there were 101 authors who wrote 271 articles. Although my study does not encompass the totality of authors writing columns in the Mexican print media, it is sufficiently large to permit the depiction of Mexican opinion-makers as a collectivity in both 1996 and 2007 and to analyze their role in the stage of electoral democracy.} I highlight some of the changes in the composition of the group as a whole from 1996 to 2007. The main professional activity and political alignment of opinion-makers are relevant because they shape their support or opposition of law initiatives or policies.\footnote{This was especially true in the analysis of the 2007 electoral reform: journalists with ties to electronic media tended to criticize and justify their opposition to the changes to the electoral advertising model (see Chapter 6). Changes in the legislation touched specific interests—those of their employers. Similarly, two articles criticized that aspect of the reform, one of them written by a lawyer with links to the mass media corporations and the other by a high-ranking executive member of Televisa (both of these authors were classified in the “other” category).}

As Trejo Delarbre (2015, 83) explains, the interest of different media outlets to diversify their content and the desire of the public, albeit a small fraction, for specialized opinions of different topics fostered the proliferation of academics as opinion-makers in the media. The number of academics and other professionals who published opinion articles in the press grew since the 1990s. Among them is a smaller group of opinion-makers who move rather frequently among different newspapers, and who, because of their name recognition or reputation, are also invited to share their opinions in news shows in radio and television. Contreras (2010) calls them “media intellectuals,” and Escalante (2007) deems this group as “the star system.” Both characterizations describe a group whose main professional activity is to analyze the country’s political reality, the exercise of power, as well as the actions of politicians.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below show the number and percentage of authors classified according to their main professional activity, and the number and percentage of articles per year.\footnote{The “other” category is composed by authors from different fields and sectors: from consulting to law. I aggregated them to avoid very small numbers of groups that would not inform my findings. The category includes advisors highly knowledgeable about electoral issues. As Table 4.2 shows, their number grew considerably from 1996 to 2007. See tables A14 and A15 in Appendix A for a breakdown of this group according to their professional activity.}
Table 4.1. Number and Percentage of Authors and Articles Classified According to Authors’ Main Professional Activity 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 1996</th>
<th>Number of authors</th>
<th>Percentage of authors</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
<th>Percentage of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada*, and *Reforma*, Jan.-Dec., 1996.

Table 4.2. Number and Percentage of Authors and Articles Classified According to Authors’ Main Professional Activity 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 2007</th>
<th>Number of authors</th>
<th>Percentage of authors</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
<th>Percentage of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada*, and *Reforma*, Jan.-Dec., 2007.

The proportion of authors whose main activity is journalism decreased from 20 percent in 1996 to 18 percent in 2007; nevertheless, the proportion of articles written by journalists increased 2 percent in 2007. Although columns written by journalists are more analytical than news articles, they do not do the job of academics or other experts in terms of providing specialized analysis.214

The opinion articles written by journalists include informative columns, authored by widely known and experienced journalists. In interviews with two different editorial directors of national newspapers, they explained the function of these articles in similar terms: “to make information accessible to the reader” (Author’s interviews, March 2011). A key feature of these authors is their access, or even closeness, to the political elite. For example, it is still quite common for journalists to have lunch with politicians. Of the journalists and columnists that I

214 A noteworthy exception in my sample is that of Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, whose expertise in electoral issues was apparent in his articles.
interviewed, 80 percent coincided in that because of their access to, or even relationship with, politicians, journalists are able to provide “important information” in their columns. Especially those journalists who publish columns daily, write in reaction to current events (conjunctural columns, which are mostly reactive). For example, they attempt to explain statements made by politicians or other actors. Although in general they do provide contextual information as background for the position of different political actors, their analysis is not as profound as that provided by academics and other experts.

Journalists also write “rumour” columns, which mostly serve as a messaging mechanism among political actors.  Unidentified sources leak information for these (generally well-known) journalists to make it public. The aim arguably is to make other actors react, for example, by pulling out of negotiations, appointing a different person to head a state institution, or changing a strategy (authors’ interviews with one political actor and one former government spokesman).

At times, these might even feed political squabbling, although, as Trejo Delarbre put it, they do so in this “mediated manner” (Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview, February 15, 2011). These rumours, gossip, and leaks can potentially influence a political outcome, for instance by undermining negotiation processes or blocking reforms, by feeding disagreements, or by nurturing distrust among the actors involved.

Articles in my sample written by journalists in 2007 account for the highest proportion of those of being of a lower quality (47%), a considerable increase from the 26 percent in 1996 (see tables A4 and A5 in Appendix A).

215 In Mexico this type of column is sometimes ironically referred to as “corre, ve y dile” (run, go, tell).
216 In the case of the 2007 electoral reform, three of the articles referred to possible substitutes for the President of IFE’s General Council.
217 Aguilar Camín (2007) referred to these authors as “columnistas” (in Spanish, this word means those who slander) as opposed to “columnistas” (columnists)
218 For example, in the height of the discussions about the 2007 electoral reform and after all aspects had been made public, three journalists in my sample wrote about those who they said would replace the electoral councilors removed as part of the reform. Whether this was a leak, a rumour, or neither, the publishing of such information appears to have influenced the outcome of this hotly contested issue in that it delayed the selection of the new electoral councilors (see Chapter 6 for more details).
219 Articles classified as being of low quality may fail to provide any useful contextual information, use irrelevant or inaccurate arguments, or otherwise stop short from contributing to the public discussion about the issue they write about. They may include rumours and leaked information.
Another type of opinion article written by journalists and published in the Mexican press is the “anonymous column.” No authorship is attributed to these articles, which mainly contain unverified information that, in Mexican jargon, “has transcended”—leaks, rumours, and actual gossip with no identified source. The relevance of these pieces is that their claims may be picked up by other opinion-makers writing newspaper opinion articles, and potentially by the mass media. As a result, they may shape the public debate by feeding speculation, even if it is widely known within the Red Circle that the information they contain is not verified. As Carlos Bravo (a Mexican historian) and Gabriela Warkentin (Mexican media specialist) put it, in Mexico everybody accepts them as an idiosyncratic subgenre (Authors interviews, 2011). To the best of my knowledge, this type of article does not exist in the press of liberal democracies. As Trejo Delarbre (2015) notes, in the twenty-first century, many of these leaks are mere lies: claims regarding appointments, supposed leaks about politicians who will imminently be asked to step down, or simple “anecdotes” of politics or politicians that often are not true or never happened. As he states, while these columnists never acknowledge when they have erred, when they are right, they repeatedly remind their readers of the advantages their column gave them for providing such information (Trejo Delarbre 2015, 37).

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 above show that the proportion of political actors overall decreased substantially, from 34 percent in 1996 to 18 percent in 2007. They include former or current legislators (from both chambers), party members and leaders, cabinet members, and electoral councilors. The plurality within articles written by politicians from across the ideological spectrum was greater in 2007 than it was in 1996; articles authored by those affiliated to the

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220 These are regarded as opinion pieces, not news articles, and appear in the editorial sections of the different newspapers. My sample does not contain this type of column, as an inclusion criterion was that the majority of each article should deal with the topic in question (the 1996 and 2007 electoral reform/negotiation process) and these articles include a few paragraphs about various topics.

221 This kind of column is reminiscent of the authoritarian regime in which, for the most part, critics used cartoons or published in cultural spaces.

222 Since they include only information that has been leaked, nobody assumes responsibility; newspapers do not provide the right of reply on these pieces.

223 This sub-genre is one of the widest read within the Mexican press. Every day most major newspapers in Mexico publish this type of columns (except for La Jornada): “Templo Mayor” in Reforma; “Bajo Reserva” in El Universal; “Trascendió” in Milenio; “Pepe Grillo” in La crónica de Hoy; “Rozones” in La Razón. The proliferation of this type of column suggests the demand for “insider” or somehow privileged information.
PAN increased from 6 percent in 1996 to 28 percent in 2007, reflecting the emphasis on plurality of opinion in the national print media as a whole (tables A6 and A7 in Appendix A).

In 1996, the highest proportion of the articles classified as being of high quality—which indicates overall the article’s contribution to the debate by providing relevant context and correct arguments—were written by political actors (see Table A4 in Appendix A).224 In 1996, political actors, whose articles accounted for 32 percent of all articles, accounted for 36 percent of high quality articles; in that year, several of the political actors who wrote articles included in my sample were very active in the democratization process (see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5). Their articles included relevant arguments, through which they explained the need for electoral reform, and fostered agreements. Political actors also account for 37 percent of low quality articles in 1996; these were authored by PRI legislators, whose arguments were mostly irrelevant to the topic in question.225 In 1996, the highest proportion of critical articles (see Chapter 2, 65 for classification criteria), 36 percent, was written by journalists (see Table A8 in Appendix A).226 Political actors, mostly those who played a role in the transition process, account for the highest proportion of optimistic articles (43%), as shown in table A8 in Appendix A. Perhaps not surprisingly, the highest proportion of the opinion pieces characterized as prescriptive were also written by political actors (43%).227

By 2007, a considerable proportion of the political actors who participated in the democratization process wrote articles with relevant context and accurate arguments; however, several politicians wrote articles empty of relevant content.228 Political actors accounted for 12 percent of all the

224 This may be explained by the difference in the proportion of articles written by political actors and those written by academics in 1996 (32% and 21% respectively).
225 For example, an article authored by Álvaro Vallarta Ceceña titled “Ethical values and the State reform” contained a series of mostly rhetorical claims, arguing that the reform being discussed should strengthen ethical values within Mexican society (the aspects being negotiated had to do with the autonomy of the electoral organ, party financing, and allocation of airtime).
226 They were critical of either a specific political party in the context of the negotiation process, or of the limited scope of the electoral reform.
227 Those authors, except one PRI member, were opposed to the PRI and were very involved in the process of democratization.
228 Some exceptions found in my sample include Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (PRD founder and knowledgeable of the democratization process), and Javier Corral (PAN legislator who has been both senator and deputy), who published three articles in El Universal in 2007. He has written extensively about the need
articles in my 2007 sample, for 17 percent of low-quality articles, and for 11 percent of high quality ones (see Table A5 in Appendix A). Regardless of the quality of their articles, what appears to matter for some newspaper editors is the fact of having them as regular contributors: a former editor of a national newspaper informed me that having those personalities among their regular contributors helps newspapers “gain prestige” (Author’s interview, April 11, 2011). For politicians who write opinion articles regularly, having that space may help them to raise their visibility and profile.

The plurality of opinion in the country’s main national newspapers is, for the most part, the result of pragmatic editorial policies for business considerations, as newspapers increasingly aspired to have the most recognized figures among their regular contributors. That added issues of competition in terms of payments to recruit opinion-makers, some of whom, arguably, became a commodity for newspapers. Similar to the transition period in the late 1990s, after 2000 newspapers still tried to recruit famous, recognized, and reputable columnists. A big difference between these periods is the extent of the “market of opinion,” as the editorial director of a national newspaper called it. Mobility of opinion-makers across newspapers is common229: in the stage of electoral democracy, it was no longer sufficient to have some opposition voices writing in the opinion pages of newspapers. By then, other parties were gaining political posts, and the political spectrum was represented in the country’s opinion pages. As Roberto Rock, editor of El Universal, stated, the new priority for several print media outlets was to include more analysis (Author’s interview, March 28, 2011).

In liberal democracies, people are generally better informed, and, arguably, there is less need for academics to analyze political issues in the press than in transitioning contexts. In the former, there is a clear division of labor regarding the role of academics, which is to be critical—university tenure fosters academic freedom—and they do not have such an important presence in for new media legislation and his analysis about the aspects of the 2007 electoral reform relative to the media was thorough.

229 Tables A12 and A13 in Appendix A show all the authors of articles included in my 1996 and 2007 samples with the respective newspaper, professional activity, and political leaning/political party (if available).
the opinion pages of newspapers.\textsuperscript{230} In the Mexican case, the proportion of academics who are regular newspaper contributors (as seen in my sample) increased from 24 percent in 1996 to 35 percent in 2007 (tables 4.1 and 4.2 above). This indicates that newspapers are becoming more reliant on academics for their opinion pages, which suggests a positive trend towards more professionalism in terms of opinion articles.\textsuperscript{231} For the most part, academics produce well-supported and well-argued opinion pieces, provide analysis of high quality, and appear to be less influenced by their political alignment. Academics are also more likely to remain independent of pressure from politicians than journalists, and to produce factual and informed analysis. The increasing proportion of academics suggests that opinion-makers who regularly publish newspaper articles in Mexico are less tied to the political process; as such, they may have less political impact in policy decisions, including reforms.\textsuperscript{232} In 2007 academics wrote 46 percent of high-quality articles, the largest proportion (see Table A5 in Appendix A); these were for the most part well-researched articles, based on the merits or problems of specific aspects of the electoral reform. They provided relevant context to the debate, and their arguments were accurate. These authors however, had little direct impact on the final outcome, as Chapter 6 further explains.

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 below illustrate the change in the groups of authors according to their main professional activity within and across the three newspapers in 1996 and 2007. In 1996 Reforma had the highest proportion of academics (30\%) compared to the other newspapers. This suggests that it had higher standards regarding its contributors in a context of press opening and diversification. In 2007, all three newspapers had about the same proportion of academics among their contributors, which also indicates a trend to more professionalization in terms of opinion in

\textsuperscript{230} This does not mean that in stable democracies, intellectuals or academics do not have a media presence in television, the radio, and the press; in those contexts, higher education institutions are no longer the only space for reflection and critique. Moreover, the expansion of the media in general has led to a greater number of “public intellectuals.”

\textsuperscript{231} Although news articles are not included in my sample, I should mention that the literature on the Mexican media and interviews with scholars, journalists, and political actors suggest that news articles are not as diverse as opinion pieces.

\textsuperscript{232} In my 2007 sample, there were two academics (María Amparo Casar and Lorenzo Córdova) who advised the reform negotiators. Their articles were neutral and thorough in their explanations of different aspects of the reform, including those with which they did not agree. However, whatever influence they might have had in the final outcome was due to their role as advisors, not through their articles.
the Mexican press. In 1996 *El Universal* and *Reforma* had roughly the same proportion of political actors (see Table 4.3). In 2007, political actors as regular contributors decreased to 18 percent in all papers; and *La Jornada* and *Reforma* had a smaller proportion of political actors as regular contributors (see Table 4.4). In fact, by 2007 *Reforma* had 8 percent of political actors among its contributors, the lowest proportion of the three newspapers included in this work.\footnote{Reforma had a much larger percentage of authors whose main professional activity was classified as “other” in 2007 in comparison to 1996 (41% and 17% respectively). These include intellectuals, writers, lawyers, civil society representatives, political analysts and advisors.}

**Table 4.3 Number and Percentage of Authors Classified According to Professional Activity in *El Universal*, *La Jornada* and *Reforma* 1996**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 1996</th>
<th>El Universal</th>
<th>La Jornada</th>
<th>Reforma</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and *Reforma*, Jan.-Dec., 1996.

**Table 4.4 Number and Percentage of Authors Classified According to Professional Activity in *El Universal*, *La Jornada* and *Reforma* 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 2007</th>
<th>El Universal</th>
<th>La Jornada</th>
<th>Reforma</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above tables show the emphasis on more diversification among opinion-makers in the print media in general; in the case of *Reforma*, the increase of experts (comprised in the “other”
category) and the decrease of political actors suggest a trend to more professionalization of their regular contributors. More professionalization, however, has not meant more homogenization in viewpoints, but rather greater polarization, as distinct viewpoints became entrenched along a left right spectrum.

The increase in the proportion of opinion pieces written by academics and the decrease of articles published by political actors in the newspapers I analyzed suggest that opinion-makers are less tied to the political process and probably have less political impact in the stage of electoral democracy than they did in 1996. The change in the composition of the Red Circle in the stage of electoral democracy suggests better opinion articles, which increasingly include analysis done by academics and other experts. Nevertheless, there is no conclusive evidence that opinions contrary to particular aspects of the reform actually had some influence in minimizing the disagreements prevalent in 2007. In that year, most of the left and right authors defended their side of the debate; I did not find concrete instances in my sample where authors with strong convictions on each side of the debate changed their point of view, even if claims were obviously contradicted by well-argued articles, written by experts in a neutral tone. My findings suggest that if there is a polarization of viewpoints in newspapers, then newspaper opinion pieces may serve to entrench differences in viewpoint among political actors, or just reflect those differences.

By 2007, there was more plurality. Opinion-makers appeared to be more entrenched along left/right political lines. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 below show the differences in article position in 1996 and 2007, cross-tabulated with the author’s main activity in each year. A comparison of both years shows that, although centre articles were still the majority in 2007, there was an increase in right and left articles in comparison to 1996. This change is also illustrative of more diversity of opinion as described above.

234 The percentages shown are within each activity group, not article position.
Table 4.5 Article Position and Author’s Professional Activity 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 1996</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma, Jan.-Dec., 1996.

Table 4.6 Article Position and Authors’ Professional Activity 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 2007</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma, Jan.-Dec., 2007.

In 2007, newspaper editorial articles (those expressing the institutional viewpoint of the newspaper) in El Universal are on the centre, and in La Jornada are on the left of the political spectrum. As can be seen by comparing tables 4.5 and 4.6 above, in 2007 the proportion of centre articles written by journalists and political actors decreased, and both left and right articles written by these authors increased. With more political competition and more political actors of all stripes writing in the press, it is not surprising to see more marked differences among politicians. What is more relevant is that journalists wrote articles more clearly aligned to the right or to the left. While this is a good indication of plurality in the Mexican press, it also suggests that in a polarized political context, opinion articles in the print media may not only reflect differences among political parties and different policy positions, but also fail to mitigate them.

Reforma does not publish a newspaper editorial.
In 2007, there is a noticeable difference across newspapers regarding article tone (which reveals the attitudes and presuppositions of the author). In that year, 47 percent of all articles were critical, versus 39 percent in 1996 (see tables A10 and A11 in Appendix A). The proportion of critical articles in La Jornada is noteworthy: 77 percent of all the pieces published in that paper, a significant increase from 35 percent of critical articles it had in 1996. There were no optimistic articles in La Jornada in 2007.\textsuperscript{236} Journalists account for 43 percent of critical articles, the highest proportion (see Table A9 in Appendix A).

As opinion-makers publishing articles in the press became less tied to the political process, they became less able to participate in, or contribute to, the formulation of electoral reforms in Mexico. By 2007, the print media reflected a greater variety of positions and concerns, opinion-makers publishing articles in the press had become increasingly divided, and the print media had become less of a means of communication between the two polarizing sides. There was still communication within the Red Circle in the sense that authors of opinion pieces read and sometimes responded to each other’s articles.\textsuperscript{237} Nevertheless, there is no evidence that this type of communication in fact changed opinion-makers’ points of view on the opposing sides of an issue.\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{236} The discontent with the 2006 electoral process among an important sector of the left was reflected in their articles. As explained in Chapter 6, although authors in La Jornada were mostly favorable and supportive of the changes to the electoral legislation, their authors were highly critical of the actors that they considered responsible for the left candidate being narrowly defeated (namely, the mass media and IFE’s electoral councilors).

\textsuperscript{237} Opinion-makers may comment on issues addressed by one of their colleagues in another article and respond, positively or negatively. It should be mentioned, however, that some newspapers—notably Reforma—ask their regular contributors to abstain from discussing amongst themselves (Trejo 2015); this is to avoid controversy from reaching their columnists.

\textsuperscript{238} Although they are unlikely to foster consensus and foster agreements in a context of polarization, the arguments used by opinion-makers can have an impact on policy-making, for example by either undermining or bolstering the credibility or legitimacy of political actors among their colleagues (given that the print media does not reach the public), thus affecting their ability to negotiate, or publishing details that might derail an agreement. For example, in 1996, criticisms of recalcitrant or hard-line politicians added to the pressure on them to reach the agreements that led to the electoral reform. In 2007, leaks of some names of potential new electoral councilors arguably delayed the selection process.

With the election of a president from an opposition party in 2000, there were great expectations that political communication in the country would considerably change: specifically, that the media, in a context of freedom of expression and of the press, would play a more normative role, similar to the role of a free press in liberal democracies. Nevertheless, the relationship between the government and the media “soured” after President Fox took office (Riva Palacio 2004, 178). Opinion-makers criticized President Fox’s lack of leadership, his lack of political sensitivity, and his domestic policy errors, and many argued that these elements were affecting the government’s performance239 (Ochoa 2005). As (Aguilar and Castañeda (2007) and Castañeda (2008) account, Vicente Fox did not receive well the constant scrutiny and criticisms of his administration, and adopted a dismissive attitude mostly towards the press, in particular towards opinion-makers. Such thinking began to resonate with some government officials who believed that the media was only interested in criticizing the government (Castañeda 2008; Riva Palacio 2004).

Notwithstanding the increased openness and diversity in the print media, press opening in Mexico mostly meant liberalization in the circulation of ideas among the country’s elites, rather than among the public in general. The elitist character of the Mexican press meant that it arguably has had less impact in the policy-developing process and in holding the government accountable than the press does in liberal democracies. This particularity of the Mexican context is key to understanding the role of opinion-makers. As Riva Palacio (2004, 99) explains, the Mexican press never worked as a bridge between those who govern and the rest of the population; rather, it has always been a medium through which elites communicate with each other. The role of the print media in guiding opinion among the country’s elites in the stage of electoral democracy is not very different from what it was under PRI rule. For the most part, the Mexican press does not appear to respond to popular needs.

239 As I explained in Chapter 3, the transition to electoral democracy in 2000 did not fulfill citizens’ expectations of a generalized improvement of living conditions. The government’s inability to reach agreements and to solve serious economic and social problems (including poverty, crime, week rule of law, and corruption) eroded confidence in the country’s institutions.
Politicians do pay attention to opinions in the press: of the 12 political actors I interviewed, 11 responded that they read columns and opinion articles, although 50 percent of them stated that those articles are mostly a sort of “monologue” of opinion-makers, suggesting that columnists do have some influence and are capable of bringing attention to topics. Politicians, however, know that opinion-makers have little impact on policy decisions, given that the press has little influence on public opinion, or even on electoral results. More than the opinion of specialists (published opinion), political actors appear to care about public opinion; they know that unless the arguments and positions expressed in newspaper columns and opinion articles are reproduced on radio and television, those arguments will not reach the majority of the population. However, although journalists appear to recognize that the press has little influence in policy outcomes, they seek to bring attention to the issues they consider important in order to hold politicians accountable (Cardona, author’s interview; Granados Chapa, author’s interview; Moreno, author’s interview; Sarmiento, authors interview).

In addition to the low readership of newspapers, other elements may be at play regarding the apparent disconnect between opinions in the print media and policymaking. For example, when criticism in the press is directed at collective entities, such as political parties, the Senate, or the Chamber of Deputies (for example, the discussion about legislative process), criticism is “diluted” among all members of that group. Separate interviews with one senator and one legislator coincided in suggesting that in these cases, the spotlight is taken off of legislators, diffusing responsibility, which in turn deflects criticisms from one or a few individuals to the whole legislative body.240

The interviews I conducted with political actors, journalists, and newspaper editors suggest that in the stage of electoral democracy in Mexico, the relationship between journalists and politicians—the print media and the government—is still in transition in a mutually adjusting and learning process. Politicians are learning to deal with a diverse and sometimes very critical

240 This was the case regarding the selection process for IFE’s new electoral councillors in 2007, as explained in Chapter 6. The 2007 electoral reform was promoted by a small group of legislators who had a mandate to negotiate. When the details of the legislation were discussed in Congress, several authors of opinion articles stressed the need to change the process to select electoral councilors. The fact that they did not change the process in any meaningful way suggests that they knew that the responsibility (criticisms) for not doing so would not be directed to one individual.
press, while the latter is learning to work in a new context of press freedom at the national level. The media in general appear to have evolved more quickly than has the ability of politicians to adapt and become tolerant of criticism. All the journalists and columnists I interviewed coincided in their account of the evolution of their relationship with the government and politicians: political actors seem to have had a harder time getting used to being criticized or held accountable by increasingly assertive media. One columnist and two journalists described the situation in similar terms: both said that the PAN and the PRD had had the most difficulty adjusting to critical newspapers. In interviews with PAN and PRD politicians, they stated that several columnists were especially hard on them or their parties, and that they felt that the criticism of their parties was unfair (according to them, critics were dismissing the important role of both parties in the transition). Interviews with Mexican politicians suggest that in the stage of electoral democracy, the Mexican political class is not satisfied with the role of the media: as one Mexican senator (a long-time promoter of democratization) mentioned in an interview, “it is not always easy to assimilate that level of criticism and openness” (Author’s interview, March 30, 2011). Three of the four political actors of the PRI that I interviewed shared a rather critical assessment of opinion-makers: they suggested that “for a certain generation of opinion-makers (those that had been critical of the PRI regime and advocated for democratization), the PRI would always be perceived as the enemy” (Author’s interviews, February and March, 2011).

As Trejo Delarbre (2015, 55) explains, the obstacles resulting from the subordination of the mass media to the political power during the twentieth century no longer impede free information (although journalists face significant dangers in some areas with high influence of drug-traffickers). All the journalists I interviewed and some of the political actors emphasized that the situation of local newspapers is different from that of national ones: in many states, local politicians, particularly governors, still hold enormous power and exert pressure and threats to the print media. Organized crime is also a constant threat for independent and quality journalism at the state level. Several international organizations, including Freedom House, IFEX, and Journalists Without Borders, have expressed their concerns about the situation in Mexico, in particular the failure of the government to investigate crimes against journalists. This has
resulted in the downgrading of Mexico’s ranking of freedom of the press. Notwithstanding the important gains in terms of freedom of speech and of the press at the national level in Mexico since the 1970s, some of the legacies of the previous regime did not entirely disappear. Although press freedom is now a reality at the national level, the liberalization of the Mexican press has not been accompanied by new legislation necessary to regulate issues such as media concentration, government advertising, and ethical codes.

Although political actors still have some influence on the Mexican press, this is less prevalent than it was during the authoritarian period (Trejo Delarbre 2015). Some of my interviewees indicated that during the stage of electoral democracy, some political actors still try to gain influence or positive coverage from journalists (including columnists and newspaper owners). Some politicians also continued trying to “become friends with journalists” and, through that personal connection, trying to gain some influence over what they write. Twenty-five percent of the journalists I interviewed, 25 percent of political actors, and two academics told me that some journalists were still seeking privileges or prerogatives from politicians. As Trejo Delarbre (2015, 39) states, media owners may also have difficult relationships with journalists who write opinion articles, particularly if their critical opinions concern their business interests. Newspaper editors and columnists that I interviewed coincided in stating that there is little dialogue in response to critical newspaper articles (Author’s interviews with three journalists, one news editor, and one former government spokesperson). The reaction of politicians to critical articles ranges from phone calls to an editor (although not as frequently as in the past) to simply ignoring those articles. Politicians may not respond to critical articles for two main reasons: a) to prevent the criticism from spreading to other media outlets or articles, and b) because they simply dismiss those critics (Aguilar, author’s interview, March 10, 2011).

The transition to electoral democracy in 2000 stopped short of bringing transparency to the organization, the functioning, and the decision-making processes within the media themselves. As Carreño (2007) argues, the relationship between the media and the political system slowed

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241 Freedom House indicators (2015) put Mexico’s press status as “not free.” Mexico was “one of the world’s most dangerous places for media workers in 2014,” with multiple non-fatal attacks on journalists and press outlets in different states (many allegedly perpetrated by corrupt or abusive government officials), leading to self-censorship in some states.
the process to renew and establish rules to privilege the rights of the public with respect to transparent and reliable media. Mexico, unlike liberal democracies, has no official data on the numbers of newspapers published, in terms of either circulation or readership. This data is instead provided and updated by the newspapers themselves, and there is no independent entity to verify it (Pérez Espino 2004; Riva Palacio 2004; Sarmiento 2005; Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview; Warkentin, author’s interview). This lack of transparency is a legacy of the authoritarian period, in which newspapers survived thanks to government subsidies. The need for newspapers to attract government and commercial advertising negates any incentive for them to be transparent about this information—and so risk appearing less competitive than other newspapers and losing advertising revenue.

Although financial independence from the government was key in the quest for independence of the Mexican press, following the transition to electoral democracy revenue from government advertising remains important for the survival of several (smaller) newspapers. This is relevant because it is one of the legacies of the previous logic of the old authoritarian practices, in which official advertising was a mechanism to censor or reward the media based on its editorial line. In the twenty-first century, the allocation of government advertising is still discretionary and does not have any relation to the size or reach of the media outlet (Carreño, author’s interview, March 3, 2011; Dupuy 2011; Moreno, author’s interview, March 1, 2011; Ramirez 2010; Trejo Delarbre, author’s interview, February 15, 2011; Trejo Delarbre 2015). The legal framework that regulates government advertising is incomplete, with one exception being the regulatory framework concerning electoral processes. There is an absence of competitive, open, transparent,

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242 The national Print Media Registry is described on its website as a tool offered by the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación): “Here you will find those newspapers, magazines, supplements, etc., that register voluntarily to certify the places or regions in which they are distributed, the number of people that read them and the number of copies that circulate periodically in each place” (Padrón Nacional de Medios Impresos 2015, available at http://pnmi.segob.gob.mx/, accessed May 26, 2016).

243 As Carreño (2007) and Riva Palacio (2004) explain, a large number of newspapers throughout the country only publish a few thousand copies per day. These are able to survive thanks to government advertising, and editors care little about increasing the number of readers.

244 Government advertising includes paid ads highlighting the merits of different governmental institutions or agencies, promoting public infrastructure or programs at a federal or local level. This type of advertising is not exclusive of the executive branch of the federal government. States, municipalities, and all public institutions (Congress, autonomous agencies, and even public universities) allocate resources for media advertising.
and public criteria to distribute government advertising. This complicates the relationship between the media and the government and leads to questions of biased coverage, even in the stage of electoral democracy (Dupuy 2011; Moreno, author’s interview, March 1, 2011; Trejo Delarbre 2015).

As Ramírez (2010) explains, the possibility to negotiate the allocation of government advertising inhibits the social role that the media should play in a democratic society and promotes self-censorship. Even with plurality in the press in general, government advertising that lacks transparency may have negative consequences: for example, some newspapers may publish articles with the exclusive purpose of helping a particular cause or group, conveying unfounded criticisms of political actors, public programs, or policies. If arguments of those articles are then picked up by other media outlets, they may influence support or rejection of reforms or other policies, even in a context of low press readership.

