

MEXICO 2018: AMLO'S HOUR*

México 2018: la hora de AMLO

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ABSTRACT

In July 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) was elected President of Mexico in the largest electoral landslide in Mexico's democratic history. As a self-proclaimed transformational candidate, AMLO made big promises in areas of great concern for Mexican citizens: anti-corruption, criminal violence and security, and the economy. Support for AMLO remained extremely strong in 2018; however, to retain that support he will need to make concrete progress in these areas. AMLO and his party coalition face formidable challenges, not the least of which are high expectations from citizens bent on major changes in governance and policy outcomes. Critics are concerned about a united executive and legislative coalition unchecked by countervailing powers, threatening a potential return to the *presidencialismo* of the twentieth century.

Key words: MORENA, criminal violence, NAFTA, corruption, AMLO

RESUMEN

En julio de 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) fue elegido Presidente de México en el mayor derrumbe electoral en la historia democrática de México. Como un autoproclamado candidato transformador, AMLO hizo grandes promesas en áreas de gran preocupación para los ciudadanos mexicanos: anticorrupción, violencia criminal y seguridad, y la economía. El apoyo a AMLO se mantuvo extremadamente fuerte en 2018; sin embargo, para conservar ese apoyo, necesitará hacer progresos concretos en estas áreas. AMLO y su coalición de partidos enfrentan desafíos formidables, entre los cuales se encuentran las altas expectativas de los ciudadanos que se inclinan por los cambios importantes en la gobernabilidad y los resultados de las políticas públicas. Los críticos están preocupados por una coalición ejecutiva y legislativa unida no controlada por poderes compensatorios, que amenaza con un posible retorno al *presidencialismo* del siglo veinte.

Palabras clave: MORENA, violencia criminal, NAFTA, corrupción, AMLO

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I. INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, 2018 was Andrés Manuel López Obrador's year. After running unsuccessfully for president in 2006 and 2012, AMLO—as he is commonly called—and his party coalition swept to victory in the largest electoral landslide in Mexico's democratic history. MORENA (National Regeneration Movement), the party AMLO founded in 2014, and two smaller parties, the Social Encounter Party (PES) and the Workers' Party (PT), came together in the coalition "Together We Make History" (*Juntos Hacemos Historia*). As the name suggests, AMLO has a keen sense of himself as a transformational leader and pledged to usher in a Fourth Transformation of the Mexican state in the same lineage as Benito Juárez, Francisco Madero, and Lázaro Cárdenas.¹ Indeed, AMLO sees his presidency as following in the line of three other key moments in Mexican political history: the Independence, the Reform period, and the Revolution.² At the heart of the fourth transformation is AMLO's plan to eliminate the "abusive" privileges of the Mexican government by means of an ambitious austerity plan (Fuentes 2018). AMLO certainly does not lack confidence, but ultimately the concrete results of his administration in the areas of most importance to Mexican voters will determine the success of his presidency. These issues are corruption, criminal violence and security, and the economy. As a transformational president, AMLO has promised to root out corruption, improve the security situation, and lift average Mexicans out of poverty. Support for AMLO remained extremely strong in 2018; however, to retain that support he will need to make concrete progress in these areas in the face of high expectations from citizens bent on major changes in governance and policy outcomes.

In the July elections, a majority of Mexicans rejected the performance of the mainstream political parties: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Acción Nacional (PAN), and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). In addition to widespread discontent with the mainstream parties, observers credited AMLO's landslide victory to citizen frustration with the ongoing and increasingly violent drug wars, endemic corruption, as well as a sagging economy. In the long period between the July elections and his assumption of power on December 1, AMLO kept himself in the political spotlight almost constantly. This exposure has not appeared to hurt him politically as poll after poll showed that an overwhelming majority of Mexicans approved of his message and early decisions (Zissis and Sonneland 2019). While the election campaign consumed political news in 2018, there were other issues of importance: the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), rising homicide rates and security concerns, the Central American migration crisis, the ongoing corruption scandals of

¹ All three were former presidents and major figures in Mexican political history. Juárez (1858-1872) defeated the Emperor Maximilian and restored republican rule. Madero (1911-13) was a revolutionary leader who ousted the long-time dictator Porfirio Díaz. Cárdenas (1934-40) nationalized the oil industry and engaged in significant land redistribution.

² Notably, AMLO does not recognize the democratic transition period of the 1990s as one of these transformative moments.

former PRI governors, and uncertain economic futures. In the wake of the elections, critics expressed concern about a united executive and legislative coalition unchecked by countervailing powers, threatening a potential return to the *presidencialismo* of the twentieth century (Olvera 2018).

II. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Enrique Peña Nieto, the first PRI president in the democratic era, was hailed as a modern reformer when he came to power in 2012.³ In the first days of his presidency, leaders of the PRI, PAN, and PRD agreed to work together--in what was called the Pact for Mexico--to pass major legislation. Over the first fourteen months of Peña Nieto's term, historic legislation was passed in several sensitive and controversial areas: the administration of public education; the increasing of competition in the telecommunications sector; the introduction of consecutive re-election in the federal congress and among mayors; the transformation of the attorney general's office into an autonomous agency independent of the presidency; the restructuring of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) to take responsibility over state elections and renaming it the National Electoral Institute (INE); and the alteration of the long-standing constitutional provisions prohibiting foreign and domestic investment in oil exploration. After this initial legislative success, Peña Nieto was engulfed in a series of scandals that severely diminished his presidency, most notably his handling of the investigation of the disappearance of forty-three young men who were students at the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Tixtla, Guerrero on September 26, 2014.⁴

At the start of his administration, Peña Nieto attempted to downplay the violence resulting from Mexico's bloody drug wars. However, as his time in office wound down, he seemed unable or unwilling to deal with increased criminal violence and high levels of corruption, both real and perceived, resulting in a dramatic drop in support for his presidency and for the legitimacy of government institutions. By the end of Peña Nieto's administration, more than three-quarters of Mexican citizens disapproved of the government's handling of the economy, organized crime, drug traffickers, and battling corruption (Vice and Chwe 2017: 26). At the beginning of the 2018 election cycle nearly eight out of ten Mexicans disapproved of the president's performance, and nearly

³ In 2000 there was alternation of power at the national level, marking the beginning of a period of electoral democracy in Mexico after 71 years of a one-party rule by the PRI (1929-2000).

