Parallel Authoritarian Institutions: An Explanation of Mexico's Authoritarian Regime Durability and Breakdown

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Abstract

Party politicians in dominant party autocracies are not always in charge of taking the most important authoritative decisions in a country. Instead, it is the bureaucracy -staffed by non-party men- the one in charge of deciding the policies of the country and party politicians the ones in charge of controlling the opposition and implementing some of these policies. This role differentiation affects elite collective action and, therefore, regime durability. I use the case of Mexico -which most scholars characterize as the paradigm of dominant party autocracies- to show that it is fruitful for theoretical and descriptive reasons to distinguish between those organizations in charge of the regimes despotic power (i.e. who takes decisions) and those in charge of its infrastructural power (i.e. who implements decisions). Using process tracing and open interviews with former top-echelons of the regime, the paper examines how Mexico’s bureaucrats were able to dominate the hegemonic party and the behavior of party politicians, how this dominance enhanced regime durability and how it came to an end, contributing to the breakdown of one of the longest lived authoritarian regimes of the 20th Century.

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Mexico’s authoritarian regime was one of the most resilient of the Twentieth Century. Scholars have provided a variety of hypotheses in order to explain Mexico’s authoritarian regime durability as well as its demise at the end of the 1990s (e.g. Greene 2007; Langston 2006; Magaloni 2006). However, few authors have considered the relationship of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) to the state’s bureaucracy and its role in the sustainability and eventual disintegration of the authoritarian regime. Analyzing this relationship is important for two reasons. First, it allows differentiation between organizations responsible for making decisions, i.e. the regime’s despotic institutions, and organizations responsible for enforcing these decisions, i.e. the regime’s infrastructural institutions (Slater 2003). Secondly, it allows understanding of the Achilles’ heel of this authoritarian regime: the latent lack of accountability and responsiveness of Mexico’s presidents towards the PRI.

In this paper I will demonstrate that, unlike expected, party politicians (i.e. Priístas) were not responsible of making decisions in Mexico’s authoritarian regime. This task was in charge of the state’s bureaucracy. The PRI and its politicians were responsible of the regime’s infrastructural power. Despite this role differentiation, until the mid-1990s the state’s bureaucracy (specifically Mexico’s presidents) was able to control the hegemonic party. This control allowed the authoritarians to solve collective action and social choice problems that kept the elite united; however, it also created serious problems for the PRI in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period of increased electoral competitiveness, the bureaucrats made decisions that negatively affected the capacity of the PRI to garner votes (e.g. economic policies that diminished the party’s resources, electoral reforms that benefited the opposition parties, negotiations over various contested elections which granted the opposition governorships although they had not won in the polls, etc.). Disgruntled Priístas responded to this bureaucratic stance not by exiting the PRI, but by reforming it, thereby weakening the state’s bureaucracy capacity to influence party decisions and destroying the main mechanism of authoritarian cohesion.

The paper is organized in three sections. In the first section I present an analytic
framework by which I explain intra-elite relations in authoritarians settings, specifically those characterized by the presence of a “dominant” or “hegemonic” party. With this framework in mind, in the second section I turn my attention to the case of Mexico and intra-elite relations during this country’s authoritarian period. I present data that shows that party politicians did not staff Mexico’s federal bureaucracy. I also explain the mechanisms used by the state’s bureaucracy that permitted it to control the party –fostering elite collective action– and how some party politicians, specifically the state’s governors and those working at the local level, had certain autonomy vis-à-vis this bureaucracy (this autonomy allowed them to oppose the president’s decisions in the 1990s by reforming the PRI). Finally I analyze the 1990 and 1996 organizational reforms of the PRI. These two reforms were a rebellion against the “Imperial Presidency” and its bureaucratic cronies. These reforms ended the bureaucracy’s control over the party. Once this happened, authoritarian elite collective action was severely weakened. This stimulated the regime’s breakdown.