The transition to electoral democracy brought about a noteworthy change regarding government advertising: namely, that most advertising increasingly went to television and radio (Trejo Delarbre 2015). Trejo Delarbre also writes about a phenomenon that three of my interviewees (one former government spokesman and two journalists) told me about. In television and radio, political actors purchase spaces in news programs in which they are interviewed and then appear as “guests”: the fact that they have paid for that airtime is something the public is not made aware of.245

Final Remarks

Despite the set of media controls that prevailed under the authoritarian regime in Mexico, critical intellectuals found some small outlets in the print media to voice their discontent. This helped the PRI regime’s legitimacy, but also allowed a small contingent of opinion-makers to maintain a modicum of independence, and eventually to emerge and make a contribution towards electoral democratization.

245 The three interviewees who told me about this phenomenon said that it increased after the 2007 electoral reform prohibited the sale of airtime for electoral advertising, arguably to “make up” for the loss of revenue for television and radio corporations resulting from the changes to the electoral advertising model (the changes are fully explained in Chapter 6).
In this chapter, I explained that the liberalization of the press in Mexico was propelled by a confluence of factors, involving both political and economic developments and reforms. Most importantly, the economic crisis that began in the 1970s and subsequent reforms generated the liberalization of the Mexican political system and, almost simultaneously, of the press; these two processes then reinforced each other. The liberalization of the Mexican press was characterized by an increase in opinions and editorial diversity within several national newspapers. This generated more plurality in terms of opinion. As opinion spaces in the press grew, competition among newspapers to attract more readers in order to become more profitable also increased. Human agency was another important factor that stimulated press opening, including the creation and expansion of independent newspapers.

The elitist character of the Mexican press is an important factor in its role during the authoritarian period: the legacies of that stage in turn shaped the evolution of Mexico’s print media in the transition and in the stage of electoral democracy. Since the press in Mexico does not reach the general public, the exposure of published opinions is among the political/intellectual elite. Although opinion-makers have historically played an important political role in Mexico—perhaps more than the role they would have in a more developed society—there is no conclusive evidence of their influence over the policy-making process in the stage of electoral democracy. Whereas in the 1990s the print media was more of an actor that contributed to Mexico’s democratization process as Chapter 5 shows, in the stage of electoral democracy the press was more of a window into the political changes being approved, as Chapter 6 explains.
Chapter 5
The 1996 Electoral Reform: A Definitive Step towards Electoral Democracy and Alternation in Power

The 1996 Electoral Reform was critical for the democratization process in Mexico. It leveled the conditions for electoral competition for all political parties, and consolidated the autonomy of the country’s electoral organs from the executive branch. In this chapter, I argue that the Mexican press, through opinion articles, contributed to the democratic transition process through their debating and supporting the 1996 electoral reform. Opinion-makers helped to promote agreements and bolstered the reform’s legitimacy. The discussion in the press was mostly one among the intellectual and political elites. A significant proportion of those who wrote opinion articles were involved in the reform negotiations: they sought to open up “space” to opposition viewpoints and played a positive role in pushing forward the 1996 electoral reform. The overwhelming majority of opinion articles promoted reaching agreements or consensus, and criticized hard-line positions and political parties for not being able to negotiate or for undermining the reform. Not a single article in my sample argued that a reform was unnecessary. There was an interactive process in place: through the analysis presented in opinion articles, independent and plural newspapers promoted agreements and analyzed the implications of the possible scenarios. This facilitated political liberalization, which in turn continued deepening the expansion of press opening, as other newspapers had to improve in order to be able to compete, as explained in Chapter 4.

In the first section of this chapter I present a brief summary of the most important aspects included in the different political-electoral reforms since 1977 to underscore the gradualism of the Mexican democratization process. I discuss the contextual aspects that shed light on why it was so important for President Zedillo to negotiate a new and farther-reaching electoral reform, with support from all parties. I then explain the long negotiation process that eventually led to the 1996 electoral reform, as well as the significant changes it introduced. The second part of the chapter dissects the analysis done in the articles included in my sample and shows that opinion makers, through their debating and supporting the 1996 reform, contributed to creating broad support for it. In the last section I analyze the implications for the media and for the access of opposition parties to power.
The Long Quest for the 1996 Electoral Reform

Electoral reforms have a long history in Mexico (Weldon 2005, 27). A succession of electoral reforms slowly and gradually gave way to more competition, openness, and pluralism in the political system (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000; Crespo 2000; 2004; Loaeza 2000; Magaloni 2005). Indeed, as Crespo (2000, 2004) argues, a key aspect of the hegemony of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was its ability to handle electoral legislation in order to maintain its viability. The very existence of opposition parties contributed to legitimizing the hegemonic party system.

The political reform of 1977 provided greater space for the opposition (especially in the lower Chamber), allocated proportional representation seats to minority parties based on their overall electoral performance, relaxed the general requirements and conditions for opposition parties to maintain their legal registration, and granted some prerogatives to facilitate their survival and development (Crespo 2004). This reform responded to the need to give expression to political minorities, and attract and retain their participation within the system (Loaeza 2000).

The 1987 electoral reform introduced a new scheme of representation of political parties in the Federal Electoral Commission, wherein the representation of each political party was linked to its electoral results in the previous election (Méndez de Hoyos 2006, 40). It also established specific rules for direct public funding to support both current party operations and campaign.

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246 Loaeza (2000, 103) explains that successive electoral reforms reflect an evolution in the electoral system; in 1946, a new law centralized electoral administration in the hands of the federal government (this legislation replaced the electoral law of 1918, which picked up the pieces of the Mexican Revolution); in 1964, an electoral reform created proportional representation seats, in response to protests by marginalized political groups.

247 Crespo (2004) argues that the development of electoral legislation in Mexico in the twentieth century was closely linked to the evolution of party competitiveness from the 1940s—when the official party consolidated its hegemony—through the increased liberalization in the 1990s.

248 Loaeza (2000) argues that the means of committing electoral fraud (manipulation of electoral lists, stuffing ballot boxes, and the alteration of official results) became concrete evidence of the regime's antidemocratic nature. The function of elections and of voting changed (from legitimizing the regime to delegitimizing it); this introduced uncertainty into Mexican political life, increasing the element of risk to the authoritarian elite inherent in the electoral process (Loaeza 2000, 103).
activities (Peschard 2006, 83), but did not provide monitoring tools to the electoral authority. Crespo (2000, 2004) argues that the aspects of the 1987 reform were merely cosmetic: the legislation significantly modified the composition of the federal Chamber of Deputies to ensure that the PRI would not lose its absolute majority there, which was essential to preserving PRI hegemony and control over Congress. The strength of the opposition had increased to a point where it endangered the hegemony of the "official" party in what loomed as a tense, hotly contested presidential election in 1988.

The 1990 electoral law created the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). Although it was formally independent of the government, it still remained under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, and the PRI retained majority representation (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000; Crespo 2000, 2004; Loaeza 2000; Peschard 2006). In 1993 there was a new electoral reform. Peschard (2006) explains that the electoral legislation mandated political parties to submit income and expense reports to the electoral authority at the end of each year and after every federal election. IFE, however, did not have the auditing capacity to assure that what the parties reported was true. Although IFE’s control over party finances was merely formal, it was the first step towards making parties accountable for their funding (Peschard 2006, 84).249

In 1994, the surprising public emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) prompted a round of political negotiations that resulted in a new electoral reform approved a few months before the August presidential election. The broad social support won by the EZLN benefited the left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which demanded that negotiations over electoral issues be reopened in order to guarantee conditions of greater fairness and impartiality in the 1994 presidential election (Crespo 2004, 72).250 For the Salinas Administration, it was important to neutralize the rebels and provide legitimacy to the electoral process. It was also imperative to assure that the country’s electoral organs were trustworthy: as Peschard (2006, 85) writes, the government could not ignore this issue if it wished to retain the

249 The reforms of 1987, 1990, and 1993 allowed the PRI to maintain an absolute majority in the Lower Chamber, despite the progress of the opposition; as well, the ruling party still had control over electoral authorities (Crespo 2000, 2004).

250 The PRD had rejected the 1990 and 1993 reforms on the grounds that they were superficial and regressive. Unless there were significant amendments to federal electoral legislation, the party would not accept the results of the 1994 presidential election easily.
reputation it had acquired abroad, and to relieve the political uncertainty that the Chiapas uprising and the assassination of the PRI presidential candidate had caused among political elites and the general Mexican population.

The changes to the electoral legislation approved in 1994 modified decision-making structures in the IFE: the members of IFE’s General Council (Consejo General, IFE’s chief directive board), called citizen councillors, were proposed by the different parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies and elected by a two-thirds vote; the presidency no longer took part in the selection (Crespo 2000, 2004; Peschard 2006); and the chairperson of IFE’s General Council remained the minister of the interior. However, in order to make the electoral authority more reliable, President Salinas appointed Jorge Carpizo, a well-known and respected academic and politician, as Secretario de Gobernación and, hence, as president of IFE’s Consejo General (Peschard 2006, 85). As well, the reform permitted international electoral observers.

Ernesto Zedillo’s election as president was accepted and widely regarded as legitimate by the public, in contrast to that of his predecessor’s (Gómez Tagle 2004; Peschard 2006, 86). A majority of voters believed that he actually won the presidency in 1994 without fraud (Brinegar, Morgenstern, and Nielson 2006, 79; Magaloni 2005, 23). This enhanced his credibility and gave him more leverage to negotiate a political-electoral reform with the opposition.

The events of 1994 and 1995, including the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, political assassinations, and economic crisis, had shaken the notion of the country’s political stability. From the beginning of his administration, Ernesto Zedillo faced two important challenges: to respond and manage the 1994-1995 economic crises and the poverty it had produced, and to achieve a political reform (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 377). He had to give equal attention to the country’s economy and politics, two realms that Carlos Salinas had been able to keep separate insofar as he had focused his attention on the economy while assuming that political reforms could come later. One of

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251 The six new citizen councillors were well-respected professionals and had not held any government post before.
252 The economic crisis encompassed a considerable devaluation of the peso, inflation, and increased interest rates and public and personal debt.
253 Carlos Salinas had privileged economic, rather than political issues, for the sake of stability.
President Zedillo’s priorities was a new electoral reform, as a key component of a broader, political reform. The 1996 reform encompassed not only electoral issues, but also modified the configuration of the State’s organs, in particular the two chambers of Congress, and the government regime of Mexico City, thus going beyond rules governing elections. The following chart shows the main aspects of the 1996 electoral reform, providing the necessary background for the discussion in the first part of this chapter. The most important aspects of the reform are analyzed in more detail in the second half of the chapter.

The 1996 Electoral Reform at a Glance

Table 5.1 Main Aspects of the 1996 Political-Electoral Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes to the structure and functions of the electoral organs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major restructuring of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electoral court</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equitable conditions for electoral competition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding for political parties</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Party access to the mass media</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New rules to determine the composition of the Legislative Branch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Chamber</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author, with information from Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg (2000); Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson (2006); Crespo (2004); Magaloni (2005); Peschard (2006).
From the outset, President Zedillo promised a new political-electoral reform, which he said would be “definitive.” By this, he meant that the reform would address the remaining demands that opposition parties had been making since 1988, such as a fully autonomous electoral authority and effective competitive conditions for all parties. In his inauguration speech, he emphasized the electoral aspect, but also included other issues related to a state reform, such as federalism:

We should recognize that the democratic advancements are yet insufficient ... the time has come for us to unite in the construction of a new democracy that comprises a better relationship between citizens and the government, between the states and the federation; a new ethical code between political contenders and a “definitive” electoral reform. (Zedillo 1994)

It is important to note that the terminology was not consistently used throughout the negotiation process by the different actors (including opinion-makers). The terms “state reform” and “political reform” are not synonymous. Since the 1970s, political actors in Mexico referred to the modifications to the electoral legislation as political reforms (Weldon 2005, 27-28). By the 1990s, the goal of opposition parties was to achieve a broad, encompassing transformation of the whole political system. The Salinas Administration had modified mechanisms, alliances, and institutions that had been pillars of the presidential authoritarian regime. The “promise” was that when economic growth was achieved, a “deep” political reform would follow (IMEP 1995). There was a widespread notion that a broader reform of the Mexican state was needed to update and create the institutions and rules to the new context, and the public conversation increasingly included a state reform.

The notion of state reform is broad and encompasses measures beyond the electoral system.²⁵⁴ These include the three branches of government and the relationships among them; federalism, including the basic structure of local governments and the relationships among federal, state, and

²⁵⁴ As Merino (2003, 59) put it, the State Reform refers to an “efficacious, coherent and flexible conduction” of a transformation process of various institutional aspects; its “deliberate” objective is “democratic governability.”
municipal levels of government; guarantees of civil and human rights; and enhancement of citizen participation in government, including such measures as popular initiatives, referendums, and recall motions (Weldon 2005, 27-28).

Although the goal of achieving a broad state reform was widely supported and qualified as necessary for the process of transition, it did not come to fruition. In the end, the Electoral Reform was the only, albeit very important, outcome of the negotiation process during the Zedillo administration. The 1996 reform was an electoral-political reform, including issues related to electoral processes and their consequences in terms of the composition of both chambers of Congress, and issues related to the government of the Federal District (the country’s capital).

Inclusive and Difficult Negotiations

The complex start of the Zedillo’s presidency, especially the financial crisis that began in December 1994, prompted the president to seek support and promote consensus on both the political right and left, and the demands of the PAN and the PRD were taken seriously (Eisenstadt 2004, 50; Molinar and Weldon 2001, 224; Peschard 2006, 86-87). On January 17, 1995, the President, the Interior Minister, and the leaders of the four national political parties with representation in Congress—Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), National Action Party (PAN), Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and Labour Party (PT)—signed a "National Political Agreement" that symbolized the consensus for the "definitive electoral reform." The Agreement established President Zedillo’s commitment to promote a political reform that would consolidate electoral democracy in the country. In his speech during the signing of the Accord, President Zedillo emphasized his desire for consensus. It was a “strategic recognition: the

255 The first outcome of the National Political Accord was an agenda for the state reform, which was divided into four broad chapters: 1) Electoral Reform; 2) reform of the public powers; 3) federalism and media; and 4) citizen participation (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg, 2000, 382).

256 Indeed, a state reform has proven to be elusive. Although there were reforms in different areas—justice and tax reforms—during the Zedillo and Calderón administrations respectively, as well as other structural reforms in the first years of the Peña Administration, including education, tax, and energy reforms, a comprehensive, broad state reform has not been achieved.

257 When agreements were finally reached in mid-1996, the leaders of the PRI, PAN, and PRD had changed.

258 For more on the commitments in the National Political Agreement, see Becerra et al. 2000, 379-384).

259 “. . . the commitments signed today mark the beginning of a political agreement to which we will only arrive through full consensus” (Zedillo 1995)
cycle of reform and electoral construction could not advance any more without the participation of all relevant actors and political forces, with no exception or exclusion” (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 377-78). This was the beginning of a long negotiation process among all political actors.

The negotiation process lasted for more than 18 months. Discussions about a broad political-electoral reform took place in different spaces and among different groups, ranging from politicians to academics and civil society. The negotiation process comprised three stages and areas of activity: 1) the official negotiations mediated by the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, Segob) that led to the Bucareli Accords (started in 1995 and finalized in July 1996), with the participation of leaders of the four major political parties and representatives from the Executive power; 2) concurrently, discussions promoted by civil society organizations, the most important one being the Seminar of the Chapultepec Castle; and 3) the final stage of discussions in Congress about the regulatory legislation—after the leaders of all political parties and Segob had reached agreements in late July 1996—which concluded with the final approval of the changes to the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) in November 1996. Time was of the essence. In order to be able to conduct the 1997 mid-term federal elections under a new electoral framework, it was necessary to approve the reform before the official start of the electoral process.260

From the outset, all four political parties with representation in Congress participating in the negotiations supported a new Reform.261 The agenda for the negotiations consisted of six broad themes: 1) political rights; 2) electoral organs and authorities; 3) organization of the electoral process; 4) electoral competition; 5) party regime; and 6) legality and representation (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 381). The notion that more equitable conditions were necessary for opposition parties to be able to reach power was broadly extended, even acknowledged by

260 In Mexico, electoral reforms are incorporated in the country’s Constitution, and they require two-thirds majority support in Congress.
261 In this chapter I refer extensively to the position of the PRI, PAN, and PRD, the three political parties that played a relevant role in the discussions and negotiation of the reform. The role of the PT was virtually insignificant: the party had representation in Congress, but at the time it was considered a “satellite” of the PRI—its function in previous electoral processes was purportedly to divide the opposition.
President Zedillo. Nevertheless, agreements among all parties seemed elusive, as they had to fulfill the expectations of different groups, with different agendas and often opposed interests (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 381). Moreover, several local electoral conflicts and disagreements in Congress overshadowed the relationship of the Federal Government with the national political parties, in turn slowing the negotiation process.

Political will on the part of the Zedillo Administration was crucial to reach meaningful agreements among all parties. It is important to note that although Ernesto Zedillo had served for more than a decade in government and held two cabinet posts, he remained something of an “unknown” for the PRI elite (Brinegar, Morgenstern, and Nielson 2006, 90), unsure of what he stood for or wanted, and regarded “as an outsider” (Preston and Dillon 2004, 257). In addition, Zedillo had distanced himself from the affairs of the PRI, citing the need for “healthy distance” between the party and the government. That, along with a politically unpopular economic austerity package, explains why the PRI's leadership made public policy statements differentiating the party's position from that of the president (Camp 1996, 11), including some of the aspects of the 1996 electoral reform.

The situation was complex for the PRI. In the context of the discussions about a political-electoral reform, the party needed to redefine itself in order to adapt to the many changes that had taken place in the country (IMEP 1995). While President Zedillo was committed to the reform, not all PRI members were open to concessions that would threaten “PRI electoral dominance” and would thus force the party to give up control of more political spaces (Brinegar, Morgenstern, and Nielson 2006, 78). Contrary to the Salinas Administration actively working to weaken the PRD, Ernesto Zedillo’s strategy was to include all political parties with

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262 During a trip to London, President Zedillo stated that his election had been legal but not equitable, in reference to the fact that it had not been fair because of the difference in access of opposition parties to the mass media, as well as the disparity in campaign spending.

263 He was not a strong contender for the PRI presidential candidacy in 1994. When Luis Donaldo Colosio was assassinated in March of that year, Zedillo was the only one that could replace him, due to a constitutional requirement for all contenders to be out of office (including cabinet positions) for six months before the election. The other possible presidential candidate that Carlos Salinas considered was the then president of the Sen of PRI.

264 Four of my interviewees for this work, including two political analysts who wrote opinion articles and two political actors (from opposition parties), coincided in this assessment. President Zedillo had much at stake—in terms of prestige and role in history as a democrat—in implementing democratizing reforms.
representation in Congress in the reform negotiations. In the context of an armed peasant rebellion, the PRD was thus stronger and taken seriously. Finally, for the PAN, the negotiations represented an opportunity to redefine its relationship with the government. Although the party’s support for PRI legislation during the Salinas Administration had contributed to its place as the second political force in the country, it had also damaged its image as an opposition party, because it had backed all of Salinas’ major constitutional reforms.

Post-electoral conflicts proved to be the most recurrent obstacle for progress in the negotiations between the government and opposition parties. Both the PAN and the PRD withdrew from the discussions more than once as a reaction to questionable electoral results. In 1995, both parties left the Commission for National Political Dialogue. First, the PRD withdrew to force a resolution to the 1994 gubernatorial election in the southern state of Tabasco, in which the PRI candidate, Roberto Madrazo, had engaged in exorbitant campaign spending. The PAN did the same a few months later, after the country’s Electoral Tribunal issued a favourable verdict for the PRI in the questioned gubernatorial race in the state of Yucatán. In addition, in June of 1995, the negotiations with the Zapatistas in Chiapas were suspended and Esteban Moctezuma, Minister of the Interior, resigned. All these events generated much confusion and promoted distrust of opposition parties towards the Zedillo Administration, further complicating the negotiation process (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 388). At the same time, however, other local elections, in which the PAN obtained significant gains, showed that democracy was indeed achievable. Both opposition parties returned to the negotiation table in October of 1995, the Electoral Reform Commission was installed in December of the same year, and all party leaders and SEGOB agreed on a new list of topics (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 395).

Civil society played an important role in the process of transition. In addition to opposition political parties, the push for new electoral legislation came largely from civil society organizations, as well as members of IFE’s General Council (Gómez Tagle 2004, 92; Molinar and Weldon 2005, 224). Academic discussions and public forums, promoted by civil society 265

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265 After the 1994 presidential election, five of the six citizen councillors of the IFE published an "Agenda for the New Electoral Reform." Among other things, they proposed consolidating the autonomy of the electoral authority, by extricating the government (specifically the Secretary of Gobernación) and the
organizations, started taking place in 1994. In June of that year, intellectuals, some opposition politicians, and even some progressive PRI members created The Grupo San Ángel, a space for discussion and debate that became the origin for many other discussion spaces. Members of the Grupo San Ángel openly talked about democracy and a democratic transition. Soon after the presidential elections of August 1994, public deliberation regarding the need for more reforms increased. The number of public forums and spaces for discussion, for instance the Institute for the Study of the Transition (Instituto de Estudios de la Transición), grew, all aiming to find coincidences and common positions (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 386). As will be explained later in this chapter, information and analysis on the ongoing public discussion forums, promoted by well-respected personalities and civil society organizations, contributed to raising both the stakes of the negotiation process and the expectations about the possible outcome. This made it potentially more difficult to oppose the negotiation or the reform in principle. During the long negotiation process, opinion articles criticized recalcitrant political actors or parties for their reluctance to compromise or to push the negotiation process forward.

The Chapultepec Castle Seminar was the most relevant of all the different discussion exercises because of the scope of its conclusions, many of which were incorporated in the agreements reached by all party leaders in July 1996. It lasted roughly one year (from early 1995 to January 1996) and was concurrent with the negotiations between the parties’ leaders and the government. The Seminar provided a space for studying, analysis, and “rapprochement” among political party representatives. Its format and endorsement by important and prestigious academics facilitated a

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266 Among its founders were Jorge G. Castañeda (intellectual), Demetrio Sodi de la Tijera (left-politician, former PRI member), Manuel Camacho Solís (left politician, former PRI member), Elba Esther Gordillo (leader of the National Teachers’ Union), Federico Reyes Heroles (intellectual), Tatiana, Rebeca and Manuel Clouthier (children of the late Manuel Clouthier, PAN’s presidential candidate in 1988), Amalia García (PRD), Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, Jorge Eugenio Ortiz Gallegos (formerly PAN), Agustín Basave (PRI), and Carlos Monsiváis (writer). As will be further explained below, a fairly high proportion of these actors wrote opinion articles about the process of democratization in the press.

267 In the context of press opening, this was reported in independent newspapers such as Reforma, La Jornada, and El Financiero and increasingly in El Universal.

268 So-called because it convened in the Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City.
more open and less defensive attitude of political parties (Meyenberg 2000, 15). Indeed, the Seminar continued even after opposition parties withdrew from the negotiations sponsored by the Executive due to post electoral controversies in several state elections.

The Seminar was promoted by two of IFE’s then citizen-councillors, Santiago Creel and José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti, and by the substitute councillor Jaime González Graf. Its objective was to discuss the process of democratic transition and come up with a unified position about the political-electoral reform (Sánchez Gutiérrez 1996, 272). Ortiz Pinchetti recounted in an interview that the Seminar provided the opportunity and the space for the PAN and the PRD “to reach a common ground” that set the basis for negotiating with the PRI (Author’s interview, March 7, 2011). A key aspect of the Seminar was the recognition and prestige of its promoters and participants, including academics, political analysts, and electoral experts (López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 791).

After several months, the group produced a report containing many specific proposals, which was signed by the national leaders of the PAN and the PRD (Carlos Castillo Peraza, and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo respectively) in August 1995. These endorsements changed the nature of the Chapultepec Castle Seminar, “which became a decisive political forum” (Molinar and Weldon 2005, 225). The final White Paper, the "Sixty Points of the Chapultepec Castle Seminar" presented in February 1996, was a complete blueprint for the electoral reform, and, very importantly, the basis for the agreements reached by all four political parties in July 1996. Table 5.2a shows some of the most controversial aspects and the position of each of the four political parties; and Table 5.2b shows the points of agreement reached in the Chapultepec Castle Seminar after months of discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Public Funding</th>
<th>Access to the Media</th>
<th>IFE’s General Council</th>
<th>Registry of Political Party</th>
<th>Lower Chamber</th>
<th>Colors and Patriotic Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Distribute according to the electoral strength of each party.</td>
<td>Equity only in terms of official time.</td>
<td>Agree to their autonomy and independence; but it has not shown a definite position.</td>
<td>Retain conditioned and final registration. 1.5% of the electorate to keep record and access the Chamber of Deputies</td>
<td>300 deputies of majority representation and 200 of proportional representation</td>
<td>Maintain the current legislation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2a Party Positions – Electoral Reform Negotiations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Public Funding</th>
<th>Access to the Media</th>
<th>IFE’s General Council</th>
<th>Registry as Political Party</th>
<th>Lower Chamber</th>
<th>Colors and Patriotic Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>Distribute 70% based on votes and 30% according to the principle of equality.</td>
<td>Equitable access</td>
<td>Autonomy and independence; however a link between the branches of government should be established by the electoral authority</td>
<td>Remove conditional registration. 3% of the electorate for registration and 5% to obtain representation in the Chamber of Deputies.</td>
<td>300 deputies of majority representation and 200 of proportional representation</td>
<td>That the use of colors and other patriotic symbols by parties to be prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>Distribute with equity based on a combination of the equality and proportionality principles.</td>
<td>Equitable Access</td>
<td>Autonomy and impartiality of electoral bodies with the support of citizen-counselors and without the intervention of the executive power.</td>
<td>Remove conditional registration. 3% of the electorate to be registered and 5% to obtain representation in the Chamber of Deputies.</td>
<td>250 deputies of majority representation and 250 of proportional representation</td>
<td>That the use of colors and other patriotic symbols by any particular party to be eliminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Distribute with equity based on the principle of equality</td>
<td>Equitable Access</td>
<td>Autonomy and independence, without the intervention of the Federal powers.</td>
<td>3% of the electorate for registration and to have access to the Chamber of Deputies.</td>
<td>250 deputies of majority representation and 250 of proportional representation</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions of the discussions**

Distribution to be made as follows: 70% proportional to each party’s strength and 30% with a reverse approach to it

|  | Introduce the principle of equity in relation to the use of media. Official free time will be distributed as follows: 70% proportionate to each party’s strength and 30% with a reverse approach to it | Remove the representation of the Executive and Legislative powers of the General Council of the IFE | Conditioned registration to disappear. The required voting threshold is set at 2% for political parties to agree to proportional representation seats in the Chamber of Deputies | No points in common | No points in common |

Source: IMEP 1996a
Table 5.2b Party Positions – Points in Common

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points in Common</th>
<th>Present Situation</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate the Electoral Federal Tribunal to the Judicial power of the Federation.</td>
<td>The Federal Electoral Tribunal is an autonomous body and the highest electoral court authority. Its integration is the responsibility of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches.</td>
<td>Now the electoral irregularities defined as unlawful may be sanctioned by a legal norm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The political rights of citizens contained in Sections I, II and III of Article 35 of the Constitution shall be protected under appeal established by the Constitution.</td>
<td>Article 35 of the Constitution in its sections I, II and III specifies the rights of citizens to vote and be voted and associate freely and peacefully for political affairs.</td>
<td>The political rights of citizens (such as the right to vote and be voted; to have the necessary means to cast their votes, etc.) will enjoy legal status. For example, a citizen may seek legal protection before the competent authority in case he did not receive their ballot or voting card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish the constitutional principles guiding the electoral organization for local electoral laws, and the characteristics of the organs and local election’s processes.</td>
<td>Without legislation</td>
<td>Standardization of local and federal laws to prevent that in some states a party may impose its own laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish mechanisms for constitutional monitoring of acts and decisions of federal and local electoral authorities.</td>
<td>Without legislation</td>
<td>The IFE and the Federal Electoral Tribunal may intervene to resolve local conflicts after elections have been made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chamber of Deputies appoints the General Director of IFE, once proposed by the General Council of the Institute.</td>
<td>The General Council of the IFE appoints the General Director of IFE, once proposed by the President of the General Council of the IFE (Minister of the Interior).</td>
<td>Greater autonomy of the General Council. Thus, the Electoral Councilors ensure greater control of the IFE and the organization of electoral processes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IMEP 1996a

As Table 5.2a shows, the PRI was reticent to let go of its advantage in terms of public funding and of access to the mass media for political parties: the PRI’s position was to allocate public funding according to the electoral strength of each party. With regard to access of parties to the media, the PRI advocated for equality only in terms of “official time,” not the spaces that parties could pay. As table 5.2a shows, the positions of the other parties were not as distant among them.

The reputation of the participants in the Chapultepec Castle Seminar, including intellectuals, academics, and political actors, as well as the endorsements that it received, raised the profile of this on-going discussion forum and underscored the growing importance of civil society. Among its participants were figures such as Alonso Lujambio, José Antonio Crespo, Lorenzo Meyer, Juan Molinar (academics), Sergio Aguayo, Julio Faesler (civil society activists), Federico Reyes Heroles, Enrique Krauze (intellectuals), Carlos Monsiváis (writer), former PRI members (such as Manuel Camacho and Demetrio Sodi), and other long-time promoters of democratization in
Mexico, including former leaders of the 1968 student movement, such as Gilberto Rincón Gallardo and Heberto Castillo. Importantly, many of them were publishing opinion articles in the print media, where they emphasized the need to reach agreements. Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, a veteran journalist that at the time of the negotiation was one of IFE’s six Citizen Councillors, told me in an interview that there was a significant degree of interaction of the opinions expressed in the press and in the different discussion spaces regarding the various aspects of the reform project and the negotiations among political parties (Author’s interview, March 14, 2011).