⁴ After almost five years, it is still not clear what happened to these 43 students. The government alleges that the students' annual commandeering of several buses to travel to Mexico City to commemorate the anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre turned deadly, and that students were forcibly taken into custody by local police and then handed over to a local criminal group, "Guerreros Unidos," and killed. A panel of experts convened by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has disputed the government's version that students were mistaken for members of a rival drug gang and killed by "Guerreros Unidos" (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 2018).

six out of ten did so strongly (Polithink 2018).⁵ Voters were fed up with the performance of the Mexican government, generally, and with President Peña Nieto in particular.⁶

The 2018 Elections: Presidential⁷

Change was a central issue in the 2018 elections (see Table 1). Voters saw AMLO as a harbinger of change, despite his long history as a political insider within both the PRI and PRD.⁸ After years of intense electoral competition and divided government at both the federal and state levels, the 2018 elections resulted in an electoral landslide. In addition to winning the presidency with almost 53 percent of the popular vote, López Obrador's MORENA party coalition won a majority in both chambers of Congress, a majority in nineteen of Mexico's thirty-two states, five of the nine governorships up for grabs, and mayoral positions in the country's principal cities, including Mexico City and a number of state capitals. For the first time in Mexico's democratic history, a single party and its coalition partners control the presidency, the capital, and Congress. Concomitantly, Mexico's three traditional parties—PRI, PAN, and PRD—suffered enormous losses. PAN's desperate alliance with the PRD—a party sharing a completely different ideological perspective—helped to drive away a large number of PAN supporters, ultimately only attracting 22 percent of the vote. PRI's candidate, José Antonio Meade, a politico-technocrat, was popular among party elites, but never captured the public's imagination. To be fair, even a more charismatic candidate would have had tremendous obstacles to victory, given Peña Nieto's abysmally low approval rates and the widespread belief that the PRI was unequipped to deal with the problems of most interest to voters.⁹

⁵ To be sure, presidential approval ratings are generally low in Latin America. Throughout his term, however, Peña Nieto's approval ratings were among the lowest recorded in two decades of polling (Martin 2017).

⁶ At the beginning of the 2018 campaign, 46 percent of likely voters indicated that PRI was the worst party, four times greater than their view of MORENA. Furthermore, thirty-nine percent said they would never vote for the PRI presidential candidate, more than twice the negative response to MORENA's candidate (Cited in Camp and Mattiace 2020: 272; see "Encuesta Electoral Para Presidente de la República, Informe de Resultados," *El Universal*, April 2018).

⁷ In this section on the 2018 elections, I have drawn on material that appears in Camp and Mattiace 2020: Chapter 8.

⁸ AMLO served as the PRI's state leader in Tabasco state in the 1980s. In 1989 he joined the PRD and served as the party's 1994 candidate for governor, the national head of the party from 1996-1994, and presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012. He left the PRD in 2012 to form MORENA.

⁹ All three major parties created coalitions in advance of the 2018 election campaign. MORENA formed an alliance with PES and PT. The PAN allied with PRD and Citizens' Movement (MC). The PRI allied with the Green Party (PVEM) and the New Alliance Party (PANAL).

Table 1. Demographic Variables and the Presidential Vote in 2018

Variable	Anaya	Meade	López Obrador	Bronco
	Percentages			
Gender				
Male (50%)	22	16	57	5
Female (50%)	24	18	52	6
Partisan voter				
PRI (13%)	9	78	11	2
PAN (12%)	90	4	5	1
PRD (2%)	43	8	45	4
MORENA (24%)	2	1	97	0
Education				
None (4%)	28	27	42	3
Primary (17%)	21	25	52	2
Secondary (28%)	23	19	54	4
Preparatory (26%)	22	12	59	7
University (24%)	26	12	55	7
Age				
18-24 (16%)	21	11	56	12
25-34 (25%)	25	13	57	5
35-44 (22%)	24	16	55	6
45-54 (18%)	22	20	54	4
55+ (19%)	23	23	52	2
Ideology				
Left (32%)	14	6	79	1
Center (23%)	25	17	48	10
Right (21%)	38	33	25	4
The Most Important Problem				
Economy (30%)	24	15	54	7
Corruption (24%)	21	12	63	4
Insecurity (24%)	28	22	45	5
Poverty (20%)	20	17	58	5
Reason for Vote				
Ideas and Policies (42%)	33	19	41	7
Change (40%)	13	7	77	3
Always same party (8%)	28	53	18	11
Others (10%)	19	15	55	11

Source: *El Financiero*, exit poll, July 3, 2018, 3,670 voters, +/- 1.6% margin of error, courtesy of Alejandro Moreno. Cited in Camp and Mattiace 2020, 265.

Unlike the 2012 election cycle when López Obrador lost the sizable lead that he enjoyed in the weeks immediately before election day, during the 2018 campaign, AMLO was the clear frontrunner from start to finish. At the beginning of the year, voters gave AMLO the highest positive ratings among candidates: 49 percent positive versus 25 percent negative, in contrast to Ricardo Anaya, the National Action Party (PAN) candidate, with 34 percent positive versus 23 percent negative, and José Antonio Meade from PRI, with 19 percent positive versus 24 percent negative (Buendía and Laredo 2018: 11).

The issues of most importance to voters in the 2018 elections were corruption, criminal violence and security, and the economy (Table 1).¹⁰ On the topic of security, citizen perceptions of insecurity in their neighborhoods, municipalities, and in the country as a whole have risen since 2017 (See Table 2). Voters most interested in combating poverty strongly supported López Obrador. The 2018 elections completely upset traditional, regional voting patterns, destroying long-standing regional strongholds among the PRD, PRI, and the PAN. In contrast to the 2012 elections, AMLO's performance is striking both for the percentage of voters from a wide range of characteristics who supported his candidacy, as well as his ability to attract a much higher proportion of voters from many of the same categories that he did during his 2012 campaign (Camp and Mattiace 2020: 264). For example, the PRI has traditionally done disproportionately well among uneducated voters, but AMLO attracted 42 percent of those voters compared to only 27 percent for the PRI candidate. Not surprisingly, López Obrador captured eight out of 10 Mexicans from the left, but achieved a majority of votes by attracting half of the centrist voters in 2018, compared to only 32 percent in 2012, and by doubling his support among individuals from the right (cited in Camp and Mattiace 2020: 264-65).¹¹

¹⁰ Mexicans who went to the polls in 2018 and who wanted a change in leadership and more effective policies against corruption overwhelming voted for López Obrador. AMLO captured 77 percent and 63 percent respectively of those voters (Moreno 2018: 50).

¹¹ These data come from an exit poll conducted on July 3, 2018 of 3,670 voters, +/- 1.6% margin of error sponsored by *El Financiero*, July 3, 2018.