1 Fused or Parallel Authoritarian Institutions?

Problems of contracting are greatly complicated by economic agents who make ‘false or empty, that is, self-disbelieved [...] promises’. Oliver E. Williamson (1981, 554)

In order to understand the durability of authoritarian regimes it is important to explain why elites that command different resources (economic, military, religious, etc.), would like to cooperate with each other in order to dominate a given population. Authoritarianisms that have frequent instances of factionalism are likely to be non-durable. What is what allows authoritarians to act collectively? I propose that elite collective action is enhanced when the powers of the regime –its infrastructural and despotic powers¹– are “fused” in a single organization: either a political party or the military or the bureaucracy. When

¹Following Michael Mann’s terminology and Dan Slater’s description, by despotic power I understand “the range of actions that [a set of the elite in authoritarian regimes] is empowered to take without routine, institutionalized negotiations with other regime members.” By infrastructural power I understand the elite’s capacity to implement authoritative decisions and “its command over potential opposition in civil society and within the multiple layers of the state apparatus itself” (cf. Slater 2003, 81-82).
these powers are located in different organizations (i.e. when they are “parallel” to each other), each organization is vulnerable to “hold-up” and opportunism from the other one (Klein et al. 1978). Although the presence of this “hold-up” problem may not affect the duration of the regime -i.e. its temporal length-, I argue that it may severely curtail its durability -i.e. its capacity to survive possible challenges from societal actors or from actors within the authoritarian coalition itself, or potential crises (either economic, or political, or international ones)\(^2\).

Similar to an economic transaction where a seller refrains from making an economically sound investment for fear of being held-up by the buyer (e.g. the buyer may take advantage of the fact that the seller’s product cannot be used elsewhere to force a price reduction), authoritarian elites located in different organizations may avoid investing an efficient amount of resources that may help the regime to run smoothly. These distinct elites may command authoritarian powers that run parallel to each other; using these powers, they want to achieve the same goal (stay in power) but they may tacitly disagree on the means of achieving these objectives. As in economics, in politics one way to solve these inefficiencies is to provide formal control over both sides of a transaction to a single organization, who will have an easier time solving potential disputes than separate actors left to their own devices (Holmstrom and Roberts 1998, 76). Thus, contrary to most scholars (cf. Brownlee 2007; Magaloni 2008; Smith 2005) assumption about the importance of political parties as guarantors of authoritarian regime stability and duration, I argue that it is not the existence of parties per se but the capacity of the party –or any other organization such as the military– to contain within itself the regime’s despotic and infrastructural powers, what explains why some authoritarian regimes are more durable –more resilient- than others.

At least since Geddes (1999) seminal article, scholars have put great emphasis in understanding how different organizations/institutions affect regime durability. Among the different types of organizations, it is ruling parties the ones that have attracted the most

\(^2\)Grzymala-Busse (2011, 1279), to my knowledge, was the first author to make a clear distinction between the concepts of duration and durability. I follow her lead on this matter.
attention. According to Geddes, “single-party regimes” are more durable than other types of authoritarianisms—especially, military ones. This durability is the product of elite unity: minority factions know that the majority faction within the regime will not exclude them permanently from power; therefore this minority does not discount the future, creating incentives to coalesce with the majority. The main difference between elites in this type of regimes and military ones is the behavioral incentives actors face to cooperate with each other. Alas, despite turning scholars’ attention towards political parties, Geddes framework cannot fully explain which particularities of dominant parties provide this beneficial outcome for authoritarians. Is it really the political party the one producing cooperation among authoritarians or is it some unobserved variable—which is more likely to be present in “single-party regimes”—the one producing this result?

Brownlee provides an answer to the previous question. According to this author (Brownlee 2007, 37-38), dominant ruling parties “curb leaders’ ambitions and bind together political coalitions” because they “regulate [intra-elite] disputes and enable solutions that might otherwise prove elusive among rivalrous leaders left to their own device. [...] Beyond managing competition for power, parties restrain the conflicts of actors in power.” Dominant ruling parties, thus, provide authoritarians with a forum in which they discuss, regulate and solve disagreements among groups within the ruling coalition—these disagreements revolve around leadership succession, access to power positions and policy choices. Following a similar logic, Magaloni (2008; cf. also Boix and Svolik 2007; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007) argues that, by delegating control to the access of governmental positions and privileges to a political party, dictators can credibly guarantee, over the long run, to share power with the authoritarian ruling coalition. This “power-sharing agreement” via a political party, therefore, incentivizes elites to remain loyal to the autocracy. Along with Brownlee and Magaloni, most scholars conceive political parties as the sine qua non organization that fosters elite collective action.