In February 1996, there was room for optimism. Progress had been made on the political reform for the Federal District: the Ministry of the Interior (Segob) adopted a new position regarding its willingness not to preside over the IFE, in exchange for fully discussing the composition of the institute’s General-Council (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 389). Despite this, however, on February 17, 1996, the negotiations on the Reform faced yet another considerable obstacle resulting from a post-electoral conflict. After a very close election, the Electoral Tribunal of the state of Puebla declared the PRI candidate the winner in the municipal mayoral election in Huejotzingo. The PAN’s leaders, who believed that the PAN candidate had won, pulled out of the negotiations with the government and demanded that the Zedillo Administration alter the electoral outcome. Many voices criticized the PAN’s position and qualified the decision as “blackmail.” After the PAN pulled out from the negotiations in February, the profound distrust among political parties increased. The intrinsically complex negotiation process became even more complicated, as any proposal was exhaustively reviewed in the special committees of the different parties (Meyenberg 2000, 13).

In late February 1996, the Coordination of the Chapultepec Castle Seminar presented its conclusions and reiterated its call for democracy. That position was the result of its year-long negotiation effort and was shared by the leaders of the four main political parties represented in Congress, as well as by other civil society organizations, such as Alianza Cívica, and many of the country’s intellectuals. The common position of all of these groups was presented by the then Citizen-Councillor Santiago Creel in a public forum, and was based on four main points: a) that the Electoral Reform needed to be concluded; b) that the reform should have authentic political
consensus; c) that the reform’s content should be as close as possible to the 60 conclusions reached in the Chapultepec Castle Seminar;\(^{269}\) and d) that political actors should show, not only in words but with facts, their commitment to democracy (La Jornada 1996a). Santiago Creel warned that if the Electoral Reform was not the product of an “authentic consensus,” nobody would be able to ensure that the results of the 1996 elections would be respected by contenders and electors (Reforma 1996a). In the same vein, José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti, another of the main organizers of The Chapultepec Seminar Castle, underscored that without the support of the political parties, there would not be a Reform; he emphasized that the role of the PRI and the government was also indispensable “whether we like it or not” (Reforma 1996a).

In this extraordinarily complex context, the negotiations between the PRD, the PRI, the PT and the government continued without the PAN. On April 2, 1996, the conclusions reached on the Electoral Reform negotiation table were presented in Congress. Although they were not binding, they constituted the basis for other substantial agreements conducive to a reform that would guarantee transparent and equitable conditions for electoral competition (IMEP 1996a, 2). The document included the main commitments to reform the existing electoral system and the government regime for Mexico City, and incorporated most of the conclusions of the Chapultepec Castle Seminar, of systematic academic studies, and many of the initial party proposals (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 409-410).\(^{270}\)

The PAN, the second most popular political party in the country, which was making important electoral gains, had not yet committed itself to participate in the final phase of the reform negotiations. President Zedillo needed the PAN to legitimize any reform deal and was determined to have all major political parties in the negotiation (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006). On May 15, 1996, the PRI mayor of Huejotzingo resigned and his replacement was chosen by the PAN majority in the municipality. The following day, the PAN announced its

\(^{269}\) In January 1996, the final document that compiled the most important proposals of the Seminario del Castillo de Chapultepec between the different political parties and Segob, “Sixty points for the political-Electoral Reform,” had been delivered to the official negotiators.

\(^{270}\) The document was not endorsed by the PAN, which presented its own reform proposal later in the same month; however, when the party reincorporated to the negotiation process, it recognized the conclusions presented by the other three parties as a good starting point for the Reform (Labastida, López Leyva, and Martín del Campo 2004, 792).
return to the national dialogue. This ensured the participation of the PAN in the Electoral Reform, but, at the same time, angered hard-line members of the PRI. Many in the party were furious with the resolution of the Huejotzingo post-electoral conflict\(^{271}\); in their view, President Zedillo had given the mayoralty to the PAN just for the sake of the party returning to the reform negotiations.\(^{272}\)

The following months were still intense in the negotiation process. At last, on July 24, 1996, President Zedillo and the leaders of the PRI, the PAN, the PRD and the PT signed the agreements for the constitutional change in electoral matters. On July 31, the reform was approved by all 455 legislators\(^{273}\) of all four parties. This was crucial because constitutional reforms require a two-thirds majority in Congress, which meant that the PRI needed the support of opposition parties.\(^{274}\) The relevance of the consensus reached by all parties at this point was unprecedented and cannot be overstated (López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 793). President Zedillo called those agreements “decisive, definitive and irreversible” (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 412).

After consensus on the necessary constitutional reforms was reached, it was still necessary to define the specific terms of the electoral law (a revised version of the COFIPE (Gómez Tagle 2004, 91). In this last stage, however, the consensus reached among all parties ended: PRI hardliners in Congress resisted some aspects of the reform, particularly concerning the issue of equity in the distribution of political parties’ funding (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006). As the mid-term elections of July 1997 came closer, the success of the reform was “in peril” (Molinar and Weldon 2001, 225). In November 1996, amidst the discussions in Congress of the

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\(^{271}\) For instance, Senator Ricardo Monreal, PRI representative in the negotiations, questioned “if it was worthwhile to continue making an effort in the negotiation of a fair electoral law if it is not respected now […] such is the intrinsic gravity of Huejotzingo. […] All this should lead us to reflect and understand that, as we continue with this dismal background […] towards the 1997 elections it is better to be prepared for blackmail, pressure and mobilization rather than to win the sympathy of the electorate. So, let’s get ready to give away deputy or senator seats in 1997 and perhaps the presidency in 2000” (La Jornada 1996b).

\(^{272}\) This is relevant not only because it shows the anger and division within the PRI, but, importantly, in 1997, once the reform was in place, the PRI indeed lost its majority in Congress and the presidency in 2000.

\(^{273}\) All of those who were present in the Lower Chamber at the time of the vote.

\(^{274}\) The reform modified 18 constitutional articles.
regulatory legislation, President Zedillo sent the bill for Electoral Reform to the Lower Chamber of Congress for its approval. It included all of the agreements reached by the leaders of the PRI, the PAN, the PRD and the PT at the end of the 18 months of negotiations. Nevertheless, the position of the PRI legislators in Congress differed from those of opposition parties, as the former proposed a larger quantity of funds for campaign spending than the latter (López Leyva and Labastida 2004, 795). The discussions on the legal aspects of the reform—the regulatory framework represented by the new COIFIPE—did not end in a multi-party agreement, and the changes were only approved by the PRI. In the end, this party used its majority in Congress to approve 16 amendments to the legislation sent to Congress by President Zedillo (Eisenstadt 2004, 50). The final bill significantly increased the total amount of money to be distributed among political parties (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006, 81). The PRI’s amendments to the formula governing the distribution of public funds to political parties were beneficial for the PRI: the proportion of public funds to be allocated to the political parties according to their popular vote increased from 60 percent to 70 percent, thereby reducing the proportion to be divided equally among the parties based on their electoral support from 40 to 30 percent (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006, 84).275

The opposition, not wanting the PRI to receive credit for a reform that would further the democratization process, vigorously protested against the “excessive amounts of public funding” (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006, 82). The leaders of the PAN and the PRD, Felipe Calderón and Andrés Manuel López Obrador respectively, stated that they would not accept the money.276 However, once the parties realized how their message was amplified by the television and radio time they could buy with the new public funding available to them, they “quietly dropped their objections” (Preston and Dillon 2004, 298).277 In this stage, the debate in the press

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275 On November 10, immediately before the PRI hard-liners introduced those proposed changes, the Party had suffered important electoral defeats in the states of México, Hidalgo, and Coahuila. Those amendments appeared to aim to avoid losing perks; as stated by Oscar Levín, one PRI negotiator on the final reform package, “on the issue of financing, it was the life of the party that was at stake” (quoted in Brinegar, Morgenstener, and Nielson 2006, 80).

276 The PAN even returned the first cheque as a way of protesting, and the PRD announced that it would use part of those public resources to purchase textbooks for public schools.

277 Arguably, political parties also realized that the funds could be used for developing “business relationships” with media owners: by purchasing airtime, they brought extra revenue to the mass media,
was not as intense as it had been earlier in the year; the dissenting positions were mostly for political reasons, but opposition parties (PAN, PRD, and PT) were in agreement with 90 percent of the changes (reform negotiator, personal interview).

The 1996 Electoral Reform: Decisive Step towards Alternation in Power

The successive electoral reforms implemented since 1977 had meant a progressive loss of controls over electoral processes for the PRI. This trend was ratified with the 1996 electoral reform, which made viable the possibility of alternation in power. Although the impulse for the Electoral Reform in the end maintained the gradualism common in other previous reforms promoted by the PRI, the changes it introduced enhanced the advancement of the opposition and at the same time accelerated the attrition of the regime. The Electoral Reform was published in the Official Journal of the Federal Government (Diario Oficial de la Federación) on November 22, 1996. Despite the amendments made by PRI legislators to the original document that had been agreed upon in July, the 1996 Electoral Reform solved essential issues for a competitive and democratic electoral system (Becerra 2008, 182).

Central to the 1996 reform was the removal of the Executive Power from the control over electoral processes, as well as the Executive’s prevalence over the other two powers in this matter. The IFE underwent important transformations and became an autonomous state institution, managed by nonpartisan members named by a consensual procedure in Congress (Domínguez 1999, 8), in order to guarantee impartiality to all contenders. The most crucial, determinant aspect of the restructuring of the IFE was that the Interior minister (Secretario de Gobernación) would no longer serve as the chair of the General-Council (board). With this, the Executive was no longer part, in law and in fact, of the electoral organ (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 419-420).

which would no longer treat them with hostility, in contrast to previous electoral processes, when the PRI received most of the coverage.
The 1996 reform further changed IFE’s General Council (board)—a collegial body of ombudsmen, and the institute’s most important body, composed of nine nonpartisan members named by a consensual procedure in Congress.\textsuperscript{278} The reform allowed IFE’s electoral-councillors to select their own director (president-councillor), no longer subject to executive nomination. It also gave them the ability to make personnel changes independently and to monitor their own affairs (Eisenstadt 2004a, 51). The process to appoint IFE’s electoral councillors was by a two-thirds vote in the Chamber of Deputies to serve seven-year terms (Estevez, Magar, and Rosas 2008, 7); importantly, they could not be removed before the end of their term, in order to preserve their autonomy. Within IFE’s General Council, only the eight electoral councillors and the Institute’s president-councillor have the right to vote.\textsuperscript{279} IFE’s General Council thus “personified non-partisan expertise unencumbered by direct political interference from government” (Estevez, Magar, and Rosas 2008, 2). This was a critical aspect in the democratization process. Once IFE’s General-Council consolidated its autonomy from the government, citizens began gaining trust in the impartiality of the electoral process. The surveillance mechanisms allowed political parties to closely monitor the entire electoral process, step by step (Schedler 2000, 8). Their vigilant role goes beyond the deployment of representatives on election day; all parties with representation in Congress are legally entitled to oversee the organization of each phase of the elections, from voter registration to vote counting (Schedler 2000, 9). By 2000, all of the political parties and 77 percent of the public had confidence in the IFE’s voter-registration list and its professionalism in conducting elections (Pastor 2000, 22).\textsuperscript{280}

\textsuperscript{278} The General-Council of the IFE is the Institute’s top oversight and management body. It decides on all organizational matters relating to elections: voter registration and voting cards, boundaries of electoral districts, operation of electoral booths, instructing citizen invigilators, vote counts, monitoring of party and campaign expenditures, and overall regulation of political campaigns and party organization.

\textsuperscript{279} Political parties have representation and observer status, but cannot vote. The executive branch does not have any representative in the General Council of the IFE.

\textsuperscript{280} In order to ensure the transparency and credibility of the vote count, the IFE set up a sophisticated and expensive Program of Preliminary Electoral Results (PREP). As polling stations finish the tally, they send a copy of their official results to the PREP centre, where they are publically computed, on big screens and on the internet. This was a crucial change regarding the asymmetry of information that had been so devastating to the credibility of the electoral process in 1988, when the computer system broke down and nobody ever learned what had happened (Schedler 2000b, 15).
The new legislation established that the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation (TEPJF) would ensure the validity of all federal elections. All the rulings regarding winners in federal legislative and presidential elections are issued by the Electoral Court, and no longer by the lower Chamber of Congress (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 425). This electoral court, part of the Judicial Power, is independent and distinct from the IFE, and protects the political rights of citizens and political parties. The TEPJF was placed directly under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, whose magistrates—no longer the Executive—nominate the members of the Electoral Court, subject to legislative confirmation (Gómez Tagle 2004; Magaloni 2005).

The reform authorized the Supreme Court to intervene in court cases raising questions of constitutionality in electoral matters in federal cases, or complaints involving state-level legislation (Gómez Tagle 2004, 94; the Supreme Court can review controversies about the constitutionality of electoral actions or outcomes (IMEP 1996b). The TEPJF was also granted jurisdiction over election-related constitutional conflicts arising at the local level (Eisenstadt 2004a, 732) in order to strengthen the institutional mechanisms to solve local electoral conflicts. The changes embodied in the TEPJF had been advocated by opposition parties for a long time; the fact that the final electoral results are certified by a nonpartisan institution significantly increased public confidence in the electoral process (Gómez Tagle 2004, 94).

The 1996 reform was a watershed in that it set equitable conditions for electoral competition, specifically in terms of funding for political parties and access to the mass media. Regarding funding, the legislation established that 30 percent of the public funds available for electoral campaigns would be divided in equal shares to each party; the remaining funds (70%) were distributed according to the parties’ vote share in the prior election. Although such a high share of the funding still gave the PRI a large financial advantage, the change was crucial in that it gave the PAN and the PRD sufficient funds that allowed both parties to run much more professional campaigns than had been previously possible (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006, 81). As well, the reform guaranteed that public funding would be the most important

281 Before the 1996 Reform, the campaign resources available to opposition parties were substantially lower with regards to those accessed by the PRI. In the 1994 presidential election, the PRI had spent 73% of the total campaign resources.
source of resources for political parties. Private donations were capped at 10 percent of the public funding, hence reducing the potential influence of private interests through private donations. Lack of resources and PRI’s total dominance of the airways were two issues that had prevented the opposition from obtaining more wins in the past (Peschard 1996). The reform also granted IFE the power to monitor and sanction campaign expenditures (Magaloni 2005, 136), and thus promoted transparency on the resources used in electoral campaigns. The increased monitoring of electoral processes meant that the PRI could no longer spend campaign money in the controversial ways that in the past had assured its victories (Brinegar, Morgenstern and Nielson 2006, 81).

One of the most important demands of the opposition was that of equitable access of political parties to the mass media. Since the electoral process of 1988, political parties recognized that news programs were, in fact, spaces for political dispute (Peschard 2000, 90). The new rules introduced with the 1996 electoral reform established more precise and equitable norms to regulate party access to radio and television during elections. The official time allocated to political parties during electoral processes was significantly increased:

In 1997 (as in 1994) each political party had the right to fifteen minutes of television time and fifteen minutes of radio time per month (for non-electoral periods). The 1996 reform gave 250 hours of radio time and 200 hours of television time for political parties during a presidential campaign, and 125 radio and television hours for congressional elections (Bruhn 1999, 105). Radio and television time (in normal broadcasting time and in promotional spaces) was to be distributed among political parties represented in Congress as follows: 30 percent in an equitable manner and 70 percent proportionally to the results obtained by each party in the previous election (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg 2000, 403). As well, electoral spots were assigned

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282 A report prepared by a committee within IFE’s Electoral Council showed that in the 1994 federal elections, 71.4% of the total campaign spending corresponded to the PRI, 17.8% to the PAN, 6.05% to the PRD and 1.15% to the PT (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011).

283 Before this Electoral Reform was approved, opposition parties had few opportunities to get their message out to voters on the mass media. The PRD, for example, had been systematically shut out of broadcast-media outlets.

284 In 1994, the additional time increased during electoral periods, proportional to each party’s “electoral force,” which gave the PRI more than half of the additional time.

285 Parties without representation in Congress had up to 4% of this time.
broadcast times to reach wider audiences; political parties’ and IFE’s programs would be broadcasted at the times with higher ratings (Meyenberg 2000, 7; Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 409). The 1996 Electoral Reform also instituted guidelines for news coverage of electoral campaigns in the mass media, and the IFE was given the task of monitoring compliance. Random monitoring of news spaces, such as those performed in 1994, were now required by legal mandate of the reform. The IFE put in place the necessary technical infrastructure to conduct monitoring of the main newscasts in the whole country in order to assess the journalistic quality of the coverage of the political campaigns in the 300 Electoral Districts (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 461). In sum, these changes created conditions for a more equitable treatment of all candidates in the mass media. The role of the IFE in regulating the relationships between political parties and the mass media ensured that the new rules would be actually implemented (Meyenberg 2000, 7).

New rules for the composition of the Legislative branch were also part of the reform. It changed the composition of the Lower Chamber of Congress and the Senate. It introduced the so-called governability clause, which capped over-representation from one single party in Congress. The formula implemented with the reform eliminated the possibility of the PRI being over-represented in the Lower Chamber by stating that the majority party's share of total Chamber seats could not exceed its share of the actual vote by more than 8 percentage points (Crespo 2004, 74). The overrepresentation of the largest party in the Chamber (which results from the first-past-the-post method of choosing 300 members) would be limited to 8 percent (Domínguez and Poiré 1999, 8) except when it obtains these seats through uninominal votes. An upper

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286 Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg (2000 460) list the ways through which Political parties could appear on television and on the radio: (1) the so-called “special programs” (discussion spaces in which party representatives state their positions and debate about public issues; (2) permanent programs (bi-weekly 15-minute spaces developed by each party to broadcast their specific position); (3) “additional time” lasting five, 7.5 and 10 minutes; (4) promotional spots (systematic 30-second flashes); and (5) spaces bought by political parties using campaign resources.

287 Since the 1996 Electoral Reform, the IFE produces detailed content analyses of broadcast coverage of each election.

288 The increased access to the mass media and the guidelines for news coverage had additional implications for the media itself, discussed later in this chapter.

289 Magaloni (2005) argues that for PRI leaders to accept such a change, they would have anticipated understood that no political party would receive more than 60% of the seats, but estimated that the party would maintain sufficient citizen support to obtain a little more than 40% of the votes. As a result, they
limit was set so that no party would have more than 60 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. This was significant because no party would have a qualified (two-thirds) majority in the Lower Chamber, which would ensure that no party would be able to modify the Constitution on its own (Gómez Tagle 2004, 94). The reform introduced changes to make the Senate more plural: minority access to the Senate expanded with the introduction of thirty-two proportional representation seats (Bruhn 1999, 105). It is composed of 128 members: the majority party holds two seats per state; the third seat goes to the minority party with the best electoral performance; and the fourth senator is selected via a proportional representation formula that takes into account different parties' share of the national vote. The change from three to two in the number of senators allocated to the party receiving the most votes in a state (as was the case with the 1994 electoral reform), and reduced, although did not eliminate, the strong advantage given to the largest party in the election of senators. It also breaks with the ideal of equal representation for all 31 states and the Federal District (Gómez Tagle 2004, 95).

The reform also brought changes to the legal regime of political parties (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 424): it clarified the conditions for political parties to enter the electoral competition. It established that a party’s permanence in the party system would be defined by citizens’ votes, and only those parties that obtain more than 2 percent of the votes would be represented in Congress. The idea was that this would eliminate “satellite” parties, which at times had served as PRI instruments to divide the opposition.290

Finally, the 1996 political-electoral reform included important changes for the government regime of the country’s capital. It established the direct election of the Chief Magistrate (“jefe de gobierno”) of Mexico City, beginning in 1997,291 as well as the 16 city councillors (delegados) and local representatives (the latter two beginning in 2000). It also broadened the capabilities of designed a system that could give them up to eight percentage votes of over representation, and with it, majority in Congress.

290 Although political parties agreed that the electoral arena would continue being a space with open access to new organizations, mechanisms for citizen participation were left out of the Electoral Reform and of any regulatory legislation.

291 Previously, the legal status of the Federal District was more that of an administrative department, and the city’s chief magistrate was appointed by the country’s president.
the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District, and thus gave it a similar status to that of a state legislature.

In sum, the electoral reform of 1996 touched and improved all the aspects that had been part of the electoral discussion in Mexico, and hence “represented the end of a long cycle of electoral reforms” (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 427). To be sure, even though the negotiations ended in a climate of disagreements between the PRI and the other political parties in the discussion of the regulatory legislation, this cannot overshadow the importance of the changes introduced in the new electoral laws. The 1996 reform was decisive in that it guaranteed the autonomy of all electoral organs and their independence from the Government and ruling political party. The new rules concerning the conditions for electoral processes were crucial in that they facilitated the country’s transition to electoral democracy. In the end, “the agreement was greater than the differences” (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000, 423): the long negotiation process had ended with a meaningful and transcendental constitutional reform, and its most important aspects had been supported by the whole opposition.

The importance of the changes regarding funding and access to the mass media cannot be overstated. The fact that the opposition had increased access to the media and enough money to get its message out was crucial. The allocation procedure for funding and media time introduced by the PRI legislators at the last moment watered down some of the agreements reached by the government and the leaders of all political parties, hence giving the PRI an advantage with regards to the opposition. Nevertheless, such advantage was offset by the greater relative impact the increase in funds and media time meant for the PAN and the PRD (Brinegar, Morgenstern, and Nielsen 2006, 82). Indeed, the availability of more funding and increased access to the mass media for opposition parties was instrumental in the PRI’s loss of the Congress in 1997 and of the presidency in 2000.

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292 The local legislative body, formerly Representative Assembly (Asamblea de Representantes) was created in 1986, and did not have real legislative capacity, mostly dealing with minor aspects of the law (reglamentaria).

293 Spending has a much greater marginal impact for challengers to the incumbent party than for the latter.

294 Given its electoral force, The PRI remained the party that obtained the largest share of public funding.
Opinion-makers and the 1996 Electoral Reform in the Press

The successive electoral reforms since 1977 gradually opened up more spaces for opposition parties, and the increasing relevance of the electoral phenomenon meant an important turn within the social sciences in Mexico (Woldenberg 2002, 25). Since the 1980s, an increasing number of academics and other professionals started studying the transformations of the country’s electoral legislation and analyzing their implications, from perspectives such as political science, law, and sociology.

As Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg (2000, 386) explain, a distinctive characteristic of the Electoral Reform negotiations in 1996 is a “massive intellectual accompaniment.” At no other point had there been such a degree of specialization regarding the electoral debate; it had never encompassed so many issues, so many participants, such meticulous care and accuracy. There was extensive and important editorial production on the topic in a context of increased press liberalization. The discussion in the press mainly took place among the intellectual and political elites. Long-time activists and promoters of democratization, as well as several of the actors that spearheaded the negotiations that led to the 1996 reform, including members of the Foro San Ángel and many of those who participated in the Chapultepec Castle Seminar, wrote opinion articles addressing the negotiation process, the country’s transition, and the necessary changes to the existing legislation. Their expertise in the issues being discussed, as well as their reputation, gave them an additional element of credibility. As will be shown in the following pages, many of them were highly knowledgeable about electoral matters and had been advocating for further political-electoral reforms.

In addition to the reform being promoted and its relevance continuously emphasized by the Zedillo Administration, the negotiation process had been publicized by many of its promoters. They did this through opinion articles, as well as through their participation in news radio shows, mostly broadcasted in Mexico City (Andrade, personal interview, February 23, 2011). Despite the differences among opinion-makers, there was broad agreement regarding the need for reform. The majority of opinion articles were highly supportive of opposition demands for meaningful changes that would lead to clean elections. Importantly, not a single article in my sample argued
that the reform was unnecessary. It is important to note that in the liberalizing press of the 1990s, divisions among anti-regime critics at the right and left of the political spectrum were not as marked: authors often found common ground in their position regarding their approach to further democratization. A widespread notion emerged in the complex political and social context of the mid-1990s that the reform was necessary and that it would be beneficial for the country and its on-going democratization process. After the Zapatista uprising, there was a broad consensus around the need to achieve electoral democracy. The PRI appeared as the culprit of all the country’s problems; and in order to solve them, it was necessary to establish conditions for the opposition to reach power.

In 1996, the highest proportion of all articles (32% of the total) were written by political actors, including former PRI members, PRD founders and other opposition politicians, and IFE’s citizen councillors at the time; journalists wrote 28 percent, and academics 20 percent of all articles (Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 shows the number and percentage of authors classified according to their activity, and the number and percentage of articles included in my 1996 sample). Table 5.3 below shows the authors of the articles included in my sample who played an active role in the democratization process—promoting and/or negotiating reforms—which include electoral experts and advisors, civil society activists, and political actors involved in the negotiations. In my 1996 sample, 20 of the 65 authors with articles (31% of all authors) played an active role in the process of democratic transition and/or were electoral experts; altogether they wrote 56 articles (36% of the total 156). Eight electoral councillors together published 19 articles (12% of the total 156). Table A12 in Appendix A shows the 65 authors with articles included in my 1996 sample, along with their professional activity and political leaning (if available).

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295 Although two articles written by PRI politicians played down the importance of an alternation in power.
296 Most opinion articles were classified as having a centre position; there were very few articles to the right of the political spectrum.
297 Some of them became electoral councillors in 1996, and others in 2003.
298 The male predominance of opinion-makers is noteworthy: of those 65 authors, only two were women.
### Table 5.3 Authors with Electoral Expertise or Involvement in the Democratization Process, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Role in democratic transition</th>
<th>Activity details</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Faesler, Julio</td>
<td>Civil society activist</td>
<td>Foro San Ángel; Alianza Cívica; Chapultepec Castle Seminar</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Rincón Gallardo, Gilberto</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor (left); 1968 student movement; activist</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Ortiz Pinchetti, José Agustin</td>
<td>Electoral expert/Promoter</td>
<td>Citizen Councillor (1994-1996); promoter of the Chapultepec Castle Seminar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Gómez, Pablo</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor (Left)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Unzueta, Gerardo</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor (Left)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Aguayo Quezada, Sergio</td>
<td>Civil society activist</td>
<td>Activist; Alianza Cívica; Chapultepec Castle Seminar</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Creel, Santiago</td>
<td>Electoral expert/Promoter</td>
<td>Citizen Councillor (1994-1996); promoter of the Chapultepec Castle Seminar</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Alcocer V., Jorge</td>
<td>Negotiations</td>
<td>Policy advisor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Sodi, Demetrio</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor; Grupo San Ángel; former PRI member</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Sánchez Rebolledo, Adolfo</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Journalist; PRD founder</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Báñez, Bernardo</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor (Opposition)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Concha, Miguel</td>
<td>Civil society activist</td>
<td>Human rights activist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Granados Chapa, Miguel Ángel</td>
<td>Electoral expert/electoral councillor</td>
<td>Citizen Councillor (1994-1996)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Zebadúa, Emilio</td>
<td>Electoral expert/electoral councillor</td>
<td>Political actor (opposition); Electoral Councillor (1996-2000)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Huchim, Eduardo</td>
<td>Electoral expert/local electoral councillor</td>
<td>Local Electoral Councillor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Camacho Solís, Manuel</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor; Grupo San Ángel; former PRI member</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Castillo, Heberto</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political actor (left); 1968 student movement; activist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ websites; biographical notes accompanying authors’ articles or presentations, and institutional websites.

Opinion-makers played an important role in convincing—or arguably “forcing”—the most intransigent negotiators, particularly regarding the Huejotzingo post-electoral conflict and the PAN’s withdrawal from the negotiation process, as well as the apparent ambivalence of the PRI.
Academics and representatives of civil society questioned the motives of those politicians stalling the negotiation, and framed the reform as the next, necessary step for democratization. Opinion-makers overwhelmingly advocated for reaching agreements that would lead to meaningful transformations to the Electoral System. They “forced the hand” of those political actors cognizant that their legitimacy was questioned in a very complicated political context (Rubio, author’s interview, February 17, 2011). Opinion-makers outside of the PRI, and/or those who had been involved in the democratization process, published articles arguing about the need for the reform, called on political actors to reach agreements, and emphasized the importance of consensus. Thus, the overall climate of opinion was a positive force around the reform. In the interviews that I conducted as part of this study, five political actors, two political analysts, and two journalists coincided in their accounts about the role of opinion articles on the final outcome in 1996: they stated that those who negotiated the 1996 Electoral Reform were indeed attentive to the editorials and opinion articles published about the reform. In addition, the press had an important “legitimizing” function for the applicability of the reform (Woldenberg, author’s interview, March 14, 2011).

The negotiation process that led to the Electoral Reform was positively informed by the arguments represented in the opinion articles analyzed, the majority of which were highly supportive of a new legislation that would include opposition demands of meaningful changes to the electoral legislation. By doing so, the press extended the notion that the only option was a substantial, meaningful reform. Arguably, this thinking permeated from promoters of democratization (including civil society activists and political actors involved in the different discussion forums) to journalists publishing in increasingly independent dailies. Despite some differences, most authors evaluated the essence of the changes in a positive light. This, in turn, enhanced support for the reform on the part of elites, and thus had a positive impact.

Tables 5.4a, 5.4b, 5.4c and 5.4d show the number of instances of causal interpretation, evaluation, treatment recommendation, and perspective frame elements respectively representing arguments related to the negotiation process. These tables show the great majority of frame

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299 Chapter 2 expands on the definitions of the different frame elements, which are briefly summarized as follows: problem definition consists of the issue or issues that define the content of the debate; causal interpretation refers to contextual explanations; evaluation represents the actual assessment or position of
elements, but the list is not exhaustive. In a few instances, articles lack a frame element. I specify the number of articles included in each table.

A significant proportion of articles, 37 percent (57 of 156), focused entirely on the negotiation process. The majority underscored the counterproductive impact of party interests for the progress of negotiations, the apparent lack of political will, and a degree of distrust on the ability of political actors to arrive at a consensus.

Table 5.4a Number of References to Causal Interpretation Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements: Causal Interpretation (negative)</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
<th>Frame elements: Causal Interpretation (positive)</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party interests</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Willingness to negotiate</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN’s strategy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>The president/government committed to democratization/the reform</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI hardliners</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Long and gradual transition process</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalent PRI</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>All actors agree in the need of democratization</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of political will</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>EZLN central actor in the transition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis in many aspects</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.–Dec. 1996.