Table 2. 2018 Election Results

Coalition / Parties	Pres. Vote Share	Chamber of Deputies		Senate	
		Total Seats	Seat Share	Total Seats	Seat Share
Juntos Haremos Historia	53%	313	63%	70	55%
National Regeneration Movement (MORENA)		255	51%	59	46%
Labor Party (PT)		28	6%	6	5%
Social Encounter Party (PES)		30	6%	5	4%
Por México al Frente	22%	127	25%	37	29%
National Action Party (PAN)		79	16%	24	19%
Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD)		20	4%	6	5%
Citizens' Movement (MC)		28	6%	7	5%
Todos por México	16%	58	12%	19	15%
Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)		47	9%	14	11%
Mexican Green Ecologist Party (PVEM)		11	2%	5	4%
New Alliance Party (PANAL)		–	–	–	–
Independent		2	0%	1	1%

Source: Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer 2018: 33.

Mexicans holding the most negative views of political parties were also major supporters of AMLO in 2018.¹² As was the case in 2012, independents played a major part in AMLO's victory, accounting for 43 percent of Mexicans who voted. Of these, 59 percent cast their vote for AMLO (Moreno 2018: 50).¹³

In 2018, fewer Mexicans relied on mainstream television for their political news than in 2012. This percentage declined from 64 percent in 2012 to 43 percent in 2018. An increasingly important factor in Mexican elections is the use of electronic communication. In 2001, 6.2 percent of the population had access to the Internet. By 2016, 47 percent did (INEGI 2016). Correspondingly, the number of voters using the internet to get their news increased from 10 percent in 2012 to

¹² Individuals expressing most negative views of political parties include the following categories of voters: those who live in the south; poorer, rural, and indigenous peoples; independents; well-educated Mexicans; those who live in the center of the country (including Mexico City); and those who have, in the recent past, favored a PRD-controlled executive branch (most of the latter ultimately became MORENA partisans). By April 2018, only 3 percent of Mexicans intending to vote in the presidential election identified with the PRD, in contrast to the 27 percent who identified with MORENA, clearly suggesting that nearly all of PRD partisans followed López Obrador (Cited in Camp and Mattiace 2020: 266; see "Encuesta Electoral para Presidente de la República, Informe de Resultados," *El Universal*, April 2018).

¹³ The low regard in which Mexicans hold parties is reflected in the high level of support for independent candidates, which has increased in recent years to nearly two-thirds of all Mexicans. Despite such support in public opinion polls, it has not yet been translated into successful campaigns for presidents, governors, and members of the legislative branch.

25 percent in 2018 (Parametría July 1, 2018). Social media use has also increased significantly. By 2017, 42 percent of Mexicans reported owning a smartphone and 53 percent said they use social networking sites (Poushter et al. 2018).

An encouraging development in the 2018 presidential election was that more Mexicans were interested in politics and enthusiastic about voting than in any election in recent memory. Two months before the 2018 election, 42 percent of Mexicans reported some or a great deal of interest in politics, compared to only 30 percent during the same period in 2012. Furthermore, 27 percent of citizens reported being enthusiastic about voting in the 2018 election compared to 13 percent voting in the 2012 election. The increased level of interest may help explain why 57 percent of survey respondents in 2018 claimed they already knew who they would vote for before the election (although in reality 46 percent actually did so), compared to only 41 percent in 2012. It also explains why 64 percent of registered voters participated in the 2018 election, the highest level since Vicente Fox's victory in 2000, when 66 percent of voters participated. Only 59 percent of registered voters participated in the 2006 and 2012 elections.¹⁴

Finally, regulation of campaign spending and campaign finance continue to be key issues for Mexico's democracy. All of the major parties were fined by INE for different electoral infractions in 2018, and ironically, MORENA received the largest fine. It is important to point out that a more insidious form of fraud—and one extremely difficult to identify—is organized crime's interference in the electoral process since 2006 through intimidation, financing, and candidate selection. Studies have concluded that organized crime has been most successful in the process of candidate selection and financing campaigns (Mendez and Loza 2016: 23; Lara 2016). A 2018 report by two leading scholars on crime and security, María Amparo Casar and Luis Carlos Ugalde, noted that unreported campaign financing in Mexico "may amount to as much as 15 times what is reported to election authorities" and that organized crime and corruption are major sources of illicit campaign funding (Cited in Asmann 2018).

¹⁴ Registration and voting in the 2018 elections by Mexicans abroad was about three times larger than in previous elections: 181,000 Mexicans abroad registered to vote and 98,000 cast their ballots for president and senators. (Residents in five states and Mexico City can vote for governors.) See National Electoral Institute 2018. Notwithstanding the increased participation, these figures still represent only about 1.5 percent of the total migrant population in the United States. Experts cite onerous bureaucratic procedures as the main explanation for low voter turnout (Wood and Schmidtke 2018). Those eligible to vote are restricted to Mexicans who obtain a voting credential a number of months before the election and apply for a mail-in ballot.

2018 Elections: Legislative and Gubernatorial ¹⁵

The depth of the MORENA victory in the Chamber of Deputies, where that party alone won more than a third of the congressional districts combined with the successes of its two allied parties, PES and PT, means that the ruling coalition controls 63 percent of all seats (See Table 3). Table 3 reveals the depth of PRI's losses in the 2018 elections, suggesting that PRI's support at the local level has been devastated. The PRD lost its status as a third national party in 2018, although its decline was visible by 2015. Looking at the 2018-2021 Congress as a whole, MORENA and its coalition partners won 313 of the 500 lower house seats and 70 of the 128 senate seats. In fact, the MORENA coalition needed only the support of small parties to secure a supermajority (two-thirds of each house) for constitutional changes (Montes 2018). In the weeks following the elections, AMLO got that supermajority in the Chamber of Deputies when he negotiated a deal with the PVEM that resulted in four legislators shifting to MORENA's camp. The Senate is currently seen as one of the few institutional checks on the president and on MORENA's power (Reuters 2019).

Table 3. Foreign Investment in Mexico

Administration	Totals (U.S.US \$ millions)	% Change
1970-1976	1,601.4	
1976-1982	5,470.6	241.7
1982-1988	13,455.4	146.0
1988-1994	60,565.5 ^(a1)	350.1
1994-2000	74,100.9	22.3
2000-2006	139,067.4	87.8
2006-2012	175,109.3	79.4
2012-2018	268,080.3	66.3

Source: *Crónica del gobierno de Carlos Salinas de Gortari, 1988-1994: Síntesis e índice temático* (México: Presidencia de la República, 1994), 441; and Mexico, Presidencia de la República, *Sexto informe de gobierno: Anexo estadístico*, September 1, 2000: 132; www.inegi.gob.mx, June 2005; *Sexto informe de gobierno: Anexo estadístico*, September 1, 2018: 579.