Despite its enormous importance for our understanding of regime durability, the
consensus on the prominence of dominant ruling parties as instruments that foster elite unity has three shortcomings. First, these explanations assume that in dominant party autocracies the ruling party is the only organization that authoritarians have to solve collective action and social choice problems. Second, the explanations assume that the most important groups of the authoritarian ruling coalition belong to the party –i.e. that authoritarians are, basically, party politicians. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate below with the case Mexico, in not all dominant party autocracies (and other types of authoritarianisms as well\(^3\)) those who are in charge of the regime’s despotic power belong to the same organization that controls the regime’s infrastructural power; that is, not all authoritarians are party politicians. Finally, an specifically for those arguments that emphasize “power-sharing arrangements”, even when dictators offer a party as a mechanism to share power with the rest of the elite, when they do not belong to this party they will always have opportunities to defect if their interests sharply differ from the rest of the authoritarians—as in the hold-up problem, dictators that are not also party politicians do not necessarily internalize the costs of investing scarce resources to keep the regime alive and they can always unilaterally end the authoritarian power-sharing agreement. The dictator, in sum, may offer an “empty promise,” especially when he does not need any more the “services” of the authoritarians in control of the regime’s infrastructural power (below, I will demonstrate that this happened in Mexico in the 1990s).

Table 1 includes data on 26 single- and dominant-party authoritarianisms\(^4\). The data show that, until the very end of the Twentieth Century, there was wide variation in regime tenure—despite the fact of the existence of single- or dominant- political parties in all 26

\(^3\)For example, in the case of Indonesia, the despotic power was in the hands of the military (and later, in a more personalized form, in the hands of Suharto) and the infrastructural power was shared between the military and Golkar, i.e. the hegemonic party. In the case of Burma, the military (Tatmadaw) controls the both infrastructural and despotic powers. For an analysis of Indonesia’s New Order regime and Burma’s military regime cf. Smith (2005, 79-99) and Slater (2010, 145-196 and 263-274)

countries. The average duration of these 26 regimes is 28.2 years, with a standard deviation of 13.9 years. The extremes of the distribution are noteworthy: Mexico’s regime lasted 71 years while that of Guinea Bissau only lasted 6 years. Ruling parties are “held constant” in all these cases, therefore this might suggest that the existence of this type of organizations is not producing a systematic effect on regime durability\(^5\).

**[TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]**

Before commenting on the last column of the previous table—which contains a variable that codes the type of system of government at regime inception\(^6\)—, I will develop some points regarding the relationship between infrastructural and despotic powers in dominant-party authoritarian regimes. Those authoritarians in control of the regime’s despotic power (despots\(^7\)) want to enact policies close to their ideal points. They will more likely secure support for these policies when politicians in the ruling party vote for the despots’ proposals either in Parliament and/or Party Assemblies. To implement their policies, despots will also need the help of those authoritarians in charge of the regime’s infrastructural power: e.g. control and/or repress opposition to these policies in civil society, obtain support for the policies in broad sectors of the population, make sure that the policies are executed at the local level, etc. Despots’ that also control infrastructural power will have a much easier time achieving these outcomes (i.e. support for and implementation of the policy). However, when they do not control the regime’s infrastructural power, despots have to negotiate a contract with those elites that command this power. Due to “bounded rationality”, at the time this contract is signed the parties cannot know what events will happen in the future and, therefore, they cannot deal with “all contractually relevant aspects” (cf. Williamson

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\(^5\) I am using a duration measure (i.e. years in power) as a proxy for durability. The case study below will make use of qualitative data to show how durability is affected by the existence of “parallel” authoritarian powers.

\(^6\) I use this variable as a proxy for the fused or parallel character of the regimes’ powers.