Table 5.4a includes 106 articles and 50 authors. The majority of the articles concerned with the negotiation process described a complex context. Authors include academics, civil society activists, electoral experts, journalists and even some political actors (calling on the other political parties to stop their intransigence or ambivalence). Within the articles that exclusively

the article’s author; treatment recommendation refers to a call for or against an action; perspective refers to the implications or likely outcome. An article may have all or some of these elements. The articles in my sample have one problem definition and one causal interpretation frame elements, but may have more than one evaluation and treatment recommendation (the number of the latter two can be substantially greater than the number of articles).
analyze the negotiation process, 27 articles underscored positive contextual aspects, as the causal interpretation frame elements in Table 5.4a above illustrate (Alcocer 1996b; Castillo 1996; Creel 1996a; Faessler 1996a; Lujambio 1996a, 1996b; Merino 1996a; Morales 1996; Posadas 1996; Rincón Gallardo 1996a, 1996b; Sánchez Rebolledo 1996; Woldenberg 1996b). Several of those authors had a direct connection to the democratization process: from the Chapultepec Castle Seminar (academics, civil society) to political actors of different stripes.

**Table 5.4b Number of References to Evaluation Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements Evaluation (negative)</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
<th>Frame elements Evaluation (positive)</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI does not want a true reform</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Conditions are more propitious</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated negotiation process</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>the president/government committed to democratization/the reform</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardline positions do not help</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Democratization process in place</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political solution to municipal post-electoral conflict in Huejotzingo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chapultepec agreements are comprehensive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PAN wanted more influence/its withdrawal from the negotiations was unavoidable</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Consensus is positive</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PAN blackmailed the government</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Makes sense to privilege consensus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN and PRD’s position is unclear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consensus is necessary (the PAN’s return to the negotiation table is indispensable)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI and PAN not really interested in the reform</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong strategy of opposition parties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of democratic culture is a problem for the transition</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic problems complicate agreements</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little time to complete secondary legislation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backing off from agreements is detrimental</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.–Dec. 1996.
Table 5.4b contains 72 articles and 42 authors. In their evaluation of the negotiation process, many opinion-makers highlighted the counterproductive impact of party interests as an obstacle to achieve a reform that was widely considered as necessary to enhance equity for all political parties in the 1997 electoral process. They framed a lack of political will, as well as specific party interests and strategies, as obstacles to foster agreements, and ultimately as an obstacle for the democratization process. They argued that the politicians involved in the negotiations should look beyond their party interests in order to achieve a profound and meaningful reform. These criticisms represented an effort of some opinion-makers to bring recalcitrant actors in line and foster negotiation and agreements. Authors of these articles include academics, civil society activists, journalists and some political actors (Alcocer 1996a; Avilés 1996a; Cansino 1996a; Cantú 1996; Chávez 1996a; Creel 1996b; Crespo 1996a, 1996b; Delgado 1996b; Garrido 1996; Granados Chapa 1996; Rincón Gallardo 1996a; Sarmiento 1996a; Shabot 1996a; Unzueta 1996a, 1996b) among others. Some authors evaluated the negotiation process positively, especially when actors came close to reaching agreements and when the reform was approved (Avilés 1996a; Cansino 1996b; Creel 1996a; Faesler 1996c; Lujambio 1996a; Píndaro 1996; among others).

Arguably, authors citing of the parties’ own interests as an obstacle to the reform negotiations was naïve. After all, an electoral reform is primarily about modifying the chances of parties winning or losing elections, hence their keen interest in reaching an outcome that would favour them. At the same time, however, for civil society organizations and activists advocating for a reform that this time would truly even the conditions for electoral competition, an argument was made regarding the urgency for all parties to put their own interests on the side, come together, and negotiate for the greater good of an electoral reform. The overwhelming majority of opinion articles promoted reaching agreements or consensus (as seen in the treatment recommendation frame elements in Table 5.3). Many of those authors criticized political parties for being intransigent and for not putting democracy above their own interests.

Evaluation frame elements in Table 5.4b above are illustrative of how authors characterized different political parties: the PRI’s ambivalence or intransigence (Creel 1996b; Crespo 1996b; Díaz Garza 1996; Faesler 1996c; Rincón Gallardo 1996a among others); PAN’s selfishness in putting the future of the electoral reform in jeopardy because of the party’s eagerness to be declared winner in a municipal election (Hernández 1996; Peralta 1996; Uriostegui 1996b;
Unzueta 1996; among others); or critical of the lack of definitions within the PRD (Bátiz 1996; Uriostegui 1996b). Authors’ criticisms of political actors or parties aimed to highlight the recalcitrant positions as obstacles to the democratization process. They underscored the importance of reaching agreements because the reform was widely regarded as a key next step for the democratization process.

**Table 5.4c Number of References to Treatment Recommendation Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parties should reach agreements</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties should approve the reform</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The president should conciliate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PAN should be part of the reform</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus is necessary/Should foster consensus</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful changes are necessary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada,* and *Reforma,* Jan.–Dec. 1996.

Table 5.4c contains 65 articles and 39 authors. An overwhelming majority of the authors analyzing the negotiation process, including political actors and negotiators, academics and analysts, as well as journalists, argued in favour of reaching agreements (see treatment recommendation frame elements in Table 5.4c above). Many authors promoted conciliation, negotiation, and the participation of all parties to give legitimacy to the reform. In their articles, they highlighted the need to foster consensus and advocated to reach agreements (Cansino 1996a, 1996b; Creel 1996a; Crespo 1996a; Díaz Garza 1996; Merino 1996b. Musacchio 1996; Posadas 1996; Rincón Gallardo 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d; Shabot 1996a; Soto 1996; among others).
Table 5.4d Number of References to Perspective Frame Elements Related to the Electoral Reform Negotiation, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
<th>Frame elements</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective (negative)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perspective (positive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not easy to reach consensus</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cautious optimism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative consequences if the reform is not achieved</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Likely that the reform will be achieved/Real possibility to reach consensus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain future of the reform</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of not completing the reform</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely that the reform will be approved</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of agreements would be bad for the president and interior minister</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.—Dec. 1996.

Authors also offered their perspective on the potential outcome of the negotiation (see Table 5.4d above, which contains 22 articles written by 19 authors). Within the 57 articles about the negotiation process, close to 40 percent alluded to a negative or uncertain outcome of the negotiations, warning of the risk of not reaching agreements conducive to a meaningful electoral reform (Cantú 1996; Báez 1996; Delgado 1996c; Garrido 1996; Ortiz Pinchetti 1996a; Rincón Gallardo 1996d; Ureña 1996c; among others). Many articles highlighted the relevance of the reform. This helped frame the lack of a reform—either an electoral or a broader political reform—as detrimental for the country, therefore raising the stakes for political parties to continue negotiating and reach agreements.

In my sample, 36 percent of the articles defined the content of the debate in terms of the overarching goal of a democratic transition (56 of the total 156). The overwhelming majority of the articles (analyzing the democratization process or different aspects of the reform beyond the negotiation) framed the reform in terms of its bringing about a democratic transition. Authors underscored the real possibility that if aspects such as more equitable funding and access to the media for political parties were included in the reform, the new legislation would make it viable for another political party to be elected. Table 5.5 below shows aggregated evaluation frame
elements of the articles analyzing the reform, or some aspects of it (not the negotiation process), cross-tabulating with article position. Table 5.5 contains 87 articles written by 44 authors. Within these articles, regardless of article position, the instances of positive “evaluation” frame elements highly exceeded the negative ones.

**Table 5.5 Aggregated Number of References to Evaluation Arguments Against / In Favour of Reform/Changes 1996 and Article Position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article position</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.-Dec. 1996.

As Table 5.5 shows, the great majority of the arguments represented in the evaluation frame elements (89 of 121, or 74%) underscored the relevance of the reform for the democratization process (for specific arguments represented in evaluation frame elements, see Table A16 in Appendix A). The majority of articles depicted the reform or its aspects as positive, even those written by authors who advocated for further-reaching changes, who recognized that the reform was only one step of the democratization process (Concha 1996; Delgado 1996a; Faesler 1996f; Merino 1996b; Musacchio 1996a; Rincón Gallardo 1996d; Sarmiento 1996b; Semo 1996; Unzueta 1996b; 1996c; Woldenberg 1996c; among others). Their emphasis was on the importance of the political/electoral reform as part of the long process of transition.

In the overall analysis of the reform (not the negotiations), there were less than 30 percent of negative evaluation frame elements (32 out of 121 or 26%). These mostly concerned the reform or some aspects not going far enough (Avilés 1996c; Castillo 1996; Chávez Jaimes 1996b; Faesler1996h; Ortiz Pinchetti 1996c; among others); or disagreements regarding funding for political parties (Gómez 1996a; Rincón Gallardo 1996h). Notwithstanding that the PRI amendments (regarding the distribution of public funding for political parties) were controversial, there was a generalized notion that the reform, even if insufficient as it did not include aspects of a broader state reform, was a step in the right direction towards electoral democracy.
Among the articles with negative evaluation frame elements, seven were written after the final approval of the reform in Congress in November (which included the PRI amendments discussed above). Two articles evaluated negatively the effects of the reform for political parties: both were written by PRI members (Urióstegui 1996d; Gordillo 1996a). Notably, in Gordillo’s article, she also stated that alternation in power is not necessary for formal democracy.

Figure 5.1 below shows the differences and similarities across all newspapers in terms of basic tone (according to the authors’ attitudes or presuppositions) about the actors involved in the negotiation, the reform, and its implications. The highest percentage of articles in my 1996 sample (39%) were critical. Objects of criticism were, for the most part, the actors involved in the negotiation, including opposition parties, the government (which some authors held responsible for the slow pace of negotiations, for not doing enough to accelerate the approval of the reform), and the PRI, in particular the “hardliners.” Of all articles, 29 percent were prescriptive; almost one-fifth of articles (19%) were neutral/mixed; and 13 percent, a minority, were optimistic.

Most of the critical articles were published in February, April, and May—the months in which the negotiation process was more complicated and agreements among all parties about the reform seemed less likely. Conversely, most optimistic articles were published immediately after meaningful agreements had been reached in late July. *La Jornada* had the largest proportion of optimistic articles. This is illustrative of the overall opinion climate. Arguably, the considerable criticism/pessimism regarding the various actors did have some impact in helping to bring the recalcitrant into line. Critical articles were, however, supportive of the reform. Not a single article argued that a reform was unnecessary.

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300 The proportion of opinion articles in my sample published in the last months of 1996—after the reform was finalized—is smaller. For that reason, there are fewer instances of arguments about the PRI amendments, and specific aspects of the reform.

301 Table A17 in appendix A shows all opinion articles classified according to their tone, cross-tabulating with each month, to illustrate the changes in the opinion climate.
As Figure 5.1 shows, *Reforma* had the highest proportion of critical articles. Prescriptive and critical articles were assertive. The proportion of these articles shows that by 1996, the three newspapers analyzed in this work were extensively publishing opinion articles, even if they openly criticized the government or the PRI.\(^{302}\) *El Universal* had the largest proportion of prescriptive articles, and *La Jornada* and *Reforma* had roughly the same proportion of neutral articles, which was not much higher than that of *El Universal*. Support for the reform was consistent across the three newspapers. Notwithstanding the differences in tone, there was general agreement among columnists about the need of meaningful changes, even if the diagnosis varied or if the perception regarding the negotiation changed (specifically regarding the blaming of different parties).

\(^{302}\) Chapter 4 explained the importance of editorial diversity in the process of liberalization of the Mexican press: *Reforma* was independent from the government from its launching in 1993; similarly, since its founding in 1984, *La Jornada*’s opinion pages had been an outlet for authors critical of the government and advocates for democratization; and *El Universal* was immersed in a process of transformation, aiming to attract more readers.
Table 5.6 below shows cross-tabulations of article position and basic tone. As it illustrates, in 1996 a majority of left, centre, and right articles were critical (47%, 33% and 63% respectively).

**Table 5.6 Numbers and Percentages of Articles Classified According to Article Position and Tone (Critical/ Neutral/ Optimistic/ Prescriptive) on the 1996 Electoral Reform**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article position</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article tone</td>
<td>Number of Articles</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of Articles</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada*, and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 1996.

In my sample, 36 percent of the articles with a critical tone (22 of 61) were written by journalists (see Table A8 in Appendix A), roughly equally divided among the three newspapers. Of critical articles, 30 percent (18) were written by political actors, mostly aiming at rival political parties. Objects of criticism included political parties, mostly the PAN for leaving the negotiations because of the Huejotzingo post-electoral conflict and the PRI’s hardliners. The articles critical of the PAN framed the party as intransigent, merely seeking to gain more influence in the negotiations, rather than focusing and bolstering the reform (Alemán 1996; Bátiz 1996b; Crespo 1996a; Sarmiento 1996d; Ureña 1996; among others). Some authors framed the whole issue as “blackmail” on the part of the PAN (Hernández 1996; Urióstegui 1996b). Critics of the PRI argued that the party’s hardliners sought to approve the minimum changes possible, as that would make it easier for the PRI to remain in power (Crespo 1996b; Díaz Garza 1996; Faesler 1996c; Gómez 1996a; Pradilla 1996; Shabot 1996a; among others).

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303 Overall, the number of right articles is significantly lower in comparison to centre and left articles.
304 Seven in El Universal and Reforma and eight in La Jornada.
305 An article classified as critical may have more than one object of criticism. Thus, even though only 39% of articles (61) have a critical tone, there are 74 instances of criticism, and 20 objects of criticism.
306 See Table 18 in Appendix A for the objects of criticism in 1996.
Other critical articles took issue with the reform not going far enough; they argued that more, and more profound, changes were necessary in order to achieve a broader institutional reform (state reform). Along the same line were the authors who argued that the Electoral Reform was only the first step of a state reform. The fact that the only criticism made of the reform was that it did not go far enough served to push the reform along and gave it legitimacy: it was abundantly clear that some kind of reform was necessary. As a veteran journalist told me in an interview, “it was not politically correct” to oppose the reform openly (Author’s interview, April 18, 2011). Regardless of article position, what is most relevant is the confluence of many opinion-makers around the positive implications that the reform would have for the democratization process. As stated above, the 1996 political-electoral reform mostly focused on electoral issues and the regime change for the Federal District. Several opinion articles allude to the fact that despite the importance of the consensus and agreements, the approved legislation was one step in the democratization process. In particular, several opinion-makers in their “treatment recommendation” frame elements—excluding those related to the negotiation process—highlighted the need to continue the reform process in order to enhance the country’s institutions, including more mechanisms for citizen participation: such as referendum and direct consultation, and independent candidacies.

Table 5.7 below shows all authors classified according to their main professional activity, cross-tabulated with the correctness (accuracy) of the arguments they used in their articles. I assessed the relevance and accuracy of arguments based on the two following aspects: whether the context for the issue being discussed was relevant; and whether arguments were correct/accurate (see Chapter 2, 64 for more details on the binary classification of each component, drawing on the criteria to assess article quality).

As Table 5.7 shows, political actors, who wrote 32 percent of all articles (50 out of 156 articles), accounted for 35 percent of the articles (32 of 92) with the most relevant and accurate arguments; however, political authors also wrote an almost equal proportion within articles with

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307 For example, criticisms of the new rules for creating citizens’ organizations that were framed as not-conducive for citizen participation (again, in terms of a broader state reform), and criticisms of not including mechanisms to enhance citizens’ ability to have a say in political decisions, such as the plebiscite and the referendum.
irrelevant/inaccurate arguments, at 31 percent (8 out of 26). Notably, of the eight political actors who wrote articles with irrelevant/inaccurate arguments, seven were members of the PRI and one was a member of the PAN. Conversely, all of those whose articles have very relevant/accurate arguments were, or had been involved, in the process of democratization, including all of those who supported the Chapultepec Castle Seminar. This underscores the importance of the intra political elite/intellectual class discussion that was taking place in the opinion pages of independent and increasingly plural newspapers. A significant proportion of opinion-makers who were involved in the reform negotiations sought to open up spaces to opposition viewpoints, and played a positive role in pushing forward the 1996 electoral reform.

Table 5.7 Authors’ Main Activity Cross-tabulated with Relevance and Accuracy of Arguments 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 1996</th>
<th>Accuracy of Arguments</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Articles</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of Articles</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma, Jan.–Dec., 1996.

The print media contributed to the process of transition by helping to foster consensus and by bolstering the legitimacy of the reform. The emphasis of a majority of authors on the need for new electoral legislation created an opinion climate that proved to be conducive for a positive outcome. As I showed in the previous pages, through their reasoned and informed arguments, they promoted agreements and explained the situation very clearly, further enhancing the legitimacy of the reform. Journalists also picked up on the arguments made by authors that had been promoting the reform in the Chapultepec Castle Seminar, highlighted the significance of the reform, and argued in favour of some type of meaningful agreements, therefore reflecting the diversification in terms of opinion in the Mexican press.  

It would be misleading to state that the agreements reached in 1996 were only the result of the arguments made by a majority of the

[^308]: Just a few years earlier, it would have been almost impossible to criticize the president directly, or the PRI regime.
authors who wrote opinion pieces in that year. Nevertheless, the overwhelming support for reaching a reform that would facilitate competitive elections, and the criticism to hardliners who resisted the reform are suggestive of a positive impact of these authors in the Mexican transition to electoral democracy.

Implications of the 1996 Electoral Reform: More Political Competition and Increased Plurality in the Press

The 1996 Electoral Reform was pivotal in establishing competitive norms that facilitated the access of opposition parties to power. Equally important, it de facto contributed to deepening and consolidating the process of liberalization of the Mexican press ongoing since the 1970s and more apparent since 1994. The analysis of the 1996 electoral reform in the press thus continued the trend towards more diversity in terms of opinion. As Manuel Camacho put it, “Once the levy was broken, nobody wanted to stay behind because they would lose prestige” (Author’s interview, March 3, 2011).

The two aspects of the new electoral reform that had the most direct and wide-reaching implications for how the media thereafter would inform about parties and candidates during electoral campaigns were the changes to the allocation of airtime for political advertising and the increase in funds for opposition parties. In turn, the news and information about opposition candidates, and a more equitable coverage of campaigns and elections beginning in the 1997 federal electoral process, facilitated the access of non-PRI candidates to public office. As the PRI lost the majority in Congress in 1997, an increasing number of politicians from the opposition gained more power positions at the state and municipal level. Reporters therefore turned to non-PRI politicians for information, and in turn offered more plural news coverage (Hughes 2003, 101). At the same time, the additional coverage in the media gave political actors from opposition parties more spaces to spread their messages to the public, which further stimulated

309 In interviews to political analysts and journalists with articles in my sample such as Leonardo Curzio (February 23, 2011) and Sergio Sarmiento (February 15, 2011), they underscored that several of the country’s intellectuals had published articles about the 1994 electoral reform, in which they had spoken about the need to open up the political system, in particular emphasizing fairer funding for all political parties, as well as more equitable access to the mass media.

310 One notable example is Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the first mayor elect of Mexico City (1997).
greater plurality in the media. Diversity in the press followed a pattern similar to that of
political opening and democratization: an increase in political options meant a more diverse
spectrum in the print media.

As a consequence of the 1996 reform, the PRI faced much more competitive conditions than had
ever existed in Mexico, and lost its hegemonic condition (Crespo 2004, 74). The results of the
1997 electoral process showed that the 1996 reform was a necessary step to democratize the
Mexican regime: the PRI obtained 39.1 percent of the total valid vote, which translated into 239
seats (47.8%) in the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies (Crespo 2004, 70); the PRD had 125 seats in
the lower Chamber, displacing the PAN (with 122 legislators) as the largest opposition bench. In
addition, the PRD won 38 of the 40 plurality districts in Mexico City's Asamblea de
Representantes, the City’s legislative body (Bruhn 1999, 89). Moreover, almost ten years after
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas left the PRI and contested the 1988 presidential election, he became the
first directly elected mayor of Mexico City. The PRI's overwhelming capacity to impose its will
came to an end: as Crespo (2004, 73) explains, the composition of the Lower Chamber meant
that the PRI lacked automatic majority support for its initiatives. The other parties in Congress
formed a parliamentary "opposition bloc" through which they redistributed committee
assignments and internal decision-making authority. Since then, federal budgets and law
initiatives became the object of hard bargaining among parties represented in Congress.

Final Remarks

The analysis of the negotiations that led to the 1996 reform, as seen in the opinion articles in my
sample, shows that there was a feedback mechanism in place: the majority of opinion articles
published in independent and increasingly plural newspapers promoted agreements and
emphasized the importance of the reform for the democratization process. Several opinion-
makers involved in the negotiation process published articles with arguments that legitimized the
need for the reform, called on political actors to reach agreements, and emphasized the

311 As described in Chapter 4, by the mid-1990s it was rather common to observe a greater degree of
plurality in terms of political trends in some media outlets, where it was more common to see alternative
positions closer to those of opposition parties, and not only those of the “official” party.
312 This bloc, however, did not survive because of differences on economic policy matters among the
parties, especially between the PAN and the PRD.
importance of consensus. This contributed to creating an opinion climate in which a new electoral reform was widely framed as necessary. The new electoral legislation made it possible for more opposition politicians to access power, which in turn continued deepening the expansion of press opening, as other newspapers were encouraged to improve and diversify so as to be able to compete. An increasingly open press was both a cause and a consequence of more political competition. Two processes were occurring, as well as an interaction between them: one of growing media independence and the other of political liberalization, including pressures for deeper electoral reform, growing party competition, and pressures for equitable conditions for the acquisition of office by opposition parties. The 1996 reform established new rules for media access and campaign coverage during electoral campaigns, and the increasing number of opposition politicians taking office in turn led to greater plurality in the print media.
I argue in this chapter that new political elements influenced the debate in the opinion pages of Mexican newspapers in 2007. The loss of the candidate of the left in the 2006 presidential elections meant that left opinion-makers took a tougher position on electoral reform, aiming to secure measures they deemed necessary to bring about a more level playing field. Concurrently, changes to the electoral legislation reducing the revenue for mass media corporations led the media conglomerates and their journalistic supporters to enter the increasingly tense political fray. Nevertheless, while a well-informed debate occurred in the press, positions remained firmly entrenched and several issues were not picked up by the mass media (television and radio). Despite the plurality of debate in the press, the low readership of newspapers meant that the arguments were not made known to the general public. Hence, the press, which in liberal democracies helps to contribute to legitimacy and support for policy among the general public, did not in this case fulfill the same function.

The first section of this chapter revisits the 2006 post-electoral conflict, underscores the elements that evidenced the need for a new electoral reform, and presents an overview of the most important aspects of the legislation approved in 2007. It then explains the different implications of the most controversial issues of the reform, namely the changes to the electoral advertising model and the anticipated removal of some electoral councillors. The second part of the chapter dissects the analysis in the opinion articles included in my sample and emphasizes how the most contentious aspects of the reform were framed by opinion-makers.

A Complex Context and the Need for a New Electoral Reform

As I explained in chapters 3 and 5, the transition to electoral democracy in 2000 was possible as a result of successive reforms to the electoral legislation (Becerra, Salazar, and Woldenberg 2000; Córdova 2008; Crespo 2004; Flores 2008; Loaeza 2000; López Leyva and Labastida 2004; Woldenberg 2002). The most recent electoral reform, that of 1996, responded to the need to minimize the occurrence of large-scale frauds, and ensured the autonomy of the country’s electoral organs. For more than a decade, however, the Electoral Legislation remained mostly unchanged, which resulted in a lag in the strengthening of electoral institutions and regulatory
shortcomings (Eisenstadt and Poiré 2005, 9). In October 2003, the outgoing electoral councillors submitted a letter to both chambers of Congress stating that, based on seven years of experience with the 1996 electoral legislation, they felt it was necessary to reform it further (Woldenberg 2008, 27). Academics and experts had written about some of the gaps of the 1996 Electoral Legislation and advocated for correcting them: for example, the lack of clarity and definition of electoral pre-campaigns (the days and weeks before the official start of a political campaign) and the lack of tools to audit party spending (Merino 2003, 72). Furthermore, the legislation on banking confidentiality prevented monitoring of political parties’ finances, and the formula used to calculate the economic resources allocated to political parties since 1996 had resulted in tremendous growth on campaign spending by political parties (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Córdova 2008, 70; Langston 2007; Murayama 2007).

The 2006 presidential election was the most closely contested in the country’s history: the official tally of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) yielded a difference of 0.56 percent (233,800 votes) between Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, candidate of the right-leaning National Action Party (PAN), and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate of the left Coalition for the Good of All (Coalición por el Bien de Todos, CTB), which included the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the Labour Party (PT), and Convergencia (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Eisenstadt 2007; Lawson 2007; Serra 2009a). López Obrador claimed that he had been robbed of his legitimate victory by an orchestrated fraud and challenged the official results, arguing that he was a victim of a conspiracy that had allegedly been devised by former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari with the help of Mexican businessmen and President Fox (Castañeda and Morales 2008; Estrada and Poiré 2007; Serra 2009a). Although the Coalition for the Good of All demanded a full recount of all votes and staged mass protests and an intense rhetorical campaign against government institutions (Schedler 2007; Serra 2009a), none of the claims of the alleged fraud was “substantiated beyond circumstantial conjectures” (Castañeda and Morales

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313 A few legal changes had been made in the electoral legislation, including: gender equity among candidates of electoral processes; new requirements needed to constitute political parties; and the mechanism to allow Mexicans to vote for the country’s president from abroad (Córdova, 2007).

314 Felipe Calderón got 36.7% of the vote; López Obrador got 36.1%; and Roberto Madrazo of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) obtained only 22.7% of the vote (IFE, 2006). There were two other presidential candidates.
In its final declaration of validity of the elections, the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF) stated that the problems alleged by the left-coalition were not sufficiently proven, and that it was not possible to measure their impact on the electoral results, for example regarding the influence of the so-called negative campaigns (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 14). The TEPJF thus rejected that there were deliberate actions “with a common goal of influencing voters’ intention” (TEPJF 2006, 472).

The post-electoral conflict was, no doubt, a difficult test for the country’s electoral institutions and underscored the need to implement a new Electoral Reform. Polls taken in the months after the election showed that close to two-thirds of Mexicans remained convinced that the election was clean and express trust in the IFE and the TEPJF at aggregate rates close to those recorded in previous years (Schedler 2007). Although the performance of the IFE and the TEPJF in connection with the 2006 electoral process largely confirmed their institutional integrity (Eisenstadt 2007, 42; Schedler 2007, 91), the polarized post-electoral conflict had partly undermined the credibility and trust in the country’s electoral institutions among a sector of the population that had supported the left candidate. Those political parties that had been part of the Coalition for the Good of All continued their claims against the electoral arbiter, against third parties (specially business groups that had intervened in the electoral process through paid electoral advertisements that portrayed the left-candidate in a negative light), and against the mass media (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 14).

As Córdova (2008) explains, the 2007 electoral reform responded to three main reasons: first, it was necessary to update the electoral legal framework in accordance with the country’s new political reality and challenges; second, the reform responded to the demands made apparent in

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315 As Castañeda and Morales (2008) explain, tampering with ballots was virtually impossible: votes were hand-counted before party representatives by randomly selected citizens who served as election officials; a print copy of the polling station tally was given to each party representative (who could object to the count and who accompanied the citizen-election officials to deposit the scaled ballot boxes in the electoral district office to be preserved in case it became necessary to re-count the votes). Any fraud would have required coordinating hundreds of thousands of Mexicans (among election officials, party representatives, and randomly selected citizens).
and third, the reform aimed to limit the role of the electronic mass media (television and radio), understood as “a de facto power,” in a tense and conflictive relation with politics and with the state.

**The 2007 Electoral Reform: Main Aspects**

In September 2007, in the context of an ambitious institutional transformation, a new Electoral Reform was approved by both chambers of the Mexican Congress. This constitutional reform included a set of complex changes that affected diverse aspects of the Mexican electoral system. The electoral reform aimed to: a) decrease, in a meaningful way, spending in electoral campaigns; b) strengthen the responsibilities and prerogatives of the federal electoral organs; and c) design a new communication model between society and political parties (Cámara de Diputados 2007). The two issues that captured most of the attention among opinion-makers, and the most controversial ones, were the changes to the electoral advertising model, in particular the prohibition of purchasing space in television and radio for party advertising (in order to increase the level of equity among candidates during electoral campaigns) and the anticipated removal of two-thirds of IFE’s electoral councillors, including its president. As Casar (2009) explains, although both chambers of the Mexican Congress approved the reform, it was highly controversial.

The chart below summarizes the most important changes to the electoral legislation, approved in 2007. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the most contentious issues, as noted above, the changes to the electoral advertising model and the structure of the IFE—particularly, the anticipated removal of six of its nine electoral councillors. The intent of this choice of focus is

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316 Many of the changes to the electoral advertising model, in particular the prohibition for third parties to pay for advertisements promoting or criticizing contenders, and the anticipated removal of some of the electoral councillors that had organized and overseen the elections were direct consequences of the controversies around the 2006 electoral process.

317 It was a constitutional reform; as such, its approval required two-thirds of votes in Congress, and the ratification of 17 state legislatures (50% +1). It modified the content of nine articles of the Mexican Constitution: 6, 41, 97, 99, 108, 116, 122, and 134.