Beginning with the 2018 elections, deputies and senators can run for consecutive reelection. Deputies may serve a maximum of four consecutive terms of three years and senators two consecutive terms of six-years. Under the previous system

¹⁵ Mexico's national legislature is bicameral, with a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate. Deputies are elected on the basis of roughly equally populated districts, of which there are three hundred. In 1970 one hundred seats were added for deputies selected from party lists based on the proportion of the votes cast for the parties. The Senate, which has fewer powers than the Chamber of Deputies, has two senators from each state elected by relative majority (Mexico City is now, in effect, a state) for a total of sixty-four, thirty-two assigned to the party with the second highest vote count in each state (i.e., first majority), and the remaining thirty-two divided among the parties in proportion to their share of the national vote for a grand total of 128.

of no consecutive reelection, all members were new to a particular legislature, so seniority did not exist, at least regarding committees. All things being equal, consecutive reelection enhances legislative power by permitting members to increase their expertise and to develop stronger ties with their constituencies, neither of which has been characteristic of the Mexican Congress. We would also expect that reelection would make members of Congress less beholden to their respective state governors than they have been in the past (Camp and Mattiace 2020: Chapter 7).

Five MORENA party coalition governors were elected in 2018.¹⁶ Since 2000, many observers have noted the growing power of governors within the Mexican political system--which was certainly not the case in the long decades of PRI dominance, where power was concentrated in the hands of the executive branch (See Hernández 2003). On the one hand, the ascendancy of governors reflected a decentralization of power from the executive branch, which had a democratizing effect on the Mexican political system. On the other hand, some states became authoritarian enclaves ruled over by corrupt and rapacious governors (Cornelius et al. 1999).

One notable case of corruption occurred in the state of Veracruz. In September 2018, Javier Duarte, the former governor of that state, pleaded guilty to charges of criminal association and money laundering. His abuses of power, including the embezzlement of millions in state money, became so outrageous that he eventually proved to be “too embarrassing for his political allies” (Agren 2018). Mexicans were outraged when reports came out that the Veracruz state health secretariat under Duarte’s watch had given watered-down medicines to child cancer patients. Even in a country accustomed to high levels of corruption and impunity, this seemed to many to be beyond the pale. In addition to Javier Duarte, several former PRI governors are in prison, under investigation, or on the lam, including Tomás Yarrington and Eugenio Hernández, two former governors from Tamaulipas, Robert Sandoval, former governor of Nayarit, Roberto Borge, former governor of Quintana Roo, and César Duarte, former governor of Chihuahua (González 2018; García 2018: 10). Citizen disillusionment with the PRI and its corrupt governors cost the party at the polls. While the PRI did not pick up a single governorship in 2018, it currently governs in 13 states, including five that have only had PRI governors: Campeche, Coahuila, Colima, Hidalgo, and the State of Mexico. The PAN holds ten governorships and the PRD holds two.

In the wake of the 2018 elections, the era of powerful governors may be over, at least for now. AMLO appears to be resurrecting the power of the president. For example, he has appointed delegates in each state to oversee spending of federal monies. While it is too early to evaluate the scope and effect of these delegates’

¹⁶ Four ran on the MORENA ticket in Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Mexico City. In Morelos, MORENA’s coalition partner, the PES candidate, won.

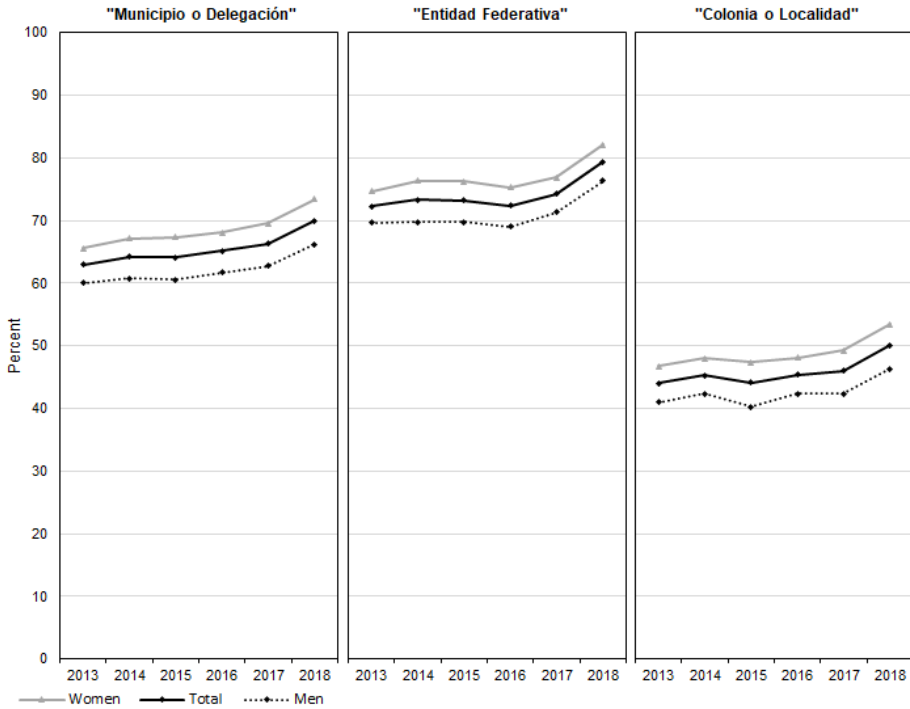
work, it may well “erode the power of the governors to rule unchallenged in their states” (Montes 2018).

III. SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

While drug-related homicides initially decreased at the start of Peña Nieto’s administration, they increased to record levels in 2017 and 2018. In 2018, the number of intentional homicides reported by the Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection rose to a historic high of 28,958 (a rate of almost 30 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) (SESNSP 2019).¹⁷ Many sources indicate that since President Calderón declared his War on Drugs in 2006, roughly 150,000 homicides in Mexico were related to organized crime, including the killing of politicians, students, and journalists (Beittel 2018; Lee and Renwick 2017). While few regions of the country are immune from the ravages of this war, some states have suffered more acutely than others. Guanajuato, the historic center of Mexico’s conservative heartland, was the most murderous state in Mexico in 2018 with 2,609 recorded homicides (Agren 2019). Citizens’ perceptions of insecurity have risen across the board, as illustrated in Graph 1. As criminal organizations have expanded their activities beyond drugs into kidnapping, human trafficking, and extortion, they have become increasingly bold in their targeting of political candidates and politicians and in their attempts to influence the outcomes of elections. In the 2018 election cycle, for example, at least 120 political candidates were killed; most were candidates for local offices (Olson 2018).