\(^7\) By “despot” I understand the following: the person/s in control of the regime’s despotic power. This understanding of the word ought not to have negative connotations and ought not to mean “a ruler with absolute powers, i.e. a tyrant.” Thus, according to my definition, democracies also have despots (e.g. congressmen in charge of making laws).
The presence of this type of incomplete authoritarian contract implies, first and foremost, that each contracting body cannot commit not to abuse their powers in the future—especially if despots or those in control of infrastructural powers change over time\(^8\).

In “parallel” authoritarian power relations, therefore, the set of actors in control of the despotic power is unaccountable to those in control of the infrastructural power and vice-versa. Given both sides’ inability to commit to a future course of action, there is a high likelihood that authoritarians will be reluctant to cooperate with each other and invest scarce resources in the regime’s maintenance. This reluctance, of course, does not mean that authoritarians do not have any other methods to attain cooperation. In the case of Mexico, for example, the despot, via his control of an array of incentives (e.g. posts in the state’s bureaucratic structure), was able to dominate those elites in control of the regime’s infrastructural power. However, even with these incentives at hand, opportunism is always present in dominant-party authoritarian regimes characterized by the presence of “parallel” authoritarian powers. In contrast to the “parallel” situation, when authoritarian powers are “fused” in a single-organization, that is, when the despotic and infrastructural powers of the regime emanate from a single source, authoritarians are guarded against the hold-up problem. In sum, in a “fused” dominant-party authoritarian regime there is mutual dependence between the elites in control of despotic and infrastructural powers. In a “parallel” regime, instead, there is latent independence between despots and those in charge of the autocracy’s infrastructural power.

Before analyzing in detail the case of Mexico, it is important to make a final point about the origins of the “parallel” and “fused” traits of dominant-party authoritarian regimes. The last column of Table 1 shows the type of government in existence at the moment of regime inception in each of the 26 countries. For those regimes included in the table that transited

\(^8\)For example, in the case of Cuba, the despot changed in 2008. As a new despot, Raúl Castro may breach some of the agreements that his brother, Fidel, signed with the political and economic elites of the island at the end of the Cuban Revolution. However, following my argument, this possibility seems to be highly unlikely given that Cuba is a case of fused authoritarian powers (both despotic and infrastructural powers are contained within the Communist Party of Cuba).
to democracy or to another type of authoritarianism by the year 2000 –19 countries in total–, the odds of having a presidential system of government at the time of regime formation were 4:5. In stark contrast, six out of seven stable dominant-party autocracies still in power at the beginning of the 21st Century (i.e. Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Laos, Singapore, Kenya and Malaysia) had a parliamentary system of government at the time the regime originated. I performed a Fisher’s Exact Test to assess whether the data in Table 1 just happened by chance or if we can reject with confidence this hypothesis (to perform the test I created a 2 by 2 table, with rows indicating “Government Type” and columns indicating “In Power by 2000?” –I excluded the three semi-presidential types from the analysis). The results of this statistical test reject the null hypothesis of true odds ratio equal to 1 with a two-sided *p*-value of 0.0002: dominant-party regimes that start with a presidential system of government are much more likely to be out of power by the year 2000 when compared to dominant-party regimes that start with a parliamentary system of government. Also, the mean number of years in power up until 2000 is higher for authoritarian regimes with parliamentary systems of government (29.8 years) than for regimes with presidents (excluding Mexico, which is a clear outlier, the mean number of years in power is 21.2; including Mexico is 24.5). To assess whether these differences are statistically significant I performed a Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test, where the null hypothesis is that the life span of authoritarian regimes with presidential systems of government at regime inception follows a similar distribution than the one of parliamentary systems at regime inception (the life span of Mexico’s authoritarian regime is included in this test). The test rejects this null hypothesis with a *z*-score of -1.94 and a *p*-value of 0.052. It is interesting that Levitsky and Way (2010, 346; emphasis added), in their study of competitive authoritarian regimes –and using an alternative sample of cases–, find a similar result about the stability of parliamentary and presidential authoritarian regimes:

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9I decided to use a Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test because it is more robust to the presence of outliers –e.g. Mexico– and more efficient for small samples than a two sample T-test. Obviously, the test only has a descriptive purpose. The main problem with the test is truncation and the selection of the cut-off year. However, if we assume that the year of inception of the authoritarian regime is independent of the type of government at regime inception, then the test has some validity.
[R]egimes with parliamentary systems were no more likely to democratize (and, in fact, were less likely to democratize) than presidential or semi-presidential systems. Whereas only 1 of 6 parliamentary regimes (Slovakia) democratized, 13 of 29 presidential or semi-presidential regimes democratized.