318 This is not an exhaustive list. For a comprehensive analysis of each aspect of the reform see Becerra, 2008; Córdova, 2008; Flores, 2008; Langston, 2009; Salazar, 2008; Woldenberg, 2008.
not to undermine the relevance of other aspects of the reform, but rather to concentrate on the most controversial issues to better assess the validity of some of the most extended criticisms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Criticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes to electoral advertising</td>
<td>The reform banned the purchase of airtime for electoral advertising; instead, political parties are granted free airtime on radio and television; the prohibition applies to political parties and to third parties. The change was meant to reduce public money being spent in electoral campaigns.</td>
<td>Limits citizens’ ability to broadcast political advertisements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prohibition of negative campaigning: advertisements that include negative comments and criticism of candidates are punishable by law; prevents political parties from issuing any message that “denigrates” or “slanders” their opponents.</td>
<td>The language used is vague; there is no clear criterion to distinguish “slander” from acceptable criticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease in the length of campaigns. Presidential campaigns last a maximum of 90 days, instead of 160. Overall reduction on campaign spending.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral campaigns</td>
<td>The legislation allocated a fixed number of days for primary elections and other nomination processes. Overall reduction on the cost of electoral processes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                               | Stricter guidelines for the promotion of government programs  
Advertising must refrain from using the name, image, or voice of public officials; all government advertising has to cease completely during federal and local electoral campaigns. Stop politicians from promoting their image with public resources and prevents incumbents’ advantage | Although the changes have positive aspects, as they limit the self-promotion of government officials, there are no mechanisms that mandate the government to be accountable regarding the resources it uses for political advertising (De la Mora 2009).                                                                                                                                 |
| Changes to IFE’s structure     | Removal of electoral councillors  
The reform forced the immediate substitution of three of IFE’s electoral councillors (including the president) in December 2007, and three others in August of 2008; the remaining three were permitted to stay until 2010 and finish the terms for which they were elected in 2003. Promote trust on the electoral organ among all political parties.                                      | Negative implications for IFE’s autonomy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                               | The reform established the staggered renewal of IFE’s Electoral Council; the president-councillor’s term was set for six years; the remaining electoral councillors’ terms were set for nine years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Legislators can re-elect the president-councillor once, which critics claim gives them too much power over him/her.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                               | Creation of a General Comptrollership for the IFE—an “internal control unit”.  
It has jurisdiction over all the areas and units of the institute and has sanctioning ability. The head of the Comptrollership is designated, and can be removed by, the Chamber of Deputies.                                                                                                                                   | IFE was already audited annually by the federal government, so mandating an audit by a newly created Comptrollership was redundant (Woldenberg 2008).                                                                                                                                 |
| Public funding for political parties | New formula to calculate overall public funding for political parties: 65% of the daily minimum wage for Mexico City multiplied by the number of registered voters. It was meant to prevent exponential growth of public funding for political parties.                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                               | Increase control of private contributions to political parties: More tools were given to IFE to monitor private donations to political parties; IFE can legally request parties’ banking records, which strengthens its monitoring capabilities. The aim was to establish a stronger protection mechanism against illegitimate sources of funding, such as laundered money or donations from drug traffickers.                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
**Electoral coalitions**

Each party in an electoral coalition will appear in the ballot with its own name, as well as the coalition’s emblem. If a party in a coalition reaches 1% of the national votes issued, but does not obtain the 2% minimum required to keep their registration, the necessary percentage will be taken off from the votes of the other party or parties in the coalition, so it can maintain its registration. This makes it possible to count the number of votes obtained by each coalition member, relevant for the allocation of public funding and other prerogatives.

Critics argued that the “eternal life clause” would artificially help survive political parties that obtain more than 1% and less than 2% of the popular vote.

**Electoral calendar**

Consolidation of electoral calendars (for state, and municipal elections)

Local elections are condensed to be held on the first Sunday in July in the years with no federal elections. The aim was to decrease the level of seemingly permanent confrontation related to electoral processes occurring with a few months of difference.

Source: Author, with information from Buendía and Azpiroz (2011); Córdova (2008); IMEP (2007c); Langston (2009); Salazar (2008); Woldenberg (2008).

### A Mandate for Legislators to Negotiate

Talks to reform several aspects of the country’s electoral legislation and institutions started soon after the new legislators took office. On November 14, 2006, the leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) parliamentary group in the Senate, Manlio Fabio Beltrones, introduced a bill to the Senate floor: the Law for the State Reform, popularly referred to as “Beltrones Law” (*Ley Beltrones*). It was unanimously approved in the Senate and received with optimism, as it established specific conditions conducive for negotiation among all political parties, despite the polarized political context (Flores 2008).

In essence, the Law for the State Reform mandated the creation of new legislation. Political divisions among parties had proven to be important obstacles to reaching agreements in the past, and the expectation was that Beltrones Law would make them more viable (IMEP 2007a). Its purpose was to prevent political actors from abandoning the negotiations or criticizing the work in progress. This legislation mandated the completion of the reform process

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319 No party had a majority in Congress. The distribution of the 500 seats in the Lower Chamber was as follows: PAN 206; Alianza por México (PRI, PVEM) 121; Alianza por el Bien de Todos (PRD, PT and Convergencia) 160; Partido Nueva Alianza (PNA) 9, and Partido Socialdemócrata y Campesino (PASDC) 4 (IMEP, 2006).

320 The Law for the State Reform mandated registered political parties and parliamentary groups to express their opinion about the five topics of the reform until a reform was passed or the Law for the State reform expired.
within one calendar year after its publication; political actors were thus required by law to conclude the political reform process by April 13, 2008. It was, in short, a law that required Congress to legislate on the matter or, at the very minimum, mandated political parties to make public their positions about the different aspects included in the legislation. Given the 2006 electoral process and post-electoral conflict, it was logical that the first aspect negotiated under the Law for the State Reform was that of the electoral legislation (IMEP 2007b), as this was, arguably, the issue that concerned citizens the most. In the end, the electoral reform was the first (and only) step towards the renewal of Mexico’s institutional and legal framework; the momentum to continue working on other legislation as part of a more comprehensive state reform (for example, toward a parliamentary versus presidential governmental regime) under the mandate of the Beltrones Law was lost.

The negotiation process was significantly different from that of 1996: the Executive branch of government was not a protagonist in the first stage of the 2006-2007 negotiation process (in the final stage it had a representative at the negotiation table). The Beltrones Law created the Executive Commission for the Negotiation and Construction of Agreements of Congress (Comisión Ejecutiva para la Negociación y Construcción de Acuerdos del Congreso de la Unión, CENCA) in order to facilitate and speed the negotiation process (Alcocer 2008). CENCA was approved by all political parties in Congress, which gave additional legitimacy to the reform negotiations (IMEP 2007a). As Beltrones stated, the president lacked the political authority to successfully initiate discussions conducive to a reform in the aftermath of the post-electoral conflict of 2006, and in particular the narrow margin of the final results (Beltrones 2006). The debates and negotiations included the participation of all political parties; the aim was to seek widespread support for the reform. After the creation of the CENCA, specialists in electoral matters were selected as advisors in the process. As Jorge Alcocer, one of the advisors to the negotiation process, told me in an interview, this framework set the conditions for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) to negotiate along with representatives from the

321 The CENCA originated and depended on Congress; its members included legislators and Senators, representatives of the Federal Executive and Judicial branches, as well as the coordinators of each parliamentary group in both chambers of Congress.

322 Three of the advisors on the 2007 Electoral Reform negotiations wrote opinion articles, and I interviewed two of them for this work.
National Action Party (PAN), and eventually with those representatives from the Calderón administration, deemed as “illegitimate” by the PRD.\textsuperscript{323}

The complex and politically polarized context shaped the attitudes and approaches of the different political parties regarding the reform (IMEP 2007a). The PRI was perhaps the most pragmatic of the three major parties; the negotiation presented an opportunity to arrive to an institutional arrangement that would be beneficial for the party.\textsuperscript{324} The PAN, meanwhile, needed to create alliances and so agreed to negotiate. It took a moderate stance, because, as the party in power, negotiating with the left opposition and multi-party approval of an electoral reform would enhance the legitimacy of the Calderón Administration. In this context, the PAN agreed in the end to the removal of some of the IFE’s electoral councillors who had overseen the 2006 electoral process. The PRD arguably had the most to win of all three major political parties and was the most radical of them, as López Obrador’s defeat in 2006 had sparked a highly critical stance on questions of electoral fairness. (Bruhn and Greene 2007). The PRI came to hold the balance of power in the negotiation, despite being the third party in Congress (IMEP 2007b).

According to the authors of the reform, some of its main aspects (decreasing campaign spending and reducing the power of electronic media corporations over political actors during electoral processes) had been on the negotiation table since the fall of 2006 (Becerra 2008, 180). The small group of reform negotiators in the CENCA was very discrete about the details of the talks; one of the advisors in the process explained to me in an interview, “Once negotiations began to progress and agreements were being reached, representatives of parliamentary groups and political party leaders understood that any misstep or an anticipated leak to the press would represent a risk for the negotiation” (Author’s interview, March 4, 2011). They knew that the electronic media would attempt to block the changes to the electoral advertising model, as they

\textsuperscript{323} A considerable proportion of legislators within the PRD had refused to recognize Felipe Calderón as the country’s legitimate president after the contested electoral process of 2006.

\textsuperscript{324} Purportedly, the PRI had “conditioned” its support for the Electoral Reform on simultaneous approval of a tax reform that would have positive implications for PRI state governors; this put more pressure on the Government, because a failure to approve the reforms would affect its credibility. This supposed condition was a rather extended rumor (mentioned in several of the opinion articles I analyzed); it was neither confirmed nor disputed by the negotiators I interviewed.)
indeed tried to do when the details of the reform were made public. As Becerra (2008, 180) writes, the fact that in a context of political confrontation those political actors refrained from leaving the negotiation or leaking details was surprising. Indeed, the discretion regarding the details of the discussion allowed the three main political parties to reach a consensus on the main aspects of the new electoral legislation. Setting limits on the power of electronic media during electoral campaigns and the removal of IFE’s councillors were key to bringing the PRD on board; moreover, the PRD stood to benefit the most from the prohibition of third parties to purchase airtime for electoral adds. As Casar (2009) explains, the 2007 electoral reform was a sort of political pact to ensure that the next federal electoral process (2009) would be regarded as legitimate, in contrast to the 2006 presidential election—an objective that was shared by the three major political parties.

The first result of the work within the CENCA was a set of proposals for a constitutional reform on electoral matters. The bill was agreed through consensus among the PRI, PAN, PRD, and PT and publicly presented on August 31, 2007. Discussions in Congress and formal approval of the reform followed; there was an open commitment and backing of the reform by the three major parties in the Senate, whose support was crucial for the prompt conclusion of the process (IMEP 2007c). The reform was approved in the Senate on September 12 and in the lower chamber on September 13, 2007. It was ratified on October 9 by 30 of the 32 state legislatures, and published in the Diario Oficial de la Federación (the government’s official newspaper which prints all new laws, regulations and agreements) on November 13, 2007; a new version of the Federal Code for Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) was published on January 14, 2008.  

Electoral Advertising in the Mass Media: Context and Changes Introduced in 2007

The 2007 electoral reform changed the rules for political parties and candidates to receive airtime in the mass media and gave more supervision tools to IFE (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Córdova

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325 The fact that negotiators avoided to reveal aspects of the electoral reform (that would surely be contested by electronic media corporations) until they reached consensus and secured multi-party support for the changes indicated the excessive power of mass media conglomerates and the pressure they were able to exert on political actors.

326 Those changes affected 18 secondary laws, which needed to be updated for consistency.
The new legislation eliminated all paid contracting of political advertising from radio and television during elections: it mandated the use of IFE’s official broadcasting time (allocated to the state) for all electoral advertisements of political parties and their candidates in television and radio, and banned the purchase of airtime for broadcasting political spots (Becerra 2008; Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Casar 2009; Córdova 2008; Langston 2009; Serra 2009a, 2009b; Woldenberg 2008). Serra (2009a) outlines the extended notion that in the previous model, third parties (particularly corporations and wealthy business groups) had a disproportionate advantage in producing and broadcasting political ads to promote or undermine a candidate, and thus potentially influence election results. This notion had rendered the issue of campaign advertisements (spots) highly contentious in the 2006 electoral process, in which controversial and negative ads sponsored by private organizations, especially business corporations and well-funded interest groups, had affected the popularity of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate for the left Coalition for the Good of All (Serra 2009a).

All of the political actors that participated in the reform negotiations in 2007 that I interviewed for this work, regardless of their political party, coincided in stating that most Mexicans lacked the economic resources that would allow them to pay for airtime for electoral ads. Accordingly, the prohibition against purchasing airtime included in the 2007 electoral reform applied not only to political parties, but also to individuals, civic organizations, or other groups.

The new legislation ensured access of political parties and candidates to radio and television without the need to spend money. This meant, no doubt, a considerable transformation of the electoral advertising model. Since 1996, the influence of the electronic media on electoral campaigns had grown substantially and IFE lacked authority to intervene in the relationship between the mass media and political parties, in particular to address inequities or correct

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327 Article 49, paragraph 4 of the COFIFE 2008 states, “No person or entity, on his own right or on behalf of others, will be allowed to contract advertising on radio or television geared to influence the electoral preferences of citizens, or to favour or oppose political parties or candidates running for elected office.”

328 Precedents for that kind of regulation include the United Kingdom and most of continental Europe, where all political advertisements are banned, except those from political parties. In Latin America, Chile and Brazil also followed that path (Zovatto 2003).

329 The mixed system established with the 1996 Electoral Reform permitted the purchase of electoral advertising by political parties, in accordance with the allowed limits on campaign spending, in addition to the airtime arranged by IFE and made available to political parties (Becerra, Salazar and Woldenberg, 2000; Córdova, 2007).
unlawful actions (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 31). The new electoral legislation gave IFE the exclusive authority to administer airtime (Córdova 2008; Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Langston 2009); one of the most important committees within IFE is thus the Radio and Television Committee, in charge of allocating airtime (Langston 2009).

In the context of increasing doubts about the efficacy of long and expensive political campaigns, several academics and media specialists had written about the disproportionate influence of the country’s electronic media, particularly television, over the shaping of political representation (Carreño 2007; Esteinou 2008; Trejo Delarbre 2001; 2005; 2007). As a result of the 1996 electoral legislation, electronic media corporations had greatly benefited by way of increasing revenue from selling spaces for electoral advertising. In 2000 and 2003, more than half of campaign expenses ended up being spent on the big television and radio chains (Woldenberg 2008, 27). In 2006, the transfer of public resources to the mass media appeared to be an “unstoppable phenomenon” (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 43); in that year, all political parties spent approximately 1.5 billion (one thousand 500 million) Mexican pesos, 95 percent of public funding available for political parties, exclusively on electoral advertising in television and radio (Murayama 2007, 130). The reform also aimed to reduce public funding to political parties, because they no longer needed to pay for television and radio ads.

The fact that millions of pesos of public money were being used for purchasing airtime for political advertising in the mass media not only made electoral processes more expensive, but also increased the power of mass media corporations vis-à-vis political parties and candidates: the former set airtime prices for electoral spots and determined the broadcast time of those adds within a time window. Because it was a television duopoly, political parties did not have the

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330 The IFE distributes “official airtimes” proportionally among political parties following the public funding formula: 70% proportional to the votes obtained by each party in the previous elections and 30% distributed equitably among all parties.

331 The Committee is formed by three electoral councillors, a representative of each political party and the executive director of Prerogative’s and Political Parties. The president councillor presides over this committee. (Cofipe, article 76-3).

332 In 2006, 85% of the PAN’s campaign expenses were devoted to radio and television ads; the figures for the Coalición por el Bien de Todos and for the PRI were 93% and 78% respectively (Buendía and Azpiroz, 2011, 43).

333 The reform also shortened electoral campaigns (from 186 to 90 days in the case of presidential, and to 45 days for legislative midterm elections); this was also meant to reduce campaign expenses.
option to negotiate better rates or airtimes for their electoral spots (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 43). In his analysis of the 2006 electoral campaigns, Trejo Delarbre (2010, 70) explains that the editorial policies in several television and radio stations were favourable to those parties and candidates that spent the most money purchasing airtime for their electoral spots from such broadcasters. By 2006, the inclusion of political actors in news programs, where they got exposure and became known by potential voters, was frequently conditioned to the purchase of airtime; the mass media (most importantly television) had thus become a decisive factor in the political future of candidates by giving them visibility or reducing them to a virtual non-existence (Becerra 2008, 179). As a political actor and reform negotiator put it, because media corporations could freely allocate airtime spaces, they were able to bias the competition and predetermine winners and losers.

The 2007 electoral reform meant a significant loss of revenue for mass media concessionaires, particularly those in the television duopoly. In addition, media owners lost the ability to set conditions for allocation of electoral spots. This change diminished the influence of the mass media on political actors, with the expectation that politicians would no longer be subject to the interests of the media duopoly. As Esteinou (2010, 85) put it, candidates no longer had to make any deal with the media in exchange for future economic or political benefits.

In sum, the 2007 electoral reform aimed to change the role of the mass media in electoral processes (Becerra 2008; Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Córdova 2008) in order to prevent the distorting impact of radio and television on electoral fairness among parties and candidates in a context of high economic inequality (Astudillo 2008; Salazar 2008). The objective of the new model of political-electoral communication established with the 2007 electoral reform was to strengthen the fairness (equidad) in the conditions of democratic electoral competition, while preventing particular interests from disrupting elections (Woldenberg 2008, 35).

The new legislation aimed to address the relationship between the Mexican State and the country’s electronic media corporations, beyond the direct impact in electoral campaigns. Senator Pedro Joaquín Coldwell (PRI) stated that the 2007 electoral reform was necessary to harmonize the relationship between politics and the media. He went further and emphasized that a new framework was needed to address two big problems of the Mexican democracy: money and the abuse of the mass media (Senado 2007a). As Chapter 4 explained, during the time of the
authoritarian presidentialism, the media were in a position of subordination to the government. That situation changed gradually, driven by a confluence of internal and external factors. By the late 1990s, the media enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy, and in the context of the transition, its influence (particularly radio and television) increased further. Since the early 2000s, owners of mass media corporations (private concessionaires) became increasingly confrontational with political actors and with the State (Becerra 2008; Buendía and Azpiroz 2011; Carreño 2007; Córdova 2008; Espino 2009). Indeed, the changes to the electoral advertising model in 2007 should be understood in a context described by Carreño (2007) as a process of reconfiguring the relationship between the political power and media owners, particularly radio and television. As he explains, by the first decade of the twenty-first century, a form of “backwards subordination” of the state to the big media corporations had emerged (Carreño 2007, Chapter 3). Becerra (2008, 183) notes that the Mexican democratic scene at this time was similar to the conditions described by Giovanni Sartori (1998); electoral processes were heavily influenced by television in terms of positioning candidates and shaping the electoral contest. This put mass media owners in a privileged position that allowed them to meddle in politics under the premise that only those candidates who are visible in the mass media have a chance to win an election (Córdova 2008, 64). The central role of big media corporations in electoral campaigns allowed their owners of to influence policy decisions that would affect their interests.

The most emblematic example of such a dynamic came a few months before the 2006 electoral process. In 2005, electronic media corporations successfully exerted pressure on political parties and legislators to swiftly approve a bill to reform the Federal Law of Radio and Television and the Federal Law of Telecommunications, new legislation that was widely referred to as Ley Televisa. It considerably changed the process for licenses in the digital spectrum, giving priority and preference to Televisa and TV Azteca regarding the duration and renewal of such licenses. It also meant an advantage for the television corporations to potentially expand their business by permitting them to provide other type of telecommunication services such as telephone and internet (Trejo Delarbre 2010). The Televisa Law was unanimously and quickly approved in the Chamber of Deputies in December 2005, without a single amendment. In early 2006,

334 A few large media corporations in Mexico benefit from radio and television concessions—licenses—to broadcast, and the owners are commonly referred to as concessionaires.
335 For more details about the Televisa Law see (Trejo delarbre, 2005; 2006a; Esteinou, 2008 2009).
precisely when the debate about this legislation was most polarized, Televisa’s CEO, Emilio Azcárraga Jean, invited the three main presidential candidates to a meeting at a resort near Mexico City. Their acceptance of this invitation was interpreted by many analysts as a sign not only of Televisa’s power, but of a position of “subordination” that the presidential candidates were willing to take vis-à-vis the most powerful mass media corporation in the country (Trejo Delarbre 2010, 72). One month later, the Televisa Law was approved by majority in the Senate; however, a multi-party group of senators questioned the constitutionality of the legislation and appealed to the Supreme Court, who overturned the bill in June 2007.

The swift approval of the Televisa Law became a symbolic episode of the excess and abuses of the mass media and of the subordination of the country’s public powers to the interests of electronic media owners (Becerra 2008; Córdova 2008; Trejo Delarbre 2007). In this context, political actors from all parties concluded that they should put an end to this situation and limit the “de facto” power of mass media corporations. The 2007 electoral reform represented a way of guaranteeing the supremacy of the state vis-à-vis the private media powers and their interests (Becerra 2008; Córdova 2008). The position expressed by the leaders of the three major political parties, who publically recognized the dependence of politicians on the media, was illustrative of their common goal of putting an end to such unequal relationship. They recognized their previous weaknesses with regard to the mass media (radio and television) and admitted that all parties had “knocked on the back door” of media corporations to ensure that they would have visibility (El Universal 2007; IMEP 2007c). The triumphalist and auto-celebratory attitude of some senators is noteworthy; other political actors and authors in the Red Circle shared that tone. Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, left, described this event as the “rebellion of vassals.” The change to the electoral advertising model of course meant that mass media corporations lost that source of revenue.

**Limits to Freedom of Expression: An Interested and Overblown Concern?**

The changes to the electoral communication model became the most important focal point of the reform and generated a wide debate. Mass media corporations opposed those changes (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 31), with the strongest criticisms alleging that the changes to the electoral advertising model violated freedom of expression. Members of the Chamber of Radio and
Television Industry (Cámara de la Industria de Radio y Televisión, CIRT) and business groups were outspoken critics, and television corporations also rallied their news anchors and collaborators against the reform. In a public meeting in the Senate that was broadcasted in national television, they strongly voiced their opposition, arguing that the changes to the electoral advertising model constituted an attack on freedom of expression (Reforma 2007a; 2007b; La Jornada 2007a; El Universal 2007a, 2007b). Javier Tejado Dondé, Televisa’s legal advisor, accused Senators of aiming to “expropriate” radio and television, and of giving yet more economic resources to political parties (La Jornada 2007a).336 In the same vein, the owner of Radio Fórmula, Rogelio Azcárraga, spoke about the reasons for discontent among media owners: “They will take away from us 30 percent of airtime without paying one single cent, besides ruining the ratings!” (La Jornada 2007a).

The contentiousness of this aspect of the reform reflected two very different visions of the role of the media in electoral processes. For the supporters of the reform, including authors of left-leaning and centre opinion articles, this change was a way to stop the influence of the mass media on electoral processes; for them, increased fairness and a decreased influence of money in electoral outcomes were the more important considerations. By contrast, the critics, mostly on the right and many of them with links to electronic media corporations, framed the reform as unfair, regressive (because of the alleged violation of freedom of expression), and mostly beneficial to political parties. (I will address the issue of the perception of an increase power of political parties later in this chapter.)

The prohibition against individuals, political parties, or groups purchasing airtime for electoral advertisings during elections in order to promote their political views was also included in the Mexican Constitution; this was interpreted by some of the critics of the reform, mostly on the right of centre, as an absolute restriction of freedom of expression.337 The critics neglected to

336 The argument was that although total funding for political parties was reduced, they still benefited because parties no longer had to pay for spaces in the mass media and the airtime was given to them for free.
337 In 2008, several intellectuals filed an injunction against the applicability of this aspect of the Electoral Reform. They argued that the prohibition to third parties to purchase electoral advertisings violated their right to freedom of expression. Nevertheless, in March 2011 the Mexican Supreme Court dismissed their claim.
mention the fact that political opinions can still be disseminated on television and radio. In the words of one of the advisors to the negotiation process, “the limitation refers to political parties and their candidates, but opinions can still be voiced in the media, as long as they are not advertisings, from which the mass media obtain revenue” (Alcocer, author’s interview, March 4 2011). This illustrates that by framing the reform as an attempt to limit freedom of expression, the critics gave more importance to paid spots than to actual opinion spaces, such as political analysis and debate shows.

Legally, the ban of paid airtime for electoral spots does not violate freedom of expression per se: the reform did eliminate the direct transfer of resources from political parties to the mass media. The aim was not to limit information, but to prevent actors with more economic resources (third parties such as wealthy business groups) from unfairly influencing electoral processes. As Buendía and Azpiroz (2011) explain, the positive interpretation is that “political freedom” is not lost when the purchase of airtime for political advertising in the mass media is restricted. Rather, the expression of diverse points of view is made possible by eliminating the restrictions imposed by unequal availability of economic resources. The objective is to balance different types of freedom with a “concrete restriction that does not favour some over others” (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 58).

Negative Campaigns and Quality of Debate

Another important topic related to electoral advertising was that of negative or “mudslinging” campaigns. The 2007 reform prohibited negative campaigning based on attacks or criticisms of other candidates, or on publicly promoting errors and weaknesses of their contenders. The new Electoral Legislation explicitly prevented political parties from issuing any message that

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338 Buendía and Azpiroz (2011: 23) explain that negative campaigns may question candidates’ trajectories, capabilities, personalities, or exploit negative characteristics or mistakes of their opponents. It is a commonly held view among politicians and observers that the “modernization” of campaigns is equivalent to negative campaigns or to an “Americanization” of campaigns. This notion is based on the personalization of politics, pre-eminence of the candidate over the party, and the disqualification of the opponent above any ideas (Zovatto, 2007; Buendía and Azpiroz, 2011).
“denigrates” or “slanders” their opponents.  

It is important to stress that this was not entirely new: the 1996 COFIPE had already put some limits on negative campaign, a fact about the previous legislation that the strongest critics of the reform never mentioned. The 2007 electoral reform amended Article 41 of the Mexican Constitution to include the prohibition of negative campaigning. Arguably, the objective was to foster a debate of ideas and electoral platforms, rather than competition merely based on personal attacks. For the supporters of the Reform, this aimed to raise the quality of democratic deliberation above attacks and denigration (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 32). This change prohibiting political parties from negative or defamatory messages appeared to be positive in the light of the intense attack ads during the 2006 elections, both from the left and from the right. But critics of this measure argued that it would have an unintended negative consequence: that is, citizens would be exposed to a narrower range of viewpoints and would be deprived of valuable critiques and information about the true character or track record of candidates (Serra 2009a, 417).

The lack of a clear definition to identify this type of behaviour was a considerable caveat in the new legislation (Castañeda and Morales 2007): the difference between criticizing and denigrating is not clear. This aspect was not dealt with in secondary legislation and can indeed be quite subjective; it is not easy to distinguish between an “expression to denigrate” and a valid criticism. Therefore, any sanction related to negative campaigning is highly dependent on subjective, contextual, and even formative criteria, and does have the potential to limit free expression (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 63). Without clear guidelines, it is this particular aspect of the Reform, and not the prohibition against the purchase of airtime, that could potentially result in limiting freedom of expression.

In hindsight, and although the objective was to avoid personal attacks, the changes made in the political advertising model did not improve the quality of public debate during electoral

339 The obligations of political parties include “abstaining, in their political or electoral advertisements, from any expression that denigrates institutions or parties, or slanders individuals” (COFIPE, 2008, Article 38, Paragraph 1, Clause p).
340 The 1996 COFIPE prohibited “any offense, defamation or slander” that denigrates candidates, political parties, institutions and third parties” (Article 186).
341 In political or electoral advertising distributed by political parties, they should abstain from expressions that denigrate institutions or the parties themselves, or which slander persons (Article 41, C-III, Mexican Constitution, 2011).
campaigns. The reform stopped short of eliminating “simplified formats” in order to “privilege ideas” (Buendía and Azpiroz 2011, 13). Further regulatory legislation would have been necessary to create spaces for analysis in television and mandate political debates as part of electoral campaigns. Legislators, however, did not follow through; beyond electoral spots, other formats of political communication were not fostered by either political parties or the media; broadcasting of analysis and debate programs was still voluntary and, arguably, insufficient. The basic model of electoral communication remains intact, trapped in a marketing logic of short, attractive, and shallow spots; in the words of a former government spokesman, “the difference is that now they are vapid and that political parties do not pay for those spots” (Author’s interview, March 2011). In sum, the banning of purchasing electoral spots did not lead to a political communication model characterized by ideas and proposals instead of criticism and attacks of the opponent.

The change to the electoral advertising model went beyond its impact in electoral campaigns: it directly affected mass media corporations through a loss of revenue. While there was strong support for these changes in the new legislation among academics and policy analysts, the opinion-makers opposed to the changes were vociferous, and their arguments were magnified by the mass media, in particular the television duopoly. Four of my interviewees (two political actors and two academics) accounted how the two big television corporations closed most of their spaces to voices that were not sympathetic to their position. Famously, TV Azteca vetoed Senator Santiago Creel, one of the key negotiators of the reform, arguably as retribution for his role in the reform; his face was not even shown in news broadcasts. This sheds light on the enormous power of media conglomerates and reflects one of the negative implications of the fact that the print media are not read by the general public.

The intended effect of the 2007 electoral reform in terms of transforming the unequal relationship between political actors and the mass media appears to be small. A former government spokesman and a journalist told me in separate interviews that after the electoral reform was approved, mass media corporations found ways to “make up” for the money they stopped receiving from selling airtime for electoral advertising. Television and radio chains

A 30 second spot format is not conducive to raising the quality of public deliberation, or even to expressing deep, meaningful ideas.
started “selling” interview spaces to politicians without disclosing that these political actors actually paid to be interviewed (a practice that has reportedly become more widespread at the time of writing). This practice is reminiscent of the old gacetillas described in Chapter 4 (essentially paid spaces disguised as news). Moreover, despite the positive aspects of the new electoral advertising rules (wherein government advertising was banned during electoral campaigns), the changes stopped short of transforming the overall model of political communication. Media legislation *per se* was out of the scope of the Electoral Reform. Academics and other media experts emphasized the need for an updated legal framework for the mass media, and framed the outdated media legislation as a lag in the Mexican transition.

### The Federal Electoral Institute: Early Removal of Electoral Councillors

The 2007 Electoral Reform included several changes to IFE’s structure. The most important of them was the staggered renewal of IFE’s General-Council, its main body. The reform changed the length of the terms of IFE’s electoral councillors from seven to nine years. As before, they cannot be reelected; the exception is IFE’s president councillor (who can be reelected once, for a total of two periods), although the president’s tenure was reduced from seven to six years (IMEP 2007; Langston 2009; Salazar 2008; Serra 2009a).\(^{343}\)

The anticipated removal of some of IFE’s electoral councillors captured most of the attention (among the changes to IFE’s structure) in the press. As part of the constitutional reform, legislators approved a contentious interim article in the Constitution that forced the immediate substitution of three of IFE’s nine electoral councillors, including Chairman Luis Carlos Ugalde, in December 2007, and three more in August of 2008; the three remaining Electoral Councillors were allowed to complete the term for which they had been selected and stay in office until 2010.

Since its creation in 1990 as an autonomous organ, IFE was regarded as one of the strongest pillars of the democratization process in Mexico (Estevez, Magar and Rosas 2008). In order to

\(^{343}\) The staggered renewal of IFE’s General-Council had been suggested before by electoral experts, notably by eight of IFE’s nine former electoral councillors, upon finishing their tenure in 2003; this in order to facilitate the transition and promote some level of continuity between a group of electoral councillors and the next (Woldenberg, 2008).
contextualize the controversial decision to remove IFE’s electoral councillors, it is pertinent to revisit the difference in the selection process in 1996 and 2003. As explained in Chapter 5, the 1996 electoral reform granted complete autonomy to IFE’s General-Council; it established that thereafter its chair would be independent from the government, and no longer the Minister of the Interior. IFE’s nine electoral councillors were supposed to be “irremovable,” akin to a judge of the Supreme Court (Serra 2009a, 415). The Constitution protected their tenure in office until the end of their seven-year terms; the law established that if electoral councillors failed to fulfill their duties, they could be removed through impeachment, “juicio político” (COFIPE 1996, article110-2). IFE’s Electoral Councillors (chosen by two-thirds majority in Congress) are meant to be non-partisan, in the spirit of fostering fairness and impartiality in the conducting and overseeing of electoral processes. In bargaining sessions over councillor selection in 1994 and 1996, all three major political parties informally agreed that no single party should designate a majority on IFE’s Electoral Council, that each party was entitled to propose a share of councillors roughly proportional to its lower chamber seat share, and that nominated candidates can be vetoed by any other party (Schedler 2000; Estevez, Magar and Rosas 2008).