¹⁷ National Public Radio reported a slightly higher figure, 33,341, based on SESNSP data. See Romo 2019.

Graph 1. Citizen Perceptions of Insecurity



Citizen perception of public insecurity in different jurisdictions.

Source: Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE) 2018: Principales Resultados, September 25, 2018: 37.

Mexico is widely considered to be one of the most dangerous countries in the world for reporters and the practice of journalism.¹⁸ Artículo 19, Mexico's most important organization in defense of free expression and journalists' rights, counted 1,986 acts of aggression toward journalists from 2012–2017, with 48 percent coming directly from public officials (Reina 2018). In 2018, nine journalists were killed, making Mexico one of the most lethal countries in the world to report on corruption and organized crime (Reporteros sin Fronteras 2018).

As noted above, corruption and organized crime and security were top issues for voters in the 2018 elections. During the campaign, López Obrador appeared to back efforts to demilitarize the fight against illicit drugs, placing more emphasis on the importance of stemming the drug-related violence

¹⁸ Ninety-two potentially work-related journalist murders occurred between 2000 and March 2016, and there were twenty-three disappearances between July 2003 and January 2016 (cited in Hughes and Márquez 2017). For more on the evolution of journalism in Mexico during the Mexican transition, see Camp and Mattiace 2020, Chapter 6.

rather than on capturing drug-cartel leadership. Mexico, he insisted during the campaign, must focus on attacking the underlying poverty and lack of economic development that allows cartels to attract unemployed, young males (See Partlow and Agren 2018). In the first weeks of his tenure, however, the president and his team “have primarily focused on the sort of traditional punitive responses to drug trafficking organizations that were the hallmarks of his predecessors” (World Politics Review 2019). A constitutional reform to create a National Guard (Guardia Nacional) to combat criminal organizations was approved in the early months of López Obrador’s presidency, a reform that was severely questioned by human rights organizations. Opposition parties in the Senate forced the President and his party to modify their original proposal, which required a two-thirds majority as the new law involved constitutional changes. Ultimately, Senate opposition forced the government to accept civilian leadership of the Guardia Nacional as well as parliamentary control over its 50,000 members. Human rights and opposition leaders viewed these modifications as a significant victory, giving the force a civil, rather than a military, character (Reuters 2019). Since assuming office, the government has deployed several thousand federal police, marine, and army units to assist with security duties in 17 of the country’s most violent regions (World Politics Review 2019). Experts have argued that in those states where the armed forces intervene, the homicide rate increases significantly (Rodríguez-Oreggia and Flores 2012).

In recent years, succeeding administrations have increased the scope and degree of military involvement in activities typically reserved for police, such as fighting and preventing crime and prison security (Flores and Zarkin 2018). Congress passed a new internal security law in December 2017 that formalizes and expands the participation of Mexico’s armed forces in domestic law enforcement. Critics worry that the new law will reduce the urgency of civilian police reform (Sánchez 2018).

Proposals to centralize Mexico’s thousands of different police forces under a single command (*mando único*) have gained some traction in recent years. However, critics have argued that a single command structure would obliterate the successful regional and local experiments with community police forces, as was found in work on such a force in eastern Guerrero, where citizens from 11 municipalities have banded together to protect their region from both the state police/officials and criminal organizations since 1995 (Ley et al. 2019).

In the wake of AMLO’s victory, expectations were high among civil society organizations that some type of truth commission would be formed to institutionally confront the political violence related to the drug wars. AMLO’s transition team held dozens of forums around the country to collect ideas and opinions on how best to confront this legacy of violence. At year’s end, this process appeared to be suspended, with several different proposals circulating without a clear direction from the new administration (Trejo 2019). In the face of escalating violence, continued impunity, and profound citizen disillusionment

with political parties during Peña Nieto's administration, a group of nongovernmental actors, including academics, journalists, and national and international human rights and anti-corruption organizations, among others, joined forces to pressure the Mexican government to form a truth commission to examine drug-war related violence in Mexico between 2006-2018. The Platform Against Impunity and Corruption hopes to influence public policy by collecting victims' testimonies, in hopes that uncovering past patterns of violence, for use in future prosecutions, will send a clear message to perpetrators that their actions will not go unpunished (Plataforma Contra la Impunidad). Truth commissions, even when they occur in less than fully democratic contexts, can help jump-start accountability processes, as numerous examples from Latin America over the past 20 years have shown (e.g., Guatemala, Peru, Chile) (Hayner 2011).

As mentioned previously, the start of Peña Nieto's administration in 2012 was marked by significant structural reforms in several key sectors agreed to by the three major parties (Pact for Mexico). One of the issues receiving the most public attention and support was education reform. Peña Nieto's administration focused largely on the professionalization and evaluation of teachers. Consistently, before 2018, overwhelming majorities (around ninety percent) supported evaluating teachers (Parametría April 5, 2019).

During the 2018 presidential campaign, López Obrador said repeatedly that he would repeal the reform if elected, despite its popularity. Interestingly, public opinion regarding education reform more broadly seems to have shifted from 2015-2018, at least among voters. In exit polls conducted by Parametría on July 7, 2015, 37 percent of voters said that Peña Nieto's education reforms had a negative effect on them and their families while 24 percent saw them as having a positive effect. In midterm exit polls conducted on July 1, 2018, the number of voters saying that the reforms were prejudicial rose to 59 percent, with only 10 percent saying they were of benefit to them and their families (662 respondents, +/-3.8 margin of error). The percentage of people who approved the cancelation of teacher evaluation rose sharply from 37 percent in August 2018 to 51 percent in December 2018. Parametría suggests several reasons for this shift: that the teacher reforms were closely connected to Peña Nieto and his unpopular government; that citizens did not see concrete results of the reform over time; and that AMLO's popularity as a candidate influenced public opinion (Parametría April 5, 2019).

Finally, during the 2018 campaign AMLO highlighted poverty alleviation as one of his top priorities, an issue that occupied an important place in his political agenda as mayor of Mexico City and as presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012. Social spending has been relatively high over the last several *sexenios* (six-year presidential terms) (See Camp and Mattiace 2020: Chapter 10). Through 2012, President Calderón maintained social expenditures at 57 percent (as a percentage of total federal spending), followed by Peña Nieto at 58 percent. Despite the efforts of Presidents Fox, Calderón, and Peña Nieto to maintain their emphasis on social spending and to implement anti-poverty programs such as Prospera

(formerly Oportunidades), which have been credited with reducing poverty and increasing educational levels among the poor, many of the structural problems related to income distribution, poverty, and marginalization remain relatively static (Lustig 2009: 13). In the first weeks of AMLO's administration, social expenditures were being dispersed as direct cash transfers, a pattern somewhat surprising, given that direct cash transfers have often been associated with right-of-center (i.e., 'neo-liberal') administrations (Mexico News Daily 2019; See also The Economist 2019).