However, these authors do not offer any compelling explanation of this result. Rather, they dismiss it and conclude that “institutional design [is] of limited utility in explaining post-Cold War regime outcomes” (ibid., 78). Letivsky and Way overlook the fact that governmental systems may correlate with the type of authoritarian regime: “fused” or “parallel”.

To explain the remarkable fact that parliamentary authoritarian regimes seem to be more robust than presidential ones it is important to remember the ideas of authors such as Linz (1994) and Stepan and Skach (1993) who two decades ago wrote that presidentialisms were perilous for democracies because, above all, there was a high propensity for independent elected presidents to get into severe conflict with independent elected legislatures. With no support in Congress, presidents, according to these authors, are likely to polarize politics, enact emergency measures, produce gridlock and ungovernability. In a similar vein, I argue that presidential systems of government are much more likely to produce “parallel” authoritarian powers: despots are often presidents that, de facto, do not belong to the ruling party; that try and sometimes succeed in commanding the parties and legislatures that these parties control. But they have a hard time avoiding the “hold-up problem” because they do not belong to that set of the elite in charge of the regime’s infrastructural powers. Instead, prime ministers in parliamentary systems are both despots and command the regime’s infrastructural power. This happens because both powers are located in the same organization: the dominant authoritarian party. Prime ministers are true party members, they are, de jure and de facto, the leaders of these parties and they know that, if the party falls, they will fall with it. Presidents can survive without the help of the elites that control ruling parties, they have other agents that can help them stay in power: bureaucrats, the military, etc.

To end this section, I want to contrast the logic just presented about “parallel” and
“fused” authoritarian institutions to two other theories about authoritarian regime durability and duration: one that relates authoritarian durability to the existence of “power-sharing agreements” (see above for authors that support this line of argumentation) and one about the way the executive is selected in presidential systems vis-à-vis parliamentary ones. With regards to the “power-sharing agreements” theory, scholars that are in favor of this theory have argued that the autocratic ruler needs to solicit the help of elites or potential opposers to survive in office. In order to get this help the ruler will “offer” institutions such as parliaments or parties to make credible deals. However, we must question the capacity of despots to “offer” these organizations. Most despots inherit the systems of governments of the regimes that they depose and they are unlikely to change these during their tenure in office. The data in Table 1 shows that only five out of 26 countries with dominant party regimes changed their type of government from parliamentary systems to presidential ones in the first few years after regime inception (cf. the cases of Chad, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zimbabwe). These changes contradict the expectations of scholars of the “power sharing agreement” tradition: they show that the despot, instead of trying to credibly share power with the rest of the elite, is trying to concentrate more power in his hands by creating a strong presidency. With their alternative data, Levitsky and Way (2010, 360) show a similar result: “in several of our cases –including Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia in the 1960s; Guyana and Zimbabwe in the 1980s; and Belarus, Peru and Russia in the 1990s– presidential or super-presidential constitutions were imposed after autocrats had repressed opponents and consolidated power”. Despots seem to not like sharing power and their relationships with their respective dominant parties may have historical roots in existence before the inception of the authoritarian regime.

The “presidential vs. parliamentary selection of rulers” theory (cf. Templeman 2010, 10-13) argues that 1) challengers to authoritarian rulers have an easier time running competitive campaigns in presidential systems than in parliamentary systems of government; 2) voters can coordinate better in presidential systems than in parliamentary systems to “throw the
rascals out” of power; and 3) the opposition has weaker incentives to coordinate and higher incentives to compete independently (rather than in a coalition) in parliamentary systems than in presidential ones. In contrast to this theory, which posits a constant causation argument (i.e. a presidential system must be present in a country at time $t$ in order to produce the hypothesized effects at time $t$), my theory provides a historical causation argument in the sense that the existence of a presidential system at time $t$ is not required in order to affect regime durability at this same time $t$. Rather, a presidential system has an effect on regime durability only at the inception of the regime, when authoritarian coalitions and elite contracts take shape. According to my argument, therefore, the presidential or parliamentary quality of the system at regime inception has an effect because it determines the type of authoritarian institutions that will later emerge and that will affect elite collective action: countries with presidential systems in the first years of the authoritarian regime are more likely to produce “parallel” authoritarian institutions; countries with parliamentary systems, instead, have a tendency to produce “fused” institutions. Of course, autocrats may change the system of government after they come to power (this happened, for example, in Tanzania in the 1960s and in Zimbabwe in the 1980s), but the governmental system in existence at regime inception is likely to leave a trace, a legacy\textsuperscript{10}.