In 1996, IFE’s nine Electoral Councillors had academic backgrounds and were widely regarded as non-partisan; this fostered consensus among the three main parties in Congress (Schedler 2000, 411; Langston 2009). By contrast, the process to select IFE’s Electoral Councillors in 2003 lacked consensual support in the Chamber of Deputies: at the last minute, the PRD broke off negotiations with the PAN and the PRI. These two parties had no difficulty in achieving the two-thirds majority vote needed to appoint IFE’s new electoral councillors, while ignoring the PRD (Estevez, Magar, and Rosas 2007, 3). This evidenced the breakdown of the “partisan consensus” that had characterized the political agreements of 1996 (Lawson 2007, 46). As Peschard (2006, 103) explains, although this action was legal, it was not “politically smart,” as it undermined the legitimacy of the decisions made by IFE’s Electoral Council. Indeed, immediately after the 2003 members of IFE’s electoral councillors had been selected, the PRD accused IFE of lacking autonomy from the other two political parties; in 2006 the PRD held IFE’s electoral councillors responsible for López Obrador having lost the election. Although there was no evidence that election results had been tampered with by these councillors (Estrada and Poiré 2007; Serra 2009a), an important sector of the Mexican left refused to concede victory in the 2006
Presidential Election and was highly critical of the performance of IFE’s electoral councillors, arguing that they had been partial towards the PAN’s candidate.

In the aftermath of the complicated and polarized 2006 electoral process, the different political parties in Congress regarding the future of IFE’s electoral councillors held opposing positions. Early in the negotiation process, several figures in the PAN leadership advocated for allowing all electoral councillors to complete their tenure (2003-2010); reportedly, they were concerned that the anticipated removal of the electoral councillors responsible for the 2006 presidential election would imply acknowledgement of wrong-doing, and thus would give credibility to López Obrador’s claims of fraud (Langston 2009). By contrast, the PRD, PRI, PT, and Convergencia argued that all nine electoral councillors should be removed; because four national political parties with representation in Congress wanted their removal, it was necessary to find a solution to enhance and rebuild trust in IFE.

Political party representatives reached a compromise in the CENCA: the electoral councillors would neither all be removed nor all remain in their positions. They decided to remove three councillors in 2007 and three others in 2008 (Langston 2009; Salazar 2008; Serra 2009a). Political actors expected that the replacement of most of the electoral councillors that oversaw the 2006 elections would provide the electoral arbiter with renewed trust. There was, however, no clear criteria regarding how to decide which two electoral councillors would be removed in 2007 (except for Luis Carlos Ugalde, the president-councillor) and in 2008, and which ones would be allowed to stay until the end of their terms in 2010.

It is imperative for electoral authorities to be regarded as trustworthy by political actors and the public in general; Serra (2009a) explains that IFE’s reputation of independence and autonomy was linked to its members being irremovable, and the 2007 reform did hamper that principle. Political parties were criticized in the Red Circle over the violation of IFE’s autonomy. Arguably, the anticipated removal of two-thirds of IFE’s electoral councillors through an electoral reform had more to do with political than legal reasons (Salazar 2008; Serra 2009a).

344 As Woldenberg (2008) explains, in order to restore the trust on IFE, other outcomes would have been preferable: either allow all of IFE’s electoral councillors finish their terms in 2010 (to reinforce the notion of those positions being irremovable), or remove all electoral councillors and replace them with new ones elected by consensus among all parties, as had been the case in 1996.
Although the decision was possible, as it was part of a constitutional reform, it was politically questionable: nobody presented legal arguments for the possibility of holding a political trial against the electoral councillors to determine their responsibility for the events of 2006 (Salazar 2008, 79), as the 1996 COFIPE dictated. Several analysts argued that the anticipated removal of IFE’s electoral councillors, by not following the mechanisms in place to do so, set a bad precedent not only for IFE’s future, but for other electoral organs as well. This aspect of the reform, in other words, undermined IFE’s autonomy and independence from political parties (Langston 2009; Serra 2009a).

This decision was one of the most controversial and polarizing aspects of the reform. Whereas a majority of authors regarded the changes to the electoral advertising model as something positive, support for the removal of IFE’s electoral councillors within the Red Circle was weaker: the many critics included electoral experts, intellectuals, and other authors from all political leanings, as well as business groups. Supporters of the removal were mostly in the political left.

The controversy over the issue of IFE’s electoral councillors continued in the aftermath of the approval of the reform: the selection process to fill the positions of those being removed was widely criticized. Negotiators in the CENCA had agreed to discuss the names of the new Electoral Councillors prior to their removal. Once the reform was approved, however, there was an important change made to what had been negotiated in the CENCA; in the words of Jorge Alcocer, advisor to the negotiation process, “legislators in Congress appropriated the selection of the new electoral councillors,” suggesting that they did not follow through with the agreement previously reached among the small group of negotiators (Author’s interview, March 4, 2011). Indeed, the 2007 Electoral Reform did not modify the selection procedure in any significant way (Langston 2009); all electoral councillors are selected by two-thirds majority in the Chamber of Deputies, proposed by the different parliamentary groups. The only change was that legislators now considered candidates promoted by Civil Society through a “broad process of public consultation” (Senado 2007b, 17). This particular aspect was initially received with the optimistic expectation that such a consultation would make the process more transparent; participants were required to write an essay about the reform (this was later criticized as a way to filter out those participants who opposed the changes), and were interviewed by committees of legislators, before being selected. As Woldenberg (2008, 33) writes, this procedure to select the
new electoral councillors sparked intense lobbying among political parties, contenders, and the press, not only eroding the reputation of some of the candidates, but undermining the perception and effectiveness of the selection method itself. In a way, the discussion over the principle of whether councillors should be removed degenerated into a battle over who was going to be in the newly vacated positions. This also contributed to feeding the notion that all possible replacements for IFE’s outgoing electoral councillors actually had links to a political party.

Legislators in Congress failed to select and appoint the new councillors to substitute the first three removed in 2007 within the self-imposed deadline of December 15, 2007. Furthermore, it took over one year for the main political parties to reach an agreement and finally choose their replacements. This in turn generated a great deal of criticism of legislators and fostered a generalized negative perception of an issue that otherwise could have been avoided (Woldenberg 2008, 33).

The 2007 Electoral Reform Assessed in the Press

It is important to note a central difference in the treatment afforded to the 2007 reform in the press compared to that of 1996: in 1996 most opinion articles were written while the negotiations were taking place and specific aspects of the reform were being discussed; in 2007 most of the analysis was done once the reform had been voted and approved. These were, of course, two very different moments: while in 1996 the authors could strive to actively influence the reform’s outcome, in 2007 there was no such expectation. Opinion-makers merely reflected the polarization that existed within the Red Circle on the 2007 electoral reform; since the beginning of the negotiations, the debate in the press mainly speculated in general terms about what the new legislation could include. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, because negotiators wanted to limit party spending in television and radio, part of their strategy to prevent major opposition to the legislation was to agree on all aspects of the reform before making them public; negotiators knew that the mass media corporations would rally opposition to the proposals (Author’s interviews with two political actors involved in the negotiation process, March, 2011). By 2007, polarization was arguably greater within the Red Circle than among political

345 I did not find any instance in opinion articles, even those critical of the changes, about such discretion; this may be because: a) opinion-makers would have understood that it was a strategy of those negotiating
parties in Congress; the latter had managed to overcome the (very real) polarization of the 2006 electoral process and negotiated a reform to change the status quo. The fact that the reform was approved by the three main political parties was, as Becerra (2008, 180) argues, remarkable in a context of political polarization regarding the 2006 electoral process.

Since early September 2007, the electoral reform had been consistently criticized in the mass media (particularly in television). In the case of newspapers, opinions were much more divided. A large proportion within the Red Circle rejected a number of aspects of the reform. While in 1996 opinion-makers and political actors from all parties agreed that electoral reform had to occur for the opposition to have better opportunities to gain power, in 2007 the issue was what kind of changes would be of most benefit to each political party and division among opinion-makers became more politicized. For columnists who sympathized with political parties on the left, the absence of more extensive electoral reforms would likely harm the chances of those parties electorally. Conversely, opinion-makers who were supportive of the PAN, or who had ties to big business corporations, tended to be less inclined to support reforms that might not benefit them (such as the changes to the electoral advertising model).

Roughly 20 percent of the strongest critics of the reform had links to mass media corporations. Several critical authors framed the reform, in particular the changes to the electoral advertising model and the removal of some electoral councillors, as unnecessary and antidemocratic, and as an alleged attempt for reconciliation with a radical sector of the political left (Alemán 2007a, 2007f; De la Vega 2007; Loperena Ruiz 2007; Sarmiento 2007c, 2007e, 2007f, 2007g, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j; Shabot 2007f; Tejado Dondé 2007; among others). Meanwhile, several authors on the left were still angry at what the PRD had always considered to be an imposition in the selection of IFE’s electoral councillors in 2003 and held them responsible for the debacle that saw their presidential candidate lose the election in 2006 (Aristegui 2007a; 2007d; Camacho 2007a; Flores 2007; Garrido 2007; Gershenson 2007; Muñoz Ledo 2007d; Rivera 2007b; among others).
others). The findings of the content analysis of opinion articles I conducted were confirmed by several interviewees; two political actors, three journalists, and two academics I interviewed for this work described their recollection of the analysis done in the press in very similar terms. It comprised different diagnoses, influenced by the perspective of each side (within the Red Circle), of the 2006 electoral process: authors on the left supported profound changes and those on the right opposed them.

As explained in Chapter 4, by 2007, in a climate of free expression and higher press competition, national newspapers became more reliant on academics for their opinion pages. In my sample, articles written by academics had increased about 15 percent with respect to 1996. Concurrently, the proportion of articles written by political actors decreased almost 20 percent in 2007. This suggests a positive trend towards more professionalism in terms of analysis in opinion articles. The proportion of opinion articles written by journalists increased 2.3 percent in 2007 with respect to 1996.

Table 6.2 below shows the authors who played an active role in the democratization process by promoting and/or negotiating reforms. They include electoral experts and advisors, civil society activists, and political actors involved in the negotiations: 24 out of 101 authors with articles included in my 2007 sample. They wrote roughly 37 percent of the articles analyzed, which shows the relevance of the electoral sphere. Notably, ten of the 24 authors in this table have practical electoral expertise; all of them were part, at some time, of an electoral organ: seven of IFE, and three more of local electoral institutes. In addition, three authors with electoral expertise who wrote opinion articles were advisors in the negotiation process that led to the 2007 reform. The analysis below shows that authors with background and expertise on electoral legislation took an informed approach, writing pieces that tended to be more explanatory than political.

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346 Tables 4.1 and 4.2 in Chapter 4 show a breakdown of opinion-makers with articles in my sample according to their main professional activity in 1996 and in 2007.

347 Although news articles are not included in my sample, the literature and interviews with scholars, journalists, and political actors indicate that they are very different from opinion pieces and columns, which are generally of better quality.

348 Among the journalists with articles included in my 2007 sample, eight were exclusively writing columns published several days per week: four in El Universal (Ricardo Alemán, Salvador García Soto, Raymundo Riva Palacio, and Raúl Rodríguez Cortés), two in La Jornada (Carlos Hernández and Miguel Ángel Rivera), and two in Reforma (Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa and Sergio Sarmiento).
were well supported, and pointed out the gaps and implications of the different aspects of the reform (Table A13 in Appendix A shows all the 101 authors with articles included in my 2007 sample and the newspaper in which they published their articles, along with their professional activity and political leaning (if available).  

Table 6.2 Authors with Electoral Expertise or with Involvement in the Democratization Process 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Role in democratic transition</th>
<th>Activity details</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Granados Chapa, Miguel Ángel</td>
<td>Electoral expert</td>
<td>Citizen councillor (1994-1996)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Alcocer V., Jorge</td>
<td>Electoral expert/negotiation</td>
<td>Policy advisor</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Villarreal Martínez, Juan Carlos</td>
<td>Electoral expert</td>
<td>Local electoral councillor (post)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Huchim, Eduardo</td>
<td>Electoral expert</td>
<td>Local electoral Councillor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Córdova Vianello, Lorenzo</td>
<td>Electoral expert/negotiation</td>
<td>Policy advisor; Electoral councillor (selected in 2012)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Núñez Castañeda, José</td>
<td>Electoral expert</td>
<td>Local electoral councillor (post)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Casar, María Amparo</td>
<td>Electoral expert/negotiation</td>
<td>Policy advisor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Muñoz Ledo, Porfirio</td>
<td>Promoter/negotiation</td>
<td>PRD founder; party bureaucracy. Legislator.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Camacho Solís, Manuel</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Grupo San Ángel; Party bureaucracy. Legislator.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Corral Jurado, Javier</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Legislator; senator; promoter of new media legislation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

349 The male predominance of opinion-makers is still noteworthy: of the 101 authors with articles in my 2007 sample, only six were women.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Role in democratic transition</th>
<th>Activity details</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aguayo Quezada, Sergio</td>
<td>Activist/civil society</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concha, Miguel</td>
<td>Activist/civil society</td>
<td>Human rights activist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castañeda, Jorge G.</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Grupo San Ángel; Political analyst; former cabinet member</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sánchez Rebolledo, Adolfo</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodi, Demetrio</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Grupo San Ángel; Political analyst; former cabinet member</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creel, Santiago</td>
<td>Electoral expert/negotiation</td>
<td>Citizen councillor (1994-1996); promoter of the Seminario del Castillo de Chapultepec; former cabinet member</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larios Córdova, Héctor</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Party bureaucracy. Legislator.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarrete, Carlos</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Legislator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortiz Pinchetti, José Agustín</td>
<td>Electoral expert/promoter</td>
<td>Citizen councillor (1994-1996); promoter of the Seminario del Castillo de Chapultepec</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>González Schmal, Jesús</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Former political actor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rascón, Marco</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Political analyst; PRD founder; former political actor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugalde, Luis Carlos</td>
<td>Electoral expert</td>
<td>Electoral councillor (2003-2007)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 102

Source: Authors’ websites; biographical notes accompanying authors’ articles or presentations, and institutional websites.

The changes related to the electoral advertising model were framed in very different ways in the Red Circle: on one hand, by most authors on both the centre and the left as a way to stop the uncontrollable influence of the mass media in electoral processes; concurrently, by some authors on the right (20% of whom had links to mass media corporations) as an unjust, regressive, and
even authoritarian reform that would limit freedom of expression. All the academics with articles in my sample except one (Jaime Sánchez Susarrey), as well as all authors with electoral expertise within the Red Circle were sympathetic to the changes to the electoral advertising model, and celebrated its positive implications for increased equity in terms of candidates obtaining airtime to broadcast their political adds.

Tables 6.3a and 6.3c below show the number of instances of aggregated causal interpretation and evaluation frame elements representing arguments related to the changes in the electoral advertising model, cross-tabulating with article position.\textsuperscript{350} Tables 6.3b and 6.3d show in more detail exactly what each of those frame elements means for the issue of electoral advertising. As I explained in the methodology section, the number of authors, numbers of articles, and the numbers found in the tables showing references to frame elements are different; tables 6.3a and 6.3b involve 98 articles and 59 authors; tables 6.3c and 6.3d involve 124 articles and 66 authors.

**Table 6.3a Number of References to Aggregated Causal Interpretation Arguments in Favour of or Against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model and Article Position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article position</th>
<th>Against in favour</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada,* and *Reforma,* Jan.–Dec. 2007.

Table 6.3a shows that an overwhelming proportion of the articles about the electoral advertising model depicted a context in which some change was necessary, framing the reform in a positive light overall (96 out of 98 articles). Table 6.3b below illustrates that most causal interpretation frame elements alluded to a privileged position of the mass media: several articles highlighted a context in which electronic media corporations had “excessive power” (Alemán 2007d; Aziz

\textsuperscript{350} Chapter 2 expands on the definitions of the different frame elements (23-24); they can be briefly summarized as follows: problem definition consists of the issue or issues that define the content of the debate; causal interpretation refers to contextual explanations; evaluation represents the actual assessment or position of the article’s author; treatment recommendation refers to a call for or against an action; perspective refers to the implications or likely outcome. An article may have all or some of these elements. The articles in my sample have one problem definition and one causal interpretation frame elements, but may have more than one evaluation and treatment recommendation (the number of the latter two can be substantially greater than the number of articles).
2007b; Bendesky 2007a; Córdova 2007b; Córdova Vianelo 2007e; Díaz Garza 2007b; Linares 2007; Muñoz Ledo 2007b, 2007e; Sodi 2007a; among others). Authors also underscored the “excessive spending in electoral advertising” (Aguayo 2007a; Alcocer 2007b; Aristegui 2007b; Aziz 2007a; Carbonel 2007; Córdova Vianelo 2007c; Corral 2007a; González Schmal 2007; Granados Chapa 2007c; Huchim 2007c, 2007d; among others); and emphasized the “unequitable access to the mass media” (Ackerman 2007; Aguilar Valenzuela 2007; Casar 2007c; Díaz Garza 2007a). Such a context justified the need to reduce the influence of money in electoral processes and to limit the power of the country’s media more generally. In a similar vein, centre and left articles, and even some right-leaning ones, coincided in their analysis of the strong reaction of mass media concessionaires and news anchors: some authors depicted a context in which the big media corporations attempted to protect their own interests through the Chamber of Radio and Television Industry (CIRT)’s opposition to the reform, for example authors alluding to “de facto powers” wanting to maintain the status quo (Alemán 2007b, 2007c; Camacho 2007c; Delgado 1997e; Granados Chapa 2007k; Huchim 2007h; Muñoz Ledo 2007c; Woldenberg 2007f; among others).

### Table 6.3b Number of References to Specific Causal Interpretation Frame Elements Representing Arguments in Favour of or against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements Causal interpretation (pro changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
<th>Frame elements Causal interpretation (against changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excessive media power</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Threats to freedom of expression</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive spending in electoral advertising</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequitable access to the mass media</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto powers want to maintain status quo</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular interests opposing the reform</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.–Dec. 2007.

The figures in tables 6.3c and 6.3d below correspond to evaluation frame elements; the totals are larger than the number of articles included in the tables, which comprise 67 authors and 124 articles.
Table 6.3c Number of References to Aggregated Evaluation Arguments in Favour of or Against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model and Article Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article position</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>In favour</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada*, and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec. 2007.

Table 6.3d Number of References to Specific Evaluation Frame Elements Representing Arguments in Favour or Against Changes to the Electoral Advertising Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements Evaluation (pro changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
<th>Frame elements Evaluation (against changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposals to prohibit purchasing airtime for electoral advertising makes sense</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Normative dilemma</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in electoral advertising model is positive</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Prohibition of negative</td>
<td>campaigns does not make sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing airtime for electoral advertising is problematic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Coverage guidelines limit freedom of expression</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reform does not limit freedom of expression</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>The reform limits freedom of expression</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage guidelines are not new</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Impossibility of consensus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media only interested in protecting their economic interests</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media lies</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False arguments criticizing the reform</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing campaign spending is positive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibition of negative campaigns existed since 1996</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive to include right of reply as part of the reform</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3d shows that within a total of 137 evaluation frame elements in support of the changes to the electoral advertising model, in 30 instances arguments specifically highlighted that the reform “does not limit freedom of expression” (Alcocer 2007k; Aziz 2007e; 2007f; 2007g; Camacho 2007c; Cansino 2007a; Carbonel 2007; Casar 2007c; Díaz Garza 2007a; Granados Chapa 2007c; Huchim 2007h; 2007j; Merino 2007b; 2007e; Raphael 2007b; Riva Palacio 2007b; Sánchez Rebolledo 2007a; 2007b; Sandoval 2007b; Woldenberg 2007f; among others).\textsuperscript{351} None of the opinion-makers with electoral expertise whose articles were included in my sample framed the prohibition of purchasing airtime in terms of a limit to freedom of expression.

Among the 35 negative evaluation frame elements against the changes are 23 instances of articles that argued that the reform “limits freedom of expression,” 22 right-leaning and one on the centre (de la Calle 2007; de la Vega 2007; Loperena 2007; Reyes Heroles 2007a, 2007b, 2007d, 2007e; Rubio 2007; Sánchez Susarrey 2007c, 2007c, 2007d, 2007g, 2007h, 2007i, Sarmiento 2007c, 2007e, 2007f, 2007g, 2007i, 2007j; Shabot 2007f; Tejado Dondé 2007; among others).\textsuperscript{352} Sergio Sarmiento, news anchor and Director in TV Azteca (in four of his 13 articles included in my sample), argued that a rule in the COFIPE mandating a meeting between IFE and the CIRT, for the former to provide general guidelines for news coverage during electoral campaigns, was censorship: an attempt to “set the line”; he argued that such guidelines were aimed at limiting freedom of expression. Concurrently, other authors, many of whom had electoral expertise, reminded readers that the prohibition of negative campaigns existed since 1996 (Delgado 2007d; Granados Chapa 2007d, 2007i; Huchim 2007j; Merino 2007e; Woldenberg 2007f). Indeed, as Woldenberg (2008) explains, those critics neglected to mention the fact that a very similar rule had been in place since 1993 and that such guidelines are not

\textsuperscript{351} Of the 30 articles that evaluated the reform as not violating freedom of expression, 11 were classified as having a left ideological position and 18 were on the centre, but none of these articles were on the right of the political spectrum.

\textsuperscript{352} Four of 18 authors of articles with negative evaluation frame elements contrary to the changes to electoral advertising had strong links to media corporations: Javier Tejado Dondé (Televisa’s Legal Advisor), Lolita de la Vega, Sergio Sarmiento, and Ezra Shabot (news anchors). Leonardo Curzio and Carmen Aristegui (other news anchors with articles in my sample) did not take that position. Other authors that framed the reform as restrictive of freedom of expression include lawyers and analysts that filed injunctions against the reform (e.g. Luis Rubio and Federico Reyes Heroles).
binding; he argued that those guidelines are suggestions precisely because the intent was not to limit free expression.\(^{353}\)

Regarding the issue of the prohibition of negative campaigns, authors expressed concerns about the lack of clarity of definitions (denigration and slander for example) potentially leading to controversies and litigation in future elections. Opinion-makers advocated for secondary legislation to clarify and facilitate the implementation of this aspect of the reform, or argued that merely prohibiting candidates to criticize their opponents would not improve the quality of debate during electoral campaigns (Carbonel 2007; Córdova Vianello 2007e; De la Torre 2007; Elizondo 2007b; Merino 2007b; Riva Palacio 2007b; Reséndiz 2007; Shabot 2007d; Zárate 2007; among others). Several authors highlighted the complexity of this issue and argued it was a “normative dilemma” (Díaz Garza 2007b; Krauze 2007; Shabot 2007d; 2007d), acknowledging that this issue was a line in the sand.

Several authors wrote about the strong reaction of mass media corporations to the changes in the electoral advertising model, and highlighted that false claims were being propagated (Alcalde 2007; Alcocer 2007g, 2007i; Aristegui 2007b, 2007c; Camil 2007; Córdova Vianello 2007e; Corral 2007c; Díaz Garza 2007a; Granados Chapa 2007c; Hernández Navarro 2007; Huchim 2007h; Sánchez Rebolledo 2007a, 2007b; Sandoval 2007b; Villarreal 2007j; Woldenberg 2007d; Zamarripa 2007b; among others).\(^{354}\) The widespread support of the changes to the electoral advertising model (except from those authors on the right, generally with links to mass media corporations) led many centre and left opinion-makers to call on the Mexican Congress to follow-up on what they started with the electoral reform and legislate a new framework for the country’s media (television, radio, and the press); 27 articles with treatment recommendation

\(^{353}\) The title of one of Woldenberg’s articles “Amnesia Interesada” (Amnesia with an Interest) captures an apparent intention in the neglect of some reform critics to mention that this aspect of the electoral legislation was not new.

\(^{354}\) These references were included mostly in left and centre articles. In a piece titled “Bombs, Screens, and Barricades,” Reyes Heroles wrote: “The hysterical reaction of the mass media … exhibited lack of arguments … the high emotional charge of the issue will deepen the national divisions.” This is a noteworthy example because Reyes Heroles opposed the changes to the electoral advertising model and even filed an injunction a few months later with a group of intellectuals and other members of the Red Circle; he opposed the new changes while at the same time acknowledging that the mass media corporations overreacted.

The anticipated removal of two-thirds of IFE’s nine electoral councillors was more contentious than the electoral advertising model. While critics (on the right, centre, and some on the left) considered the anticipated removal of IFE’s councillors a violation of the Institute’s autonomy, for some authors on the left, the removal was necessary in order to foster trust in the electoral organ. Tables 6.4a and 6.4c below show the number of aggregated “causal interpretation” and “evaluation” frame elements related to the anticipated removal of some of IFE’s electoral councillors and the process to replace them, cross-tabulating with article position. Tables 6.4b and 6.4d show in more detail exactly what causal interpretation and evaluation mean for the issue of the removal of some electoral councillors. Tables 6.4a and 6.4b comprise 41 articles and 30 authors and tables 6.4c and 6.4d comprise 58 articles and 37 authors (as explained in the methodology section, the number of articles is not always equal to the number of frame elements).

Table 6.4a Number of References of Aggregated Causal Interpretation Frame Elements in Favour of or Against Removing Electoral Councillors and/or Selection Process and Article Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article position</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>In favour</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma, Jan.–Dec., 2007.

As Table 6.4a shows, regarding the removal of IFE’s electoral councillors, in the opinion articles in my sample, a total of 25 instances of causal interpretation frame elements depict a context that justified the reasons for removing some electoral councillors; 16 were against this. The context

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355 Authors arguing for new media legislation did not mean that this should be done as part of the 2007 electoral reform; opinion-makers alluded to the outdated legal framework and to the need to upgrade it (something which legislators did not do at that time).

356 Even some opinion-makers who were supportive of the banning of paying for airtime in radio and television for electoral advertising were critical of the changes to IFE’s Electoral Council, for being contrary to its autonomy (for example, María Amparo Casar and Lorenzo Córdova, advisors in the process of negotiation, and Pedro Salazar, academic).
highlighted all of the 15 left-leaning articles supported the removal, and all of the 12 right-leaning ones were against the removal; centre articles with causal interpretation frame elements representing arguments in favour or against removing some electoral councillors were split (with 4 against and 10 in favour). The differences between right- and left-leaning articles suggest a degree of polarization about the anticipated removal of IFE’s Electoral Councillors, reflecting the two radically different positions regarding their performance in the 2006 electoral conflict. Most of the supporters of removing the three councillors were sympathetic to the political left and framed the removal as necessary because they lacked legitimacy since their appointment in 2003.

Table 6.4b Number of References to Specific Causal Interpretation Frame Elements Representing Arguments Related to the Removal of Some of IFE’s Electoral Councillors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements Causal interpretation (pro changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
<th>Frame elements Causal interpretation (against changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003 selection of IFE Councillors was problematic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2006 electoral process – polarization</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 electoral process – fraud</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Current IFE Councillors were legitimately elected</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 electoral process – IFE failed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors = revenge</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFE Councillors lack credibility/trust</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.–Dec. 2007.

Table 6.4b above shows the specific arguments represented in the causal interpretation frame elements: within the 25 articles that depicted a context that would justify the anticipated removal of some of IFE’s electoral councillors, some authors referred to the “problematic” selection process in 2003, to a lack of credibility/trust in electoral councillors, or asserted that councillors had failed to fulfill their duties (Alcocer 2007c; Aristegui 2007a; Aziz 2007d; Cansino 2007b; Chabat 2007; Córdova Vianello 2007a; Delgado 2007a; 2007b; Dresser 2007a; Granados Chapa 2007b; 2007g; Huchim 2007e; 2007h; Merodio 2007; Muñoz Ledo 2007d; Riva Palacio 2007c; Rivera 2007b; among others); five articles written by left-leaning supporters of López Obrador, highlighted the issue of “fraud” in the 2006 electoral process (Aristegui 2007c; Camacho 2007a; Flores 2007; Garrido 2007; Gershenson 2007). Concurrently, 16 articles with references of causal interpretation frame elements depicted a context in which there was no reason to remove
electoral councillors; some authors emphasized that this was a rather simple way for politicians to face the polarized political context (Cremoux 2007; Aziz 2007f; García de Quevedo 2007; Reyes Heroles 2007b; Rubio 2007; Shabot 2007a; 2007b); other authors asserted it responded to the desire of politicians to take revenge on IFE’s electoral councillors for their alleged role in the 2006 electoral outcome (Alemán 2007a, 2007f; Cota Meza 2007; Creel 2007; Sarmiento 2007f, 2007i, 2007j, 2007k).

Table 6.4c Number of References of Aggregated Evaluation Arguments in Favour or Against Removing Electoral Councillors and Selection Process and Article Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article position</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>In favour</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 2007.

Table 6.4c, which comprises 58 articles and 37 authors, shows that opinion pieces across all political leanings evaluated the removal of electoral councillors as unnecessary at best, and problematic at worst. The majority of the frame elements that framed the changes to IFE’s General Council in a positive light (17 out of 23) were found in 13 left-leaning articles; all of the nine authors of those articles had supported López Obrador.357

Table 6.4d Number of References to Specific Evaluation Frame Elements Representing Arguments Related to the Removal of Some of IFE’s Electoral Councillors and Selection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame elements Evaluation (pro removal/changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
<th>Frame elements Evaluation (against removal/changes)</th>
<th>Number of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors = not revenge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors = revenge</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current IFE Councillors lack trust/failed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No reason to remove IFE Councillors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors does not hamper IFE’s autonomy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors hampers IFE’s autonomy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal of IFE Councillors is positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Process/rules to select new IFE Councillors is problematic/unclear</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

357 Of the 37 authors in tables 6.4c and 6.4d, 11 had been outspoken supporters, promoters, or collaborators of López Obrador.
Electoral Councillors have been removed in the past | 4 | Legislators’ incapability to reach agreement to name IFE Councillors is negative | 8 |
---|---|---|---
Process to select new IFE Councillors is fair | 3 | | |
New rules to select IFE Councillors are better, but not perfect | 1 | | |
**Total** | **23** | **Total** | **48**

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma*, Jan.—Dec. 2007.