IV. ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Peña Nieto's 2012-2014 Pact for Mexico reforms were wide-ranging in several key sectors, including the economy. The economic reforms included alterations in labor laws, stronger oversight over a competitive market, expanded access to credit for small businesses and households, fiscal changes focusing on increasing non-oil revenues, opening telecommunications to foreign investment, and opening the state-controlled energy sector to both domestic and private foreign investment. Given AMLO's reiterated attacks against the 'neo-liberal' policies of his predecessors, the future of these reforms and their implementation is in question.

While it is still too early to assess AMLO's position on each of these reforms, it is in the area of the hydrocarbons industry that he has put forward his most controversial ideas. Indeed, since the 2006 election, AMLO has favored an energy sector tightly controlled by the state (Wood 2018). Because the Mexican public has not seen much benefit from reforms to the energy sector—gasoline prices have risen, for example—the public has viewed these reforms as a failure. AMLO proposes restructuring the sector by investing heavily in refining capacity, the exploration and production of natural gas in Mexico, reviewing the contracts and bidding requirements for the oil blocs that were awarded to private and foreign investors since 2015, and significant new investment in, and dependence on, Pemex to develop the nation's declining oil reserves (Wood 2018). As Duncan Wood aptly notes, "These ideas mark a dramatic departure from the trends of the past 12-18 years in Mexico. The efforts of the Fox, Calderon and Peña Nieto administrations to modernize the energy sector relied on increasing the role of the private sector" (2018). Any changes to the bidding process would be tricky, experts say, as investors viewed the process of bidding for oil blocs during the Peña Nieto administration as fair. Time will tell as to whether AMLO can achieve his goal of re-inserting the state into the energy sector while also maximizing production, which he will need to do in order to raise the revenue necessary to achieve his social policy and infrastructure goals.

AMLO inherited a healthy economy. While overall economic growth rates have not been high in the democratic period, they have been steady, averaging between 1.4 and 3.6 percent during the Peña Nieto administration (Wilson 2018).

Foreign investment in Mexico during Peña Nieto's *sexenio* was steady as well. The annual inflation rate in 2018 was 4.83 percent, down from 6.77 percent a year prior (INEGI 2019). While much of Mexico's private sector did not support AMLO's presidential bid, very soon after the elections he sent "a message of stability, economic orthodoxy, and continuity directly and through his economic team" (Wood 2018: 2).¹⁹ On November 5, 2018, the International Monetary Fund had this to say about the Mexican economy, a month before AMLO was to take office:

The Mexican economy has continued to exhibit resilience in the face of a complex environment. Output has grown at a moderate pace while inflation declined, although it remains above the central bank's target. The flexible exchange rate has continued to be a key shock absorber. Fiscal consolidation is on track, monetary policy has maintained a tight stance, while financial supervision and regulation remain strong (International Monetary Fund 2018).

A key question going forward is how the President will increase social and infrastructure spending without raising taxes or growing the country's debt (Wilson 2018). AMLO has promised to raise revenues by rooting out corruption, reducing government pensions and perks, and exercising fiscal frugality. Even if AMLO is able to tackle the country's endemic corruption—an extremely complicated and multifaceted problem in Mexico—it is highly unlikely that enough additional revenues can be raised to fund his ambitious social spending and infrastructure goals.

Along with the Mexican business community, foreign investors were fearful of a López Obrador presidency and the added uncertainty over the future of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Both concerns fueled some fluctuation of the peso's value relative to the dollar, although not as much as might have been expected, given AMLO's long-time opposition to NAFTA and Mexico's economic model of open markets and investment. The peso's value against the USD ranged from a high of 18.03 pesos per dollar in April of 2018 to a low of 20.57 in December of 2018 (Banco de México 2018).

Despite repeated threats by Donald Trump to withdraw from NAFTA negotiations, in November of 2018, the three NAFTA country presidents signed a re-negotiated agreement, dubbed the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA. While AMLO had long opposed NAFTA, as president-elect he made no attempt to renegotiate the terms of the agreement along less business-friendly lines. Moreover, in the face of Trump's threats to cancel NAFTA, AMLO became a quiet supporter. In terms of the future of the USMCA Agreement, or T-MEC, as it is more mellifluously referred to in Spanish, experts do not expect surprises

¹⁹ Christopher Wilson (2018) notes that because much of the Mexican private sector opposed AMLO's candidacy, he is beholden to very few interest groups, allowing him to pursue major reforms if he wishes; at the same time, however, AMLO is more constrained by markets than most Mexican presidents.

from AMLO; Indeed, one of the challenges facing any Mexican president, and AMLO is no exception, is the country's considerable economic dependence on the United States: 80 percent of Mexico's exports are destined for the U.S. market.²⁰ In spite of the extraordinary increase in trade between the United States and China in recent years, the enormous growth in trade with the United States continues to reinforce Mexico's relationship with its neighbor. In 2017, 16 percent of US exports went to Mexico, which was more than to China, Japan, and South Korea combined (Selee 2018: 58-9).

Much more than AMLO, Trump is the wild card for the future of NAFTA (Wilson 2018).²¹ Donald Trump, not surprisingly, hailed USMCA as a dramatic improvement over NAFTA; however, observers note that the new agreement is much like the old one and represents mostly "cosmetic changes" (Gertz 2018). While the main structure of the deal is largely intact, Trump's repeated bullying of his North American partners did result in modest changes that all pointed in the direction of what the U.S. wanted, forcing Canada and Mexico to make concessions. The biggest changes include higher rules-of-origin requirements for the auto sector, marginally greater U.S. access to the Canadian dairy market, and a scaling back of the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) rules (Gertz 2018). One of the most innovative changes made to the agreement was the stipulation that 40-45 percent of automobile parts must be made by workers earning at least \$16 USD an hour by 2023 (Kirby 2019). Over the course of the negotiations, the press coverage surrounding this provision put considerable pressure on the Mexican government to raise the minimum wage, which it did—by 10 percent—in December 2017 (Angulo 2017). The minimum wage got another boost in late 2018 (which went into effect on January 1, 2019), this time by 16.2 percent (Harrup 2018).²² While re-negotiating the agreement was a major hurdle, it still must pass the respective congresses, which is no foregone conclusion. Specifically, the shift in the composition of the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2018 may be a roadblock to passage. Trump threatened to pull out of NAFTA if Congress does not approve USMCA (The Economist 2018).