As shown in Table 6.4d, within the 48 instances of negative “evaluation” frame elements, 26 referred to the selection process of IFE’s new electoral councillors, with 18 articles assessing the process and/or the rules to select them as problematic or unclear (Alemán 2007e; Casar 2007d; Delgado 2007c; Gordillo 2007b; Granados Chapa 2007j, 2007l; Huchim 2007l; Merino 2007d; Muñoz Ledo 2007d; Raphael 2007c, 2007d; Riva Palacio 2007c; Sánchez Susarrey 2007i; Sarmiento 2007k, 2007l, 2007m; Zamarripa 2007c). Other articles underscored the incapability of legislators to select the new Electoral Councillors in the timeframe that they themselves specified in the 2007 reform (Alemán 2007f; Camacho 2007d; Curzio 2007; Núñez Castañeda 2007f; Raphael 2007e; Rossel 2007b; Valdés Ugalde 2007b).

There were 42 articles exclusively about the anticipated removal of IFE’s Electoral Councillors and/or selection process of the new ones; eight articles explicitly advocated for not removing IFE’s Electoral Councillors (Casar 2007b; Córdova Vianello 2007a; García Soto 2007a; Salazar 2007a; Sánchez Susarrey 2007b; Sarmiento 2007a, 2007b; Silva-Herzog Márquez 2007a); six articles argued that they should be removed or should resign (Delgado 2007a; Flores 2007; Gershenson 2007; Merodio 2007; Ortiz Pinchetti 2007; Rivera 2007a). Thirty-five articles included treatment recommendation frame elements emphasizing the importance of a transparent selection process not based on party quotas but on merit, with the objective of strengthening IFE (Alcocer 2007k; Alemán 2007e; Aristegui 2007c; Aziz 2007g; Bégne 2007b; Bucio 2007; Cansino 2007b; Casar 2007d; Delgado 2007a, 2007c; Granados Chapa 2007d; 2007g, 2007h, 2007j; Huchim 2007l; Larios 2007; Merino 2007d, 2007f; Núñez Castañeda 2007a; Raphael 2007e; Sarmiento 2007l; Silva-Herzog Márquez 2007d; Villarreal 2007l; Woldenberg 2007e;
among others). Although authors of all leanings coincided in this (19 articles on the centre, 11 on the left, and five right-leaning ones), they had no impact on the final outcome: legislators not only did not come up with a different and improved selection process, but took over one year to replace the councillors who were removed in 2007, failing to meet the deadline that they had originally established.

As Salazar (2008,?) explains, critics of the reform deemed the agreements reached among the three main political parties as “partyarchy” or “partycracy.” The use of the term partyarchy in the Mexican context, where a competitive party system is rather new, merits an explanation: partyarchy refers to a rather extended notion that political decisions are made by entrenched party elites, whose objective is to protect their own interests rather than those of the citizens who elect them, thus failing to strengthen Mexican democracy. The omissions of the 2007 electoral reform were framed as an example of partyarchy; for instance, contrary to the expectation of some citizen groups, the 2007 Electoral Reform did not include mechanisms to facilitate direct citizen participation in political decisions, such as plebiscite and referendum (Casar 2009).

Another outstanding issue was that of the consecutive re-election of legislators (which would promote accountability to their constituents, rather than to the party leadership); arguably, by avoiding incorporating this aspect, political party elites refused to give up their power to create the lists of candidates, an effective mechanism to guarantee party discipline (IMEP 2007b). The reform also stopped short of making independent candidacies viable; in societies where political parties represent the full spectrum of public opinion and citizens have opportunities to join and participate in existing parties, this is not really an issue. Public democratic participation and independent candidacies are not necessarily the same. Independent candidacies are

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358 As I explained in Chapter 3, the constitutional framework concerning the state remained anchored to an outdated political logic since the 1990s: the country’s institutions, originally designed to work under the political premises of a strong presidentialist system and a hegemonic party regime, were no longer functional in a context of a divided Congress, in which no party had a majority. Since the Fox Administration, academics and analysts had framed the difficulties to reach agreements regarding necessary reforms to continue the democratic deepening process as an issue of “partyarchy” (IMEP, 2007b).

359 At the last minute, legislators modified Article 116 of the Constitution (about elections at the provincial level), but did not change Article 41; this resulted in a contradiction in the country’s Constitution and so the issue of independent candidacies was ineffectual. A fix for this discrepancy required a new constitutional reform.
discouraged through both informal and formal rules in the majority of electoral democracies. In the Mexican context, however, what was missing was an efficient process to allow those citizens who do not identify themselves with any of the existing political parties to form new ones, contend in the electoral process, and thus become a different political option (Woldenberg 2008, 41).

Several authors with articles included in my sample used the notion of partyarchy to frame the reform or some of its aspects as regressive for democracy: as further strengthening the hegemony of party elites in detriment of freedom of expression; hampering IFE’s autonomy; preventing more citizen participation; or weakening accountability (Aguilar Villanueva 2007; Alemán 2007c, 2007d; Castañeda 2007a, 2007b; Concha 2007b; De la Calle 2007; De la Torre 2007; De la Vega 2007; Raphael 2007e; Reséndis 2007; Reyes Heroles 2007c, 2007d, 2007e; Rubio 2007; Sánchez Susarrey 2007b, 2007g; Sarmiento 2007d, 2007h, 2007l; Silva-Herzog Márquez 2007a, 2007c; among others). Of course, it would be naïve to think of an electoral reform without or against the will of the parties, which are there to compete and win elections. Accusing political parties was, arguably, aimed at driving a wedge between the parties’ interests and those of the citizens, as if the two were completely separate. As Woldenberg (2008, 38) explains, by capitalizing on the diminishing prestige of political parties, some of the most critical authors aimed “to convert a legitimate reform into a factious and illegitimate initiative,” and thus undermine the legitimacy of the reform.

The viewpoint that party elites approved a reform that was mostly beneficial to them was largely held by authors critical of the reform or close to mass media corporations; however, the issue of party interests, or an alleged partyarchy was also addressed by authors with no direct links to the mass media, albeit in different terms: some centre and left articles written by academics, electoral experts and activists emphasized the important role that political parties are meant play in a democracy (Alcocer 2007k; Merino 2007b; Sánchez Rebolledo 2007a; Silva-Herzog Márquez 2007c; Treviño 2007; Woldenberg 2007c; 2007d); this suggests that some authors

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360 For example, Jaime Sánchez Susarrey, academic, was very critical of the reform; he began his article, titled “¿Quién?” (“Who?”), with the rhetorical question, “Who won? (with the reform), and continued by stating that “apparently, all … politicians … this is the happy world of the political class in power … a game in which everybody wins and nobody loses, at least none of the three main political forces.”
aimed to elevate the quality of the discussion within the Red Circle. Although the content analysis of opinion articles shows that well-informed pieces were published in the press, some aspects of the discussion did not float down to the public (through radio and television). Positions remained entrenched and the print media had virtually no impact on any aspect of the reform’s implementation.

Table 6.5 below presents cross-tabulation of article position and basic tone. As it shows, a high percentage of left and right articles were critical (56% and 88% respectively). The highest percentage of all articles in 2007 was critical (47%). Perhaps not surprisingly given the context of polarization, and the rejection of the reform among many opinion-makers, the lowest share of articles have an optimistic tone. The analysis done in the press reflected the growing climate of elite polarization; positions became entrenched in different groups within the Red Circle, which in turn failed to mitigate such polarization. There is no evidence that authors changed their viewpoints in response to other articles.

Table 6.5 Number and Percentage of Articles Classified by Article Position and Tone (Critical/ Neutral/ Optimistic/Prescriptive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Tone</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Articles</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number of Articles</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from El Universal, La Jornada, and Reforma, Jan. – Dec., 2007.

The differences among opinion-makers regarding the most contentious aspects of the reform were in line with the political context prevalent during and after the 2006 electoral process. The high number of instances of critical tone both in right- and left-leaning articles reflected the contentiousness of some aspects of the reform: right-leaning articles were critical of changes in the electoral advertising model and of the anticipated removal of electoral councillors; left-

Article position may refer to political leaning or ideological position specific to the issue being discussed. Basic tone reveals the author’s attitudes and presuppositions (See Chapter 2, 29 for classification criteria).
leaning articles criticized IFE’s electoral councillors, the PAN, business groups, and the mass media. Indeed, in 2007 critical articles used a more confrontational discourse in their analysis of the Electoral Reform than they did in 1996. For example, some of the critical articles on the left that supported the changes to the electoral advertising model and the removal of IFE’s electoral councillors were based on criticism of the role played by those whom they considered responsible for the outcome of the 2006 electoral process (IFE’s electoral councillors, the mass media, and business groups). Some articles in the right and centre were critical of legislators and politicians for proposing and promoting changes that these opinion-makers framed as detrimental for the country’s electoral institutions; however, their main concern was arguably for the impact of the changes to the electoral advertising model on their interests (profits or electoral fortunes).

Figure 6.1 below shows the differences and similarities across *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and *Reforma* in terms of basic tone. The difference across newspapers regarding article tone is noteworthy: the highest percentage of critical articles within newspaper is in the left-leaning *La Jornada* (77%), more than double from the 35 percent it had in 1996. This was rather surprising, because left-leaning authors writing in *La Jornada* were supportive of the new legislation; for the most part, they stressed their criticism of the actors that they considered responsible for the outcome of the 2006 electoral process, namely, the mass media, IFE’s electoral councillors, and business groups. No optimistic articles appeared in *La Jornada* in 2007 (in contrast to 1996 when it had the highest share). The proportion of articles with a predominantly critical tone in *El Universal* and *Reforma* was similar to that of 1996.

**Figure 6.1 Percentages of Articles by Tone in *El Universal*, *La Jornada* and *Reforma***
Overall, the two sides of the issues included in the 2007 electoral reform were well represented, particularly in Reforma and El Universal; conversely, article position in La Jornada was highly homogeneous: the paper moved markedly towards the left in comparison to 1996. This reflects the evolution of the three newspapers: while El Universal and Reforma continued promoting diversity in their editorial pages, La Jornada, although always a left-leaning paper, adopted a rather homogeneous left stance in their opinions, as I explained in Chapter 4.

Table 6.6 below shows all authors classified according to their main professional activity, cross-tabulated with the correctness (accuracy) of the arguments they used in their articles. I assessed the relevance and accuracy of arguments based on the two following aspects: whether the context for the issue being discussed was relevant; and whether arguments were correct/accurate (see Chapter 2, 64) for more details on the binary classification of each component of the criteria to assess article quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Activity 2007</th>
<th>Accuracy of Arguments</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Low</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 6.6 shows, academics wrote the largest proportion of articles that included relevant and accurate arguments: they wrote 35 percent of all articles, but wrote 47 percent of all articles with highly accurate and relevant arguments. Academics pointed out the gaps and implications of the different aspects of the reform, and their articles were explanatory and analytical; analysts, experts and academics were more likely to use relevant and accurate arguments in their articles than were journalists or political actors. Of the 96 articles written by academics, 78 include arguments that are highly relevant or accurate. Journalists wrote only 19 percent of the articles with highly accurate and relevant arguments (32 articles); and for political actors, the figure is 10 percent (17 articles).
Some of the articles that used relevant and accurate arguments were written by political actors (Creel 2007; Corral 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Muñoz Ledo 2007a, 2007c; among others). Journalists wrote 50 percent of the articles with arguments rated as having low accurate or relevant arguments, and 45 percent of articles with moderately accurate and relevant arguments. Some articles written by journalists served to feed speculation: for example, about who would potentially replace IFE’s electoral councillors, giving names of possible contenders and their supporters among political actors (Alemán 2007a; García Soto 2007c; Riva Palacio 2007a).

Raymundo Riva Palacio (2007a), for example, recounted that Senator Santiago Creel (PAN), a key reform negotiator, agreed to the removal of IFE’s electoral councillors on the condition that his former Chief of Staff (María Amparo Casar, an academic who also participated in the reform negotiations as an advisor) be appointed as chair of IFE’s Electoral Council. Similarly, García Soto (2007c), alluding to two rival PRI politicians, argued that “the dispute over IFE” was “linked to two characters who, with the electoral organ as an arena, battle once more in their long political war.” Notably, none of the people these two opinion-makers mentioned in their articles became part of IFE’s Electoral Council. This suggests the possibilities that some of those journalists were politically motivated, or that they were tied in some way to specific interests. In no instances in my sample did authors with entrenched opinions on either side of the debate (journalists and political actors) change their point of view, even if claims were contradicted by well-argued articles written by experts in a neutral tone.

The issue of criticisms to the reform became a topic of analysis in itself. Eight articles include “treatment recommendation” frame elements concerning the need to base criticisms on facts and evaluate the reform fairly (Alcocer 2007e; 2007i; Dresser 2007b; Merino 2007e; Raphael 2007b; Reyes Heroles 2007a; Zamarripa 2007b). This is illustrative of the concern among some opinion-makers, of all leanings, about the polarization around some issues related to the reform.

The content analysis of opinion articles I conducted reveals a sharp conflict among views in the print media over several aspects of the 2007 electoral reform. The numbers of references to specific frame elements are helpful in elucidating the thought process among the different

362 It is worth mentioning that these columns sometimes still serve as a messaging mechanism among political actors, as they did during the PRI regime. In Mexico, this type of article is sometimes ironically referred to as “corre, ve y dile” (run, go, tell), indicating their gossipy nature.
authors of opinion articles (and how profoundly opposed it was on the two sides). They don’t, however, explain the nature of polarization within the Red Circle or demonstrate the prevalence of a particular viewpoint on their own. The numbers and proportions of authors and articles showed the extent of support or rejection of the different issues on each side. The diversity and expertise of some of the authors that wrote opinion articles in 2007 is illustrative of a plural debate in the stage of electoral democracy. Nevertheless, positions remained firmly entrenched and the print media had virtually no impact on any aspect of the reform’s implementation. In order to have an influence, it would need to reach a wider cross-section of the public, as is the case in liberal democracies.

Final Remarks

The diversity and expertise of some of the authors who wrote opinion articles in 2007 is illustrative of a rich public debate and speaks well of the overall quality of the Mexican opinion pages in the stage of electoral democracy. This Chapter revealed strong positions among opinion-makers supporting and opposing some aspects of the 2007 electoral reform: first, a left/centre versus right divide on the issue of changing the rules for access to the mass media; and second, a left versus centre/right on the removal of electoral councillors. The Red Circle was increasingly divided within itself by 2007, and the print media became less of a means of communication and understanding between the two polarizing sides. In the case of the changes to the electoral advertising model, most authors within the Red Circle were in favour of the reform, only a minority against; regarding the removal of IFE’s electoral councillors, most opinion-makers saw it as unnecessary, with only a minority (mostly of left-leaning authors, supporters of López Obrador) defending the removal.

Although the political elite still communicates through the print media as it did in the past, the increase in academic opinion-makers and the decline of political actors writing in the press may have contributed to the declining influence of the Red Circle regarding the new electoral reform.

363 Examples include the selection of the three electoral councillors to replace those who were removed in 2007 (26 instances in which authors advocated for a different selection process); the call to the Mexican Congress to approve new media legislation (27 articles); and the lack of clarity in the terms associated with “negative campaigns” (seven articles in which authors advocated for comprehensive secondary legislation to define these terms).
A relevant aspect in this stage was the role of mass media interests, which, arguably, had some key journalists doing their bidding, perhaps contributing to the erosion not only of the 2007 electoral reform, but also of the legitimacy of political parties. Given the low readership of the press, the effect of the failure of the Red Circle to foster consensus or mitigate polarization was on the country’s elite.
Chapter 7
General Conclusions: The Press and Democratization – Lessons from Mexico

My objective in this dissertation was to examine the role that the liberalizing and increasingly diverse press of the 1990s played in the Mexican democratization process, as well as the influence of the print media once it became independent and free of political control in the stage of electoral democracy. I argued that structural factors, specifically economic changes and reforms, relaxed press controls significantly in the 1990s and propelled the incipient process of press liberalization. I further argued that these events allowed opinion-makers, a group that had become increasingly independent and diverse, to make a contribution towards electoral democratization. In the stage of electoral democracy, divisions and disagreements increased within the Red Circle; although the debate in the press was plural, the low readership of newspapers meant that not all arguments were known to the general public.

The case of Mexico shows that the role of the press in democratization processes is determined by several explanatory factors. First and foremost are the legacies of the authoritarian regime: the low levels of functional illiteracy and a poor public educational system, which result in small press readership. Indeed, the elitist character of the Mexican print media is a key contextual factor that shaped the role of the press beyond the authoritarian period, as well as the nature of the involvement of the Red Circle on the democratic transition. My findings suggest that in later stages of a democratization process, there are some caveats to the positive impact that the media may have earlier in a transition. Such limitations may happen if the readership of the press is small, if there is no recent memory of democracy, if citizens do not feel that their needs are being fulfilled, or if political polarization is an issue. In these situations, the press may not live up to the expectations of the normative functions that it is supposed to fulfill in liberal democracies: promoting democratic attitudes, fostering understanding among groups with different visions, or holding politicians accountable.

In this closing chapter, I present a comparative overview of the analysis of the 1996 and 2007 electoral reforms in opinion articles and emphasize the factors that shaped the role of the print media in the Mexican democratic transition. I discuss the implications of my findings, which are relevant for the democratization literature, in particular for contexts of political polarization. I
then expand on the applicability of my methodological framework and highlight some of the advantages of coding articles systematically, based on the different functions of frames (frame elements). In the last section I point to directions for future research.

**The Mexican Democratization Process and the Role of an Elitist Press**

For most of the twentieth century, the Mexican press was shaped by a broad array of governmental controls that generated positive coverage for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). There also were, however, a few spaces in which critical intellectuals (mostly on the left) could publish their opinions, which helped bolster the regime’s legitimacy; this also allowed a small contingent of critical journalists to survive and expand once greater opportunity became available. The incipient opening of the print media that began in the 1970s accelerated as a consequence of the country’s economic crises and subsequent economic reforms (compounded by other factors), in turn reinforcing the country’s gradual democratization process. Nevertheless, Mexico did not make the transition to the liberal democratic model, in which the press helps to shape public opinion, potentially influencing policymakers. Since the press in Mexico does not reach the general public, the exposure of published opinions is among intellectuals, business, and political circles. This contrasts with television and radio, which, having much larger audiences, are in a position to influence public opinion more directly than the print media. Notwithstanding the relevance of diversity of published opinion in many national newspapers, the small readership of the press means that published opinion does not permeate to the rest of the population; the impact of the press is thus on the country’s political, intellectual, and business elites.³⁶⁴

The focus of the democratization process in Mexico was on the electoral realm. In the 1990s considerable differences emerged among opposition parties over several issues; furthermore, civil society organizations, intellectuals, and the elite coincided in the desire to drive the PRI out of power. Political parties finally reached agreements that enabled the transition to electoral

³⁶⁴ For most of the twentieth century in Mexico, published opinion was that of a minority that had specific and direct means to make themselves heard by the elites or the general public. In the stage of electoral democracy, the polarization of opinion also involves groups who do not belong to the traditional elites and question the legitimacy of the country’s economic model and the quality of Mexican democracy.
democracy. After 2000, however, old mistrust among political parties reemerged and with it fears that some parties may be at a disadvantage in terms of access to the political system because of recent history. The content of political negotiations shifted to more specific issues, and the differences between opposite visions became more prevalent. Progress on poverty alleviation was minimal in Mexico in a context of low economic growth. There was no consensus or strong agreement over what democracy actually means: process (elections) or social outcomes. Fundamental differences existed between the right and the left about how to solve the many challenges that Mexico faced. By 2007, the differences of opinion within the Red Circle about these issues reflected the differing viewpoints and perspectives prevalent in different sectors of the Mexican elite.

In 1996, one-third of the authors of the opinion pieces included in my sample were political actors, a significant proportion of whom were long-time promoters of further democratization and were involved in the reform negotiations (Chapter 4, Table 4.1). In 2007, there was a noteworthy decrease in the proportion of opinion-makers with direct influence over the political process, in comparison to that of 1996: the percentage of articles written by political actors in my sample decreased from one-third in 1996 to roughly one-tenth in 2007. At the same time, the percentage of articles written by academics increased from one-fifth in 1996 to above one-third in 2007 (Chapter 4, Table 4.2). This shows a positive trend towards more expertise in the country’s opinion pages; the fact that fewer political actors and more academics were regular press contributors suggests that in the stage of electoral democracy, opinion-makers were less tied to the political process than in 1996. By 2007, however, opinion-makers became increasingly divided, and the print media became less of a means of understanding between the two polarizing sides. The different opinions in the press were largely based on the implications

365 The deeper underlying problem that the Mexican print media reflected in 2007 regarding the discussions around the electoral reform was the lack of agreements among the country’s elites on the rules of the game, regarding both the democratic process and how the economy should work.
366 Neoliberal policies adopted in the 1980s and 1990s failed to produce equitable prosperity and to decrease poverty levels (Teichman 2009, 67? ).
367 For example, in terms of poverty reduction, the PAN supports free markets, investment, and individual responsibility, and the PRD prefers an expanded social safety net and greater government responsibility (Bruhn and Green 2007; Teichman 2009).
that the most contentious aspects of the electoral reform would have for the various stakeholders, including political parties, the country’s electoral institutions, and mass media corporations.

The 1996 and 2007 Electoral Reforms in the Press: From Fostering Consensus to Reflecting Differences

The 1996 electoral reform was widely supported in the Mexican press. Although there were some disagreements among opinion-makers, in general it is possible to speak about some type of consensus around the need for a reform that had largely been promoted by civil society activists and opposition political parties. The problems were clearly identified, and most opinion-makers coincided in the diagnosis and what needed to be done: reduce the probability of electoral fraud by granting full autonomy of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) from the Executive branch, and create conditions for more equitable electoral competition, in particular, more impartial media coverage of all candidates and more proportional allocation of public funding for political parties so as to mitigate the PRI’s disproportionate advantage. As was the case in other processes of democratization (notably that of Spain), the press in the earlier stage of the process of transition in Mexico underscored the importance of reforms and placed them on the agenda, thus serving as a forum for political dialogue. Opinion articles depicted the reform as a realistic and necessary step for the transition from authoritarianism, accentuating the demands of opposition political actors and civil society, and supporting further-reaching transformations. This, in turn, had significant consequences for the development and eventual institutionalization of political pluralism.

In the 1990s, a broad consensus existed among opposition parties and civil society activists about the need to enhance the electoral legislation in order to push forward the process of democratization; Mexico’s opinion-makers were strongly supportive of long-reaching political changes and further democratization. In their articles, they sought to open up “space” to opposition viewpoints, and hence they played a positive role in pushing forward the 1996 electoral reform. As seen in Chapter 5, the intra political elite/intellectual class discussion in the press was important in fostering consensus. The majority of the authors of opinion articles in my sample—many of whom had been active in the discussions promoted by civil society organizations, intellectuals, and academics—coincided in that a new electoral reform had to occur; in their opinion pieces, they supported meaningful changes to give way to clean electoral
processes, which, in turn, created an environment more conducive for reaching agreements. The approval of the 1996 electoral reform had positive implications for opposition parties, and most opinion-makers framed the changes in a positive light. This enhanced support for the reform on the part of elites and thus had a positive impact in its legitimization. In sum, the print media contributed to the transition process by helping to foster agreements and by bolstering the legitimacy of the reform.

In 2007, the context was different: most importantly, the country had already transitioned to electoral democracy. Therefore, the goal of the 2007 Electoral Reform was not to achieve fair rules for the electoral system, but to improve it further. It was necessary to fine-tune the electoral legislation in order to address its weaknesses. Nevertheless, different actors had distinct viewpoints on what the flaws were; in the aftermath of the 2006 electoral process, in which the left PRD narrowly lost the presidency to the center-right candidate, divisions among opinion-makers, rooted in a context of left-right polarization, were much more politicized than they were in the previous stage.

While in 1996 most opinion articles were written concurrently with the negotiations as specific aspects of the reform were being discussed, in 2007 most of the analysis was done once the specifics of the reform had been agreed upon by political actors (who put aside their differences to prevent another post-electoral crisis). Opinion-makers thus could not strive to actively influence the reform’s outcome; importantly, even though some opinion pieces offered relevant arguments and useful policy recommendations, these had no impact on its implementation.

A comparison between the references to recommendations made by opinion-makers that had an impact on shaping the negotiation process or the approved legislation and those that did not in both 1996 and 2007 is suggestive of the influence of the press in each of the two periods analyzed. In 1996 most opinion articles were highly supportive of opposition demands for

368 Broadly, opinion-makers on the left feared that the absence of more extensive electoral reforms would harm the chances of the left electorally; those on the right tended to be less inclined to support more extensive reforms.

369 The PRD felt its failure to gain office had been harmed by negative adds sponsored by third parties, by the acts of IFE’s electoral councilors (whose appointments were decided by the PRI and the PAN only) and by unfairness in media treatment.
meaningful changes that would lead to a more equitable electoral competition. More than one-third of the articles about the negotiation process in 1996 advocated for consensus and reaching agreements and underscored the importance of achieving an electoral reform. I did not find a single article that argued that the reform was unnecessary; hence, authors’ recommendations were crystallized with the approval of the reform. In 2007, a significant proportion of opinion articles advocated for new media legislation (beyond electoral advertising, and as part of a broader media reform). As well, the majority of authors advocated for a new selection process for the new Electoral Councillors.

The press, as seen through the authors of opinion articles, evolved from being strongly united in support for electoral reform legislation in 1996 to a situation characterized by growing polarization of opinion by 2007. Although my analysis did not determine causality, there appears to be a relationship between the position of opinion-makers in the power and social structure, as well as their main professional activity, and their support or opposition to laws initiatives or policies. This was more apparent in the second stage, in the analysis of the 2007 electoral reform: 20 percent of those authors who strongly opposed the changes to the electoral advertising model had ties to mass media corporations (the ban on the sale of airtime spaces for electoral spots was detrimental to the economic interests of mass media owners). I did not find evidence of authors with strong convictions on either side of the debate changing their point of view, even when their arguments were refuted by authors with electoral expertise using highly accurate and relevant information. This, in turn, undermined the possibility of fostering consensus among elites about the implications of the reform or further changes to the legislation. Different arguments resonated mostly among other like-minded opinion-makers, rather than building bridges of understanding among those with different opinions. The detailed analysis did not lead to agreements among those on the different sides of the debate; the contentiousness of the changes

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370 By 2007 there was a broadly shared view among opinion-makers, critics of the status quo, who wrote about the need to overhaul the existing legal framework concerning the media (beyond electoral advertising and as part of a broader media reform): issues such as the process to obtain and renew licenses for television and radio chains, the right of reply, and ethical codes.

371 Opinion articles of all leanings in the press coincided in their treatment recommendation, arguing that the procedure to select IFE’s new Electoral Councillors should be transparent and not based on party quotas. However, legislators in Congress not only did not come up with a different process, but failed to meet their self-imposed deadline to find replacements for those electoral councilors that were removed in 2007.
resulted in authors on each side of the debate making claims that seemed to resonate with those that had similar political positions. Moreover, although in the analysis of the 2007 reform many authors coincided in their assessment of how the new electoral legislation could be improved and the need to implement changes in other areas, political actors for the most part did not appear to take those solutions into consideration.

The two electoral reforms had different implications for all media (press, radio, and television). In 1996, changes in media coverage of electoral campaigns facilitated more media opening, for two main reasons: first, because the electoral legislation itself mandated more equitable coverage of all candidates; and second, because the media increasingly had to cover politicians from different parties, especially after taking office. The 1996 electoral reform was not only crucial for the transition to electoral democracy, but had a decisive influence in the continuation of the process of media opening, as it gave way to an increase of more plural media (newspapers, television, and radio). Another (arguably unintended) implication was that electoral campaigns became a significant source of revenue for mass media corporations, which made big profits selling airtime for electoral advertising. This situation reached a tipping point in 2006, which prompted legislators to change the electoral advertising model in television and radio in 2007. The electoral advertising rules included in the reform approved in the fall of that year had positive implications, notably a decrease in campaign spending. Nevertheless, the changes stopped short of transforming political communication in the country, as legislators did not follow through with a much-needed updated media legal framework.

Broader Implications

In the following pages I address some of the broader implications of my findings for the Mexican democracy and for democratization in Latin America more generally. The case of Mexico helps to understand the role that the print media and opinion-makers may play in a developing country with low press readership in a transition process, in a young democracy, and in contexts of political polarization. Mexico has interrelated problems that in turn limit the role that an independent press can play: first, only a small minority of the public reads the print media; second, the press can only influence the public indirectly through the mass media (radio and television); and third, the mass media is able to influence the public independently and in a way that does not provide the broad spectrum of views in Mexican society.
These limitations in turn pose obstacles to the role that a country’s media can play in democratic consolidation. Although opinion articles in the Mexican press promoted a broader-reaching electoral reform in the 1990s, press opening in the country, due to the small readership of newspapers, mostly meant liberalization in the circulation of ideas among the country’s elites rather than among the public in general. This speaks to the role of the press in processes of democratization in deeply unequal or divided societies, where functional illiteracy is high and where poverty remains substantial. It suggests that the impact of the press in democratizing countries may be small if the full range of ideas and discussion does not filter down: that is, if published opinions do not become known to the wider public.

As Dorcé et al. (2014) explain, the transition to electoral democracy in Mexico in 2000 did not facilitate the democratization of either media structures or the laws regulating broadcast media. The two administrations that followed showed complacency and maintained the privileges bestowed on media owners, which increased their influence. Media corporations opposed changes to any regulation that might have altered or diminished its privileges. My analysis of the 2007 electoral reform suggests that if the mass media (television and radio) is strongly opposed to a considerable portion of opinion found in the press (as happened in 2007), it is unlikely that the opinions that are contrary to the interests of mass media corporations will reach a considerable proportion of the population.