While investors were reassured with AMLO's negotiating position on NAFTA throughout 2018, they were less pleased with the president's decision to cancel the construction of a \$13 billion USD new airport for Mexico City, which, at the time of cancellation, was about a third completed. The current airport is widely seen as needing significant expansion to meet growing demand. AMLO

²⁰ See Trading Economics, an online site for historical and contemporary economic data, based on official, typically governmental, sources <https://tradingeconomics.com/mexico/exports> Notably, somewhere between 15 to 20 percent of the content in Mexican exports to the United States are American made and may be as high as 40 percent for finished goods (Selee 2018: 58-59).

²¹ During the course of NAFTA negotiations in 2018, Trump repeatedly threatened to pull the U.S. out of the agreement in what appeared to be a bargaining tactic. See also Flannery 2018.

²² Mexican minimum wage is now pegged at 102.68 pesos (approximately \$5.10 USD) a day nationally, while along the northern border with the U.S. the minimum daily wage doubled to 176.72 pesos (approximately \$8.80 USD) (Harrup 2018).

has promised to pay out bond-holders and is currently looking at alternative sites, including adding commercial airstrips to an existing military airport north of the city.²³ AMLO's position vis-a-vis the business community in Mexico was widely variable in 2018. At times he reassured the business community with promises to balance the budget and exercise macroeconomic prudence, and at times he worried them with talk of wealth redistribution and big promises of social spending (Rapoza 2018).

In general terms, the level of criminal violence and insecurity in Mexico affects investor confidence and overall Mexican economy activity, although its effect is difficult to measure with precision. The American Chamber of Commerce announced in 2018 that US businesses "risk extortion, theft, attacks on their logistics chain and physical assault on their employees." The leading Mexican business organizations, including the Business Coordinating Council (CCE), publicly called on the Peña Nieto government during its term and on López Obrador in 2018 to address these issues, charging that "the high levels of violence have become the greatest obstacle to (economic) activity" (Esposito 2018). Local legislators in Guerrero, one of the states most affected by violence, have proposed to the Senate that the federal government legalize opium production for pharmaceutical use to reduce violence and help poor farmers who grow it, partly in response to incoming Secretary of the Interior Olga Sánchez's public support of national legalization for medical purposes in August 2018 (Guthrie 2018).

V. EXECUTIVE BRANCH

One of AMLO's signature initiatives has been to hold daily morning press conferences, which he began while mayor of Mexico City (2000-2005). At 7 a.m. each working day, and lasting for more than an hour, AMLO greets the press with these words: "Good morning. We are about to give you information dealing with the government's republican plan of austerity." These conferences serve as a vehicle for the president to communicate with the public—especially when crises arise—as well as a strategy for governing: AMLO uses these conferences to give instructions to his colleagues and subordinates. Additionally, AMLO announces new social programs, provides progress on existing ones, and often sends political messages (Nájar 2019). Given his outsized personality and disciplined work ethic, AMLO largely sets the political agenda through these early morning press conferences, which are widely covered in the news.

One of the most unusual and critiqued elements of AMLO's presidency thus far has been his use of public referenda. Between September 1 (when the new

²³ The peso fell three percent and the stock market four percent with the announcement of the cancellation. Cancellation could cost up to \$5 billion USD due to completed construction and existing contracts (Sieff 2018).

congress was seated) and December 1 (when AMLO was sworn in), two non-binding popular referenda financed by MORENA were held on several different issues. Very few Mexicans voted in these referenda, some 1-2 percent of voters nationwide, and they were widely cited by critics as being thinly-masked attempt to validate decisions he had already made (Sieff 2018). On 29 October, a referendum was held on the construction of a new airport for Mexico City, which was discussed above. Approximately 1 percent of the Mexican voting public cast a vote in this referendum. On 24-25 November, a referendum was held on 10 key policy proposals, including the creation of a new rail line in southeast Mexico, the construction of a new oil refinery, reforestation, a free public internet initiative, an increase in pensions for senior citizens, and scholarships for students (Zavala 2018). 2019 has already brought several more referenda and even more in the works.

VI. LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The role of the legislative branch in the Mexican decision-making process has changed dramatically since 1997. In the past, Congress primarily examined presidential legislative initiatives and made recommendations to the executive branch for alterations. Theoretically it could have rejected a presidential initiative, but most presidential legislation was approved, typically overwhelmingly. Since the mid-1990s, the number of legislative initiatives has skyrocketed. During the 1991-1994 Congress, deputies put forward 117 legislative initiatives; Between 2015 and June 2018 that number had risen to 6,573! (Cited in Camp and Mattiace 2020: 209).²⁴ The increasing number of legislative initiatives in the democratic period, however, is not necessarily an indication of democratic success or even productivity. Laura Valencia notes that legislative initiatives in the democratic era are not the product of inter-party agreements that promote group interests, but, rather, are presented by individual legislators without any expectation of passage, taking up much congressional time and energy (Valencia 2014: 159-60). Notwithstanding, deputies have created a much more contentious environment for debates, and they have increased attention to bills that originate from within the Chamber. While this legislative initiative may appear positive for democracy, the body continues to have very little legitimacy among the public. In survey after survey the legislative branch ranks at the bottom among all other institutions measured (Camp and Mattiace 2020: Chapter 7).

As mentioned previously, members of Congress elected in the 2018 elections may be re-elected. It will be interesting to see how this reform shifts legislators' incentives. All things being equal, we would expect accountability between legislators and constituents to increase. However, more than voters, political party leaders continue to play a major role in the selection of candidates through party lists. Party leaders also retained power by limiting political party switching

²⁴ See Gaceta Parlamentaria, <http://gaceta.diputados.gob.mx>

by candidates running for re-election and not allowing these candidates to run as independents (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer 2018).

VII. REGIONAL CRISES: VENEZUELA AND CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRATION

The ongoing political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela was a priority for Peña Nieto, who took on a leadership role within Latin America in strong opposition to Nicolás Maduro's regime. AMLO has taken a very different tack. During the campaign and in his first weeks in office he made it clear that he would be prioritizing domestic policy, stating repeatedly that "the best foreign policy is domestic policy." To date, AMLO appears to be resurrecting an important historical thread in Mexican foreign policy of privileging non-intervention and national sovereignty. Under AMLO's watch, Mexico has abstained from votes to further sanction the Maduro regime, preferring to maintain Mexico's position as a possible mediator in future peace talks between the regime and opposition forces (BBC 2019). AMLO signaled his commitment to maintaining a neutral position by inviting Maduro to attend his inauguration on December 1, which Maduro accepted.