The stage of the transition, especially the ability of the government to bring about further political or institutional reforms to respond to social issues, is also relevant. I found that an interaction among the various phases of the democratization process shapes what comes after, and also that interaction among the various phases of the transition period shapes what happens during the process of democratic deepening. Structural factors, specifically economic transformations, are likely to relax media controls in an authoritarian regime, and can shape the media’s evolution toward independence. Nevertheless, even if in earlier stages of a transition the press plays a positive role, as the democratization process continues, the press’ influence is not always conducive to deepening democracy. Whereas in liberal democracies some politicians learn how to very effectively work press coverage to help garner popular support and votes, if the print media does not reach the general public directly, the exposure to a diverse set of ideas happens mostly among the political/intellectual elite.
The analysis of the Mexican case shows that in earlier phases of a process of democratization, opposing parties more easily reach agreements because it is likely that politicians share a common goal of making the transition viable and possible. In latter stages, the differences between parties that represent very distinct visions for the country—as well as those who may sympathize with them in the press—become deeper and more politicized, which arguably renders them more difficult to bridge. This suggests that the limits to the influence of opinion-makers’ in public affairs are more evident when there are competing political agendas (which there certainly are in the Mexican case).

In Mexico, the political evolution of the electoral framework and the transition to electoral democracy were not accompanied by a similar socioeconomic evolution and development that would expand press readership. There appears to be a disconnect between the political and electoral aspects of a democratic consolidation process on the one hand, and other kinds of processes that are essential to a liberal democracy, such as a generalized improvement of living standards and better public education, on the other.

The media can be essential when there is lack of a consistent history of experiences to support the belief that democratic institutions do work despite failures such as scandals or economic decline (Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck 2006). Nevertheless, the lack of first-hand experience might make citizens in new democracies such as Mexico more vulnerable to the negativistic and adversarial style of political reporting, with negative consequences in terms of trust in political institutions. Mexicans are disenchanted about democracy (Camp 2007; Latinobarómetro 2013). In 2000, citizens’ support for democracy was at 44 percent; by 2002, it increased to 63 percent and remained fairly high during the FOX Administration (59% in 2005). Nevertheless, it decreased during Felipe Calderón’s presidency (2006-2012): 54 percent in 2006, 48 percent in 2007, and 40 percent in 2011 (Latinobarometro 2013).372

372 In 2013, support for democracy in Mexico decreased to 37%; this is 12 points less than the average from 1995-2013 (Latinobarometro 2013, ?). Reasons for this include the low economic growth—of the countries in the region, Mexico was the most affected country by the world economic crisis of 2008—(Latinobarometro 2009, ?), and violent crime. Arguably, the return of the PRI to the presidency after only 12 years shed light on citizens’ search for a solution to problems that continued despite alternation in power.
For the most part, the obstacles resulting from the subordination of the media (press, television, and radio) to the political power during the twentieth century no longer impede free information in Mexico at the national level (Trejo 2015). But the situation of local newspapers is different: powerful state politicians and organized crime still exert pressure over journalists; reporters face significant dangers related to their work. Moreover, although financial independence from the government was key for an independent press in Mexico, the allocation of government advertising is still an important source of revenue for many media outlets, and it weakens the social role that the media should play in a democratic society (Ramírez 2010). Further research is necessary to assess the degree of diversity and plurality of media outlets that rely on this type of revenue versus the ones that are sustained through commercial advertising and readers’ subscriptions instead.

Democratization and the Media in Latin America

In the following paragraphs, I draw out some comparisons to other cases in the region and expand on the implications of my research. Media systems in most countries in Latin America show similarities: like in Mexico, the press is mainly an elitist medium, while the majority of the population receives information through the mass media (television and radio); the private sector dominated commercial media, while the state played a role in shaping or subsidizing commercial media; and political coverage in Latin America’s most influential mass media was biased. In the 1980s and 1990s, after the transition from authoritarian rule in several South American countries, policies towards the media reinforced trends to market concentration and commercialization of media content. A few media outlets (typically controlled by wealthy families or individuals with conservative political leanings) boast a majority of viewers or listeners (Boas 2013). Most countries did not establish a media regime that systematically reinforces government accountability and citizen participation (Boas 2013; Fox & Waisbord 2002; Hughes and Lawson 2005; Waisbord 2006).

Generational changes in leadership, increased market competition, a trend towards professionalization of journalism, and political democratization all combined to create incentives for more balanced political reporting in Latin America (Boas 2013). This professionalization, however, was limited by market logics and political clientelism (Kitzberger 2014). Early in the twenty-first century, several left-wing presidents came to power in the region. Most of those
governments clashed with private media owners, who aggressively denounce governmental policies. Deep conflicts with leftist presidents in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina encouraged the commercial media to defend their economic interests and to favour opposition in their coverage, where right-wing political parties have been weak (Boas 2013). Media outlets controlled by the state responded with one-sided, positive coverage. Populist presidents have targeted the media in their attempt to silence or discredit unfavourable coverage through various tools, including: the legal system, using laws against defamation, slander, and libel; regulatory agencies that charge media outlets with tax evasion, airing prohibited content, or other offenses; strategic and opaque allocation of government advertising; and inflammatory rhetoric against media owners (Boas 2013). Moreover, the situation for journalists can be particularly dangerous at the local level, where powerful political bosses are likely to use their influence over the judiciary and security forces to intimidate and silence critical journalists and investigative reporting.

Although this dissertation is context specific, my findings have implications that can be useful for other cases, such as deeply divided societies undergoing a process of democratic transition, and politically polarized contexts. In particular, the issue of polarization as an obstacle to the process of democratic consolidation can travel to other contexts. My research speaks to transitions in Latin America more generally, and addresses an important issue that is absent in the democratic transition literature: the role of the print media in exacerbating or mitigating political polarization. I am not suggesting that democratization produces political polarization, although it appears to have had that impact in some cases in Latin America where extreme polarization in public demands and party positions have never worked out well; examples include Chile in the 1960s and Venezuela in the 2000s. At the same time, however, such political polarization is the reflection of deep, underlying social and political realities.

Satisfaction with democracy varies significantly across Latin America, where answers to the Latinobarometro surveys are informed by citizen’s perception of whether their respective government is working on behalf of everyone or if it is only helping a privileged few. Results from the Latinobarómetro survey show that in 2013, only close to 40 percent of respondents in the region were satisfied with the way that democracy works in their country (down from 44 percent in 2010); regarding wealth distribution, only one-quarter of respondents felt that it was fair.
Democratization and Political Polarization

In a transition process, a majority of actors will likely agree on electoral issues, with the shared goal of leveling the playing field in order to make free and fair elections viable. Cooperation between opposition parties to take the authoritarian regime out of power is rather common, driven by a desire for change in government. In a young electoral democracy after the first peaceful alternation in power, what party wins elections is arguably more relevant, because much more is at stake—unlike older, more stable democracies where differences between party platforms are not that great.

Because a country’s electoral legislation determines the rules that shape which parties may be elected, the stakes are very high. This is especially relevant in a context of political polarization, where the issue of what party is in power has potentially deeper implications than in a stable democratic system because it could mean very fundamental changes in important policies. In the stage of electoral democracy following the transition from an authoritarian regime, the divisions between the left and right may be profound regarding a country’s economic model, the type of social security protections, and methods of dealing with issues such as income inequality, massive rural poverty, high levels of corruption, and organized crime. In societies with severe social challenges such as those in Latin America, the failure of the government to address these issues may delegitimize democracy in the eyes of the public.

Once issues that are important for all actors in the earlier stages of democratization, such as free and fair elections, are addressed and legislated, they no longer form part of the democratic agenda. As democratization progresses, left–right differences become more pronounced, particularly in Latin America where inequalities are substantial. In latter stages of democratization in highly divided or unequal countries, persisting problems such as social inequality, economic crisis, organized crime, and weak rule of law can lead to disillusionment with democracy and even to political polarization, which may jeopardize a process of democratic consolidation. Fundamental political differences among political actors can lead to an intensification of disagreements and to deeper political conflict. For instance, if the political left

373 Whereas political parties on the left of the spectrum may consider that redistributive policies are necessary to reduce social inequality, for those on the right, free trade, a favourable investment climate, and solid institutions may be sufficient to lead to better living conditions for all sectors of society.
advocates for increasing spending and higher corporate taxes, the political right becomes fearful, which exacerbates disagreements and erodes the possibility of reaching consensus about fundamental issues. It is precisely in this type of context that it is most difficult to alter democratic institutions to make the political game a fairer one, as my analysis has shown.

Liberal democracies, of course, are not exempt from significant political disagreements among the different parties. Such disagreements, however, usually come about after the political system has been firmly established and legitimized, that is, when democracy has been consolidated and is stable. A healthy debate is indeed necessary to a healthy democracy. Real or even sharp division of opinion in the print media, representative of all voices in a society, is important. Nevertheless, in a polarized context, if the press reaches the educated public, it may contribute to a more deeply felt opinion divide, and potentially deepen, rather than bridge, the differences among a country’s elite about public policy, legislation or reforms.

Basic consensus on the nature of a political and electoral system and on how the policymaking process should work is a key element for a successful process of democratic deepening or consolidation. Otherwise, in the absence of fundamental agreements among political actors and acceptance of the rules by the country’s elites, every policy issue can potentially be blown out of proportion for fear that it will not be dealt with fairly by the other parties. In contexts of political or economic crisis—marked by considerable disagreements or open conflict, weak or illegitimate governments—critical articles in the press are likely to entrench differences and fail to mitigate elite polarization. It is unlikely that the print media alone could solve such disagreements. In a context in which the public debate is distorted because of the power of the mass media and the low readership of the press, it is possible that even if the print media reached the general public, it may serve to exacerbate division of opinion. An optimistic scenario would be one in which the inaccuracy or unfairness of some arguments could be demonstrated for what they are, and that knowledge eventually would permeate to public opinion.

In the absence of a broader political and economic consensus, a journalistic consensus is difficult to achieve. Waisbord (2006) reminds us that divisions inside the press can become wide open

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374 When the institutional mechanisms are in place and everybody agrees on how the political system is supposed to work, then it is easier to bridge disagreements and mitigate some of these problems.
when political confrontations peak, such as during the administrations of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela an Alberto Fujimori in Peru, when news organizations openly confronted and accused each other and did not attempt to create a common journalistic ground. If news organizations are not removed from political divisions, and if they are aligned with specific interests, the media can actually deepen divisions.

When the implications of new legislation are significantly different for various actors or stakeholders, the opinions in a pluralistic press are likely to reflect the divisions present in that country’s society or elite. A plurality of viewpoints in the opinion pages of national newspapers, as is the case in Mexico, is not a guarantee for democratic deepening. The print media cannot, by itself, mend polarization or solve the country’s challenges until and unless other kinds of changes begin to happen: if governments are not able to respond to citizen demands, support for democracy is likely to go down. If politicians fail to address what the majority of the population deems to be most important, if corruption remains high, and if the material wellbeing of the poor and marginalized sectors (who constitute significant proportion of the population) does not improve with the onset of a transition, then trust in public institutions and the belief in democracy are likely to be low.

Opinion-makers can potentially influence public deliberations through the indirect effect of what they write; through their columns, they can generate a discussion space in which some issues then become more relevant than others. This potentially creates opinion trends (within those who read opinion pieces). In a context of political polarization, basic or fundamental disagreements among opinion-makers may generate an echo of opinions among the different sides that deepens that opinion trend. When the issues being discussed in the press are specific and contentious, it appears less likely that opinion articles as a whole will bridge the differences and create an understanding among those with opposing views. My findings suggest that if columnists mostly stress the differences among different visions, instead of highlighting issues of common interest, it may lead to reinforcing attitudes instead of challenging pre-conceptions or bridging differences. Arguably, in a context of elite polarization, if published opinion becomes public opinion, it could have a detrimental impact for democratic consolidation.
Media Frames: Advantages of a Content Analysis Model Based on the Functions of Frames

A key component of my dissertation was a systematic analysis of the arguments adduced to support or reject policy negotiations and electoral reforms in opinion articles in three national newspapers. I showed how opinion-makers analyze different issues and frame them by selecting and highlighting those aspects that are most relevant to them. They publish their opinions in the press and legitimize or criticize policies or government actions. Frame analysis is a valuable tool to help determine patterns and opinion trends, because the way a story is framed can influence readers’ attitudes towards the central topic being discussed.

In order to analyze the connections between the authors of opinion pieces and their arguments, the content analysis I conducted was based on the functions of frames: diagnose or define problems, explain the causes or provide context, evaluate, and prescribe solutions. Based on each of those functions, which is represented by a frame element, I constructed a model that facilitates comparisons and is thus conducive to identifying the differences and similarities in opinions among authors and newspapers. My method also recognizes the importance of contextual information (in terms of both the issue being analyzed and the author’s own context), which should be part of any type of frame analysis. The context highlighted by the different authors is one of the key aspects of framing, as it determines how they evaluate a situation or attribute responsibility to specific actors, as well as the solutions they recommend. Similarly, the authors’ own context (professional activity, political leaning, knowledge and experience) also informs their perceptions about an issue, and, in turn, the way they frame it.

When they write an article, columnists make decisions based on what is important to them; those decisions render some aspects more salient than others. By coding and counting the instances of arguments representing different functions of frames, it is possible to find relationships and patterns among opinion-makers. A systematic analysis of the elements that represent the functions of frames, in relation to the final outcomes of the issues they refer to, is helpful in assessing whether authors have an influence in opinion trends or policy outcomes: in other words, whether published opinions have an influence in policy-making. This can be corroborated through interviews with opinion-makers and policymakers.
A systematic analysis of frame elements in a database may also be useful to identify whether authors’ opinions are drawn from new ideas (and thus they are adding new elements to the public debate), or whether they mostly adhere to existing party positions. My methodological approach, in particular the content analysis and comparison of the arguments used by opinion-makers in their editorials and columns, can be applied to analyzing newspaper and magazine articles virtually in any context. Moreover, it can be applied to almost any type of written communication. This method can be thought of as the base for constructing a framework for content analysis that, while emphasizing qualitative aspects, can also render quantifiable indicators in the form of frequency counts of the main arguments, classified by topic or policy issue. This type of framework is also conducive to finding patterns between authors’ professional activity and their policy positions.

**Future Research**

An important avenue of research is the impact of the changes in the Mexican political system on the media, with emphasis on its transformations as a consequence of democratization. My findings suggest that political actors, as well as journalists and media outlets are still learning to interact within the new context of an electoral democracy, in which national newspapers benefit from press freedom (the situation is different for local print media in many states). Because the role of the press after the fall of an authoritarian regime appears to be important to bridge differences among elites and groups with different policy perspectives, issues such as regulatory mechanisms are relevant for competitive and diverse commercial media to exist.

Newspapers in liberal democracies are increasingly facing difficulties obtaining advertising revenue. It can be expected that the situation will not be very different for print media outlets in transitioning countries or in new democracies. Issues such as media concentration and ownership structures have implications for the diversity and plurality of information; concentration of media markets and ownership, added to the politicization of state-owned media, will emphasize the points of view of those who are economically or politically powerful. In young democracies, even if newspapers are commercially competitive, mechanisms or structures to oversee how they operate may be absent. The effectiveness of a country’s political institutions following democratization will also determine the role of the media.
Non-governmental organizations and citizen groups have a fundamental role to play in monitoring media coverage, holding media accountable, or leading discussions related to new media regulations. The role of civil society in democratic consolidation, as well as in providing oversight and monitoring the media, merits further research. A transition to democracy may trigger fundamental conflicts between governments and the media over the meaning and practice of a free press (Randall 1993; Voltmer 2006b). For the media to perform even the minimal functions of a liberal democracy, it is necessary to establish new rules to facilitate its democratic functioning, including regulations to foster greater competition among media organizations and a plurality of viewpoints representative of all perspectives in a country’s society. As Price and Krug (2006) argue, the issue of media reform is an important piece in the process of media democratization. It is necessary to have a set of rules to enable the media to be independent from the government or particular interests and promote the achievement of broader political goals (restrictions on oligopolistic media conglomerates and regulations to protect the autonomy of journalism from other media functions such as advertising). The rights of journalists must be upheld by an independent judiciary and protected by the rule of law. Non-commercial media (public or private) are also important.

This dissertation, in particular the model I developed for the content analysis of opinion articles, has opened up many possibilities for applying my methodological framework in a systematic analysis of opinion and news articles in any context. Political actors, journalists, and opinion-makers have a presence in social media networks, through which they are potentially better able to inform the public conversation than they are through the print media. It is important for political scientists and political communication specialists to understand who, among pundits or other widely known figures, can influence public opinion.

In a future project I would apply my methodology to analyze opinions shared on social media networks. The methodological framework I developed allows systematic analysis of tweets or similar short messages, by coding and classifying them in a model according to the specific functions they may perform, similar to frame elements in opinion articles. This makes it possible to quantify problem definitions, how specific issues are evaluated, the support and criticism to political actors, recommendations, and possible outcomes. Those quantifications could be a good indicator of whether social media, by extending published opinions, can in fact influence public opinions.
The proliferation of the use of social networking sites in which people can share news and opinion articles has the potential to challenge the dominant narratives and viewpoints broadcasted in television and radio. Although most of the Mexican public does not read opinion articles online and instead still get their information from the mass media, citizens are increasingly sharing opinion pieces or social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. A larger number of people would then see links to articles that are shared online. This may result in the print media having more influence: some arguments can permeate to a larger number of people and create opinion trends that can potentially be assessed. This undertaking, however, remains for future research. In the following lines, I advance some preliminary thoughts that can inform a discussion about the implications of technologies that foster interconnectedness, opinions, and debate for a young democracy such as Mexico.

In countries with high levels of income inequality, not everybody has regular access to an internet connection; in Mexico, only 44 percent of people had an internet connection at home in 2014 (INEGI 2014). Since the beginning of the second decade of this century, opinion-makers within the Red Circle increasingly share not only their own articles, but also others with which they agree; they capitalize on their name recognition and some have large groups of followers. As an increasing number of members of the Red Circle use social media networks (political actors to communicate with their supporters or constituents; journalists or analysts to share their points of view), some journalists, opinion-makers and others with high name recognition will likely shift from being information providers, to directing the flow of information and public deliberation, through sharing articles written by others. Social media has thus opened spaces for a larger group of people “filtering” the news or opinions; the emphasis on sharing puts them in a different category than the more traditional opinion-maker. I will refer to this group as the Virtual Circle. It is reasonable to assume that opinions will move through interpersonal networks: articles published in the opinion pages will be shared by those in the Virtual Circle (including artists or athletes) through social media. Some of their internet followers in turn share those articles and may exert personal influence on their own circles, for example on their family and friends who follow them on social media. This may potentially have an important impact in terms of influencing opinions of those people who do not follow the news and do not read opinion articles, but who trust and share values with their friends or relatives who post something online. Some of them, in turn, may also share articles or re-tweet comments, thus expanding the
outreach of such arguments. Nevertheless, the diversity of points of view to which users may be exposed may depend on other factors, including algorithms that show posts or tweets that are similar to what they may already be interested in, leading to echo chambers. The lack of contact with different views may result in ideas becoming more extreme.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of increasing diversity of information and opinions through social media, there are also possible negative implications, especially in countries with high inequality or that are immersed in political polarization. For example, it is not unreasonable to expect that some members of the Virtual Circle—including journalists, political actors, and even entertainment or sport celebrities with a large presence on social media—may literally sell their support to political parties or actors, or convey unfounded criticisms to public programs or projects accordingly through their social media accounts. Social media can also exacerbate citizens’ disenchantment with democracy by spreading unfounded criticism, or false or sensationalist information. Moreover, if members of the Virtual Circle strongly advocate for opposing solutions within a climate of political polarization, social media can potentially deepen disagreements within opposing sides and contribute to such polarization. Another possible consequence is that opinions of some in the Red Circle that are widely shared and get some traction in the Virtual Circle may directly influence the outcomes of elections. In contexts where political institutions are weak and citizens are disenchanted with the democratic process, calls for boycotting the electoral process, abstaining or spoiling one’s ballot for example, may gain traction, with detrimental consequences for the democratic process. Finally, opinion trends that grow on social media can also deter politicians from making unpopular, but perhaps necessary, decisions in order to avoid criticism on social media. Finally, social media is a fertile ground for polarized messages, which may deepen divisions and hinder democratic consolidation. Political outsiders, taking advantage of real, or perceived grievances, can potentially generate a crisis of political legitimacy that undermines a country’s democratic process.
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Caballería contra consejeros.


## Appendix

**Table A1 Sample of Articles: Year and Newspaper**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>156</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>271</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>427</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table A2 Newspaper Circulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Printed Copies as per INE (1) 2014</th>
<th>Printed Copies as per Perez Espino (3) 2002</th>
<th>Printed Copies as per CIMA * (3) 2002</th>
<th>Readers as per BIMSA **(3) 2002</th>
<th>Circulation as per Ministry of Interior (2) 2012</th>
<th>Circulation as per Vidal Bonifaz (5)*** 2008</th>
<th>Circulation as per Pérez Espino (4) 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Cronica de Hoy</td>
<td>76,000</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>42,394</td>
<td>143,020</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excélsior</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>117,800</td>
<td>25,357</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>140,138</td>
<td>126,000</td>
<td>126,000</td>
<td>276,700</td>
<td>146,309</td>
<td>441,347</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Sol de México</td>
<td>26,626</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>56,900</td>
<td>26,626</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>56,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>170,356</td>
<td>419,500</td>
<td>56,138</td>
<td>307,003</td>
<td>225,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>107,666</td>
<td>90,000-100,000</td>
<td>100,924</td>
<td>287,000</td>
<td>107,666</td>
<td>201,048</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Economista</td>
<td>37,459</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>22,231</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>28,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Financiero</td>
<td>91,923</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>135,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>91,923</td>
<td>91,923</td>
<td>135,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milenio Diario</td>
<td>101,211</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>46,900</td>
<td>80,700</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>44,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovaciones</td>
<td>156,173</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>144,700</td>
<td>148,018</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unomasuno</td>
<td>116,000</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>78,400</td>
<td>106,182</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>less than 2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) INE: Instituto Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Institute)
[http://www.ine.mx/archivos2/DS/recopilacion/JGEor201401-24ac_01P04-01x01.pdf](http://www.ine.mx/archivos2/DS/recopilacion/JGEor201401-24ac_01P04-01x01.pdf)

(2) Ministry of the Interior
[http://pmi.segob.gob.mx](http://pmi.segob.gob.mx)

* CIMA: Centro Inter Americano de Marketing Aplicado (Interamerican Center for Applied Marketing)

** BIMSA: Buró de Investigación de Mercados (Market Research Bureau)

(3) Pérez Espino, Jose. “La prensa en México: La transparencia no llega.” Periódico Almargen. (Publicado originalmente el 1 de agosto de 2002). Republicado el (10 de Diciembre de 2004)
Pérez Espino, Jose. “The Press in Mexico: Transparency does not arrive.” Journal Almargen. (Published originally on Thursday, August 1, 2002). Republished on Dec. 10, 2004


In Vidal Bonifaz’s table Milenio, El Sol de México and Excélsior are not tabulated as independent newspapers but as part of a consortium and therefore not applicable for the purposes of this table 

blog: www.ruedadelafortuna.wordpress.com

Table A3 Breakdown of Interviewees and Professional Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional activity</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists, columnists, news editors</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actors</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media specialists and academicians</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A4 Article Quality and Author’s Professional Activity 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 1996</th>
<th>Article quality 1996</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Low</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 1996.

Table A5 Article Quality and Authors’ Professional Activity 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 2007</th>
<th>Article quality 2007</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Low</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 2007.

Table A6 Articles Written by Political Actors across the Political Spectrum (1996)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party/leaning 1996</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
<th>Percentage (within articles written by political actors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 1996.

### Table A7 Articles Written by Political Actors across the Political Spectrum (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party/leaning 2007</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
<th>Percentage (within articles written by political actors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD (and other parties supportive of López Obrador)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 2007.
### Table A8 Professional Activity and Article Tone 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity</th>
<th>Article tone</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 1996.

### Table A9 Professional Activity and Article Tone 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity</th>
<th>Article tone</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 2007.
Table A10 Article Tone and Newspapers 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article tone</th>
<th>El Universal</th>
<th>La Jornada</th>
<th>Reforma</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>15 (36%)</td>
<td>20 (35%)</td>
<td>26 (46%)</td>
<td>61 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7 (17%)</td>
<td>11 (19%)</td>
<td>11 (19%)</td>
<td>29 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>5 (12%)</td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td>21 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>15 (36%)</td>
<td>16 (28%)</td>
<td>14 (25%)</td>
<td>45 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42 (100%)</td>
<td>57 (100%)</td>
<td>57 (100%)</td>
<td>156 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal*, *La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 1996.

Table A11 Article Tone and Newspapers 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article tone</th>
<th>El Universal</th>
<th>La Jornada</th>
<th>Reforma</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>34 (35%)</td>
<td>27 (77%)</td>
<td>66 (47%)</td>
<td>127 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>22 (23%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>44 (32%)</td>
<td>70 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>14 (14%)</td>
<td>4 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (7%)</td>
<td>24 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive</td>
<td>27 (28%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>19 (14%)</td>
<td>50 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97 (100%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>139 (100%)</td>
<td>271 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from *El Universal*, *La Jornada* and *Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 2007.
Table A12 Authors, Newspaper, Professional Activity and Political Leaning 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Main professional activity</th>
<th>Political party/leaning</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcocer V., Jorge</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Political actor (policy advisor)</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alemán, Ricardo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Journalist; columnist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aviles, Alejandro</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Báñez V, Bernardo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Political actor</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanco, José</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camacho Solís, Manuel</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Political actor; former cabinet member</td>
<td>Former PRI member; Partido del Centro Democrático</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cansino, César</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantú, Arturo</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castillo, Hebereto</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Political actor / Activist</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cazés, Daniel</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chávez Jaimes, José</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concha, Miguel</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Human rights activist</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covían Pérez, Miguel</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Political actor (Legislator)</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creel, Santiago</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Citizen Councillor (IFE)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crespo, José Antonio</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delgado, René</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Journalist; Columnist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Díaz Garza, Felipe</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Political commentator</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial El Universal</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial La Jornada</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteva, Gustavo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faesler, Julio</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flores Olea, Víctor</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrido, Luis Javier</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gershenzon, Antonio</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Union leader</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gómez, Pablo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Political actor (Legislator)</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordillo, Elba Esther</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Union leader</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granados Chapa, Miguel Ángel</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Citizen Councillor (IFE)</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hernández Rodríguez, Rogelio</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huchim, Eduardo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurtado, Javier</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labastida, Horacio</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Main professional activity</td>
<td>Political party/leaning</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levín Coppel, Oscar</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Political actor (Legislator)</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linares Zapata, Luis</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lujambio, Alonso</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martínez Assad, Carlos</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendoza, Jorge</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Media executive (TV Azteca)</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merino, Mauricio</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montes, Eduardo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morales, Rodrigo</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musacchio, Humberto</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortiz Pinchetti, José Agustín</td>
<td>La Jornada</td>
<td>Citizen Councillor (IFE)</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortiz Cué, Marcos</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peralta Burelo, Francisco</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Political actor (Legislator)</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posadas, Domitilo</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Political actor (Legislator)</td>
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Source: Authors’ websites; biographical notes accompanying authors’ articles or presentations, and institutional websites.
Table A13 Authors, Newspaper, Professional Activity and Political Leaning 2007

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<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Electoral Councilor</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valadés, Diego</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdés Ugalde, Francisco</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Villarreal Martínez, Juan Carlos</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woldenberg, José</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Academic; former Electoral Councilor</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zaid, Gabriel</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Intellectual; writer</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zamarrripa, Roberto</td>
<td>Reforma</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zárate, Alfonso</td>
<td>El Universal</td>
<td>Political commentator; consultant</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
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</table>

Source: Authors’ websites; biographical notes accompanying authors’ articles or presentations, and institutional websites.
Table A14 Details of Main Professional Activity “Other” 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 1996</th>
<th>Activity details</th>
<th>Number of authors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Political Analyst / Commentator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Human rights activist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Union leader</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Media executive</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</table>

Source: Authors’ websites; biographical notes accompanying authors’ articles or presentations, and institutional websites.
Table A15 Details of Main Professional Activity “Other” 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity 2007</th>
<th>Activity details</th>
<th>Number of authors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>News anchor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Political analyst/advisor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Political analyst/Commentator</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Social entrepreneur</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

Source: Authors’ websites; biographical notes accompanying authors’ articles or presentations, and institutional websites.
Table A16 Numbers of References to Specific Frame Elements Pertaining to Various Aspects of the 1996 Electoral Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame element Evaluation (pro reform/changes)</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
<th>Frame element Evaluation (negative)</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current system no longer works/the reform is necessary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not sufficient</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reform is urgent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of mechanisms for participatory democracy is problematic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State/political reform is crucial for democratization</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Disagreements about funding/excessive funding for political parties are problematic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The electoral reform is a first step for democratic transition.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Alternation in power is not indispensable for formal democracy</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important agreements reached</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crucial first step</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFE’s autonomy is positive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFE Councilors are trustworthy and impartial/important</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public funding for political parties helps democracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful changes for the Legislative Power proposed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The political reform for Mexico City is a positive democratic change</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternation in power is crucial for a democratic transition</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
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<td><strong>21</strong></td>
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### Table A17 Article Tone and Month (1996)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Critical</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
<th></th>
<th>Optimistic</th>
<th></th>
<th>Propositional</th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>March</td>
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<td>7%</td>
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<td>7%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<td>June</td>
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<td>3%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>July</td>
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<td>34%</td>
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<td>24%</td>
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<td>22%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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Source: Author's database of opinion articles from *El Universal, La Jornada and Reforma*, Jan.–Dec., 1996.
Table A18 Numbers of Instances of Objects of Criticism in Articles with Critical Tone (1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object of criticism</th>
<th>Number of instances</th>
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<td>PRI</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political parties</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the government</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>particular interests</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreign capital</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limited scope of the reform</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opposition parties</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the president</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equitable access to parties in the mass media</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governors</td>
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<tr>
<td>guidelines for news coverage during elections</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of definitions in opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>neoliberalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>new rules to create citizen organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>party interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>politicians</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
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<td>social inequality</td>
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<td>TV Azteca</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</table>

Source: Author’s database of opinion articles from El Universal, La Jornada and Reforma, Jan.-Dec., 1996.