Long a country of emigration, in recent years Mexico has become a transit country, largely for the tens of thousands of Central Americans seeking asylee status in the U.S.²⁵ Lawlessness and violence have been on the rise in recent years in Central America, particularly in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (and, since April 2018, in Nicaragua). While the vast majority of these migrants seek to enter the U.S., many as asylees, tens of thousands are currently residing in Mexico as they wait for possible entrance into the U.S.

In 2011 the Mexican Congress passed a comprehensive immigration bill that puts Mexico in compliance with international migration standards. The legislation strengthened migrant rights in Mexico, putting them on par with the rights accorded to Mexican citizens, placed limits on the duration of migrant detention, and promoted family unity and migrant integration (Alba 2013). While this was important and historic legislation for Mexico, critics note that its implementation has been dismal. Even though migrants have these *de jure* protections, Mexican institutions are not currently up to the task of managing the thousands of migrants passing through its territory. The country's national agency for refugees and asylees, COMAR (Comisión Mexicana de Asistencia a Refugiados), is significantly understaffed. From January to September 2018, COMAR received 17,116 refugee applications, 12,381 of which were from Central American applicants. By the end of the year, approximately 2,000 had received

²⁵ Mexico is still not a migrant destination country. Less than one percent of its population is foreign born.

refugee or protected status, with 12,417 cases pending (Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2018).

While 10 percent of Mexico's population now resides in the U.S., since 2010 Mexican migration to the U.S. has been at net zero (i.e., the number of Mexicans migrating to the United States is almost exactly offset by those returning to Mexico) (Heimlich 2012). Over the last several years, thousands of Mexicans have returned to Mexico, many after long periods in the U.S., with plans to reside permanently in their country of origin. These *retornados* present a challenge in terms of incorporation and it is not yet clear that the Mexican government has a coherent strategy to facilitate and ease their re-entry (Rivera 2013).

News sources and punditry had their eyes trained on the Mexico-U.S. border in 2018 (BBC 2018). In part this was due to the spike in Central American migrant arrivals. In part this attention was due to President Trump's restrictive policy initiatives—such as the decision to separate families at the border, which was eventually rescinded in the face of intense public condemnation. Trump's decision to send several thousand National Guard troops to the border region in April was followed by deployment of U.S. Army personnel in November (Association for the U.S. Army 2018). While these actions might have provoked open critique by Mexican presidents in the past, AMLO has maintained relative quiet, faithful to his strategy of focusing on domestic policy and not provoking Donald Trump. In the first month of his presidency, López Obrador departed from the pattern of his predecessors and largely ignored the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship. Time will tell if he is able to sustain this position and, if so, at what cost.

VIII. CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATIC QUALITY AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Administrations from 2000 to 2018 introduced legislation and reforms that have strengthened electoral democracy in Mexico, an essential component of a functioning democracy. Yet, it is profoundly sobering to contemplate the tens of thousands of deaths and disappearances at the hands of criminal organizations (and the state) in Mexico in the *democratic* period. The numbers are staggering: since 2006 organized crime has been responsible for more than 150,000 deaths (Beittel 2018), 37,000 people are missing (Wilkinson 2019), and thousands more internally displaced. To put it bluntly, Mexico has become a graveyard since Calderón declared a War on Drugs.

Not surprisingly, Mexicans remain seriously unsatisfied with democracy's performance. Support for democracy in the most recent LAPOP *Americas Barometer* surveys of Latin America reached its lowest levels since they began in 2004, with only 49 percent of Mexicans supporting democracy, comparable with Haiti, Paraguay, and Guatemala, the four lowest countries in the region (Cohen et al. 2017: 5). Perhaps more disturbing is that 62 percent of Mexicans say there

is very little freedom of expression in their country, and 70 percent of Mexicans believe there “is very little freedom to express political opinions without fear” (Cohen et al. 2017: 34-38).

Moreover, as early as 2010 more than a third expressed no preference for democracy over an authoritarian government, and 14 percent actually preferred the latter (Moreno 2011). The actual or perceived level of crime and corruption affects the degree to which citizens would support a military coup against the government. In 2017, forty-eight percent of Mexicans justified a military coup in the face of high levels of crime and 50 percent for high levels of corruption (Cohen et al. 2017: 8).²⁶ According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index in 2018, Mexico ranked 138 of 180 countries surveyed. V-Dem Annual Democracy Report ranked Mexico 79th in the world on liberal components of democracy in 2018, measured by citizen equality before the law and individual liberty, as well as by judicial and legislative constraints on executive power (V-Dem 2018).

Mexican political institutions are being sorely tested in the confrontation with drug trafficking organizations, making it more difficult to achieve conditions that are typically identified with democratic consolidation. The media in Mexico cannot perform its investigative responsibilities, thereby broadening and deepening accountability of government officials, if their research and coverage involves drug trafficking linkages and corruption.

In the midst of all this bad news, it is encouraging to see that the courts in Mexico have more than occasionally challenged executive decisions, exercising their important function as a check on power. In 2018, in a historic case, a federal court ruled against the attorney general’s office in a case involving the government’s investigation into the September 2014 forced disappearance of 43 teacher college students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers’ College mentioned earlier. In the 712-page unanimous decision, judges found the government investigation “faulty and irregular” and sharply condemned the federal government for having used torture as one of the components of a fabricated case (Goldman 2018).

Formidable challenges are ahead. Only if Mexico can effectively address income inequality, political corruption, and the rule of law in the next decade, improving its performance in all areas, will it strengthen the path to a functional democracy. If it fails to address these issues adequately, the achievement of a functioning democracy will be difficult if not impossible to attain. AMLO and his MORENA party certainly have their work cut out for them in the coming months. Many of the problems currently plaguing Mexico are due to the venality and corruption

²⁶ These data need some elaboration. Given the relative weakness of the Mexican military, and its support for the Mexican state in the twentieth century, Mexicans have no experience with military rule of the type experienced by many Latin American countries from the 1960s-1980s. This may help explain the relatively high support for military rule under certain conditions. I am indebted to José Luis Rodríguez Aquino for this point.

of political parties and the ruling class. But it would be a mistake to place all our attention on AMLO—as much as he seems to crave it. Mexican civil society and all Mexican citizens have a key role to play in improving the quality of their democracy. The stakes for not improving the quality of democracy in Mexico are high indeed.

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