In sum, in this section I have develop an argument that hypothesizes that authoritarian regimes with “fused” despotic and infrastructural powers are more durable than those in which these powers are located in different organizations. The reason is that the former type of regimes are less likely to face a “hold up” problem whenever contingencies or crises emerge. With this framework in mind, next I examine the case of Mexico’s dominant-party authoritarian regime. I chose this case for two reasons: 1) it is a crucial case in the sense described by Eckstein, that is, a case that “must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory’s validity, or, conversely, must not fit equally well any rule contrary to that

\textsuperscript{10} Arthur Stinchcombe made the distinction between constant cause and historical cause; Collier and Collier (1991, 35) further elaborate on the distinction (part of their description of “critical juncture” is based on the idea of historical cause).
proposed” (1975, 118; quoted in Gerring 2007, 115). And 2) the regime’s duration (seven decades) allows me to better analyze different processes that unfolded over time (for example, how the latent conflict between those actors in charge of despotic powers and those in charge of infrastructural powers emerge) and check if they fit my theory’s expectations. This case, therefore, will allow me to shed light on the mechanisms that connect the hypothesized cause (the existence of “parallel” authoritarian powers) with the outcome of interest (regime non-durability).

2 Mexico’s Dominant Party Regime: The President and a Philanthropic Ogre

The post-Revolutionary state finished its evolution with the creation of two parallel bureaucracies. The first one is composed by administrators and technocrats; it constitutes the governmental personnel and it is the historical inheritor of the New Spain’s and Porfirista bureaucracies. It is the mind and the arm of modernization. The second one is composed by professional politicians and it is the one that runs, in its different levels, the PRI. Both bureaucracies live in continuous osmosis...

Octavio Paz (1979, 39)

In Mexico, as Octavio Paz’s epigraph above shows, the authoritarian regime was maintained by two important and differentiated organizations: the state’s bureaucracy and the PRI. These two organizations had different roles –as I will show in the rest of the paper--; the former was in charge of administering the regime’s despotic power and the latter its infrastructural power. However, the state’s bureaucracy, specifically the president of the country, was able to control, through different selective incentives, the decisions of the hegemonic party. Therefore, at least until the 1990s, Mexico’s presidency –and its occupants–

11 The approval rates of the presidents’ policy initiatives in Congress should suffice to make clear that it was them an not the Pri´ıstas (i.e. party politicians) the ones that controlled the despotic power or the regime. Data gathered for the most important policy initiatives between 1964 and 1972 show that, out of sixty-four bills introduced to the Chamber of Deputies, thirty-six (56.2%) were presidential initiatives with an approval rate of 100%. In contrast, of the eight (12.5%) PRI initiatives only three were approved and of the twenty (31.3%) opposition parties’ bills only two were approved. Nacif (1997) data confirm this trend for the period between 1982 and 1991. In this period, of the 292 bills proposed by the presidents De la Madrid (1982-1988) and Salinas (1988-1994), 284 (97.2%) were approved. In contrast, the PRI approval rate was only 23.5% and that of the opposition parties 8%. These, however, were not substantive bills. Cf. also Weldon (1997, 234-243).
was the key institution of the regime, not the “ruling” party.

In the 1930s Mexico’s revolutionary elite delegated many of their governing and administrative responsibilities to the incumbent president. During his six year term in office, each president was given full power to decide who would occupy—and for how long—certain electoral or administrative posts as well as the responsibility of deciding most economic and social policies. The president’s main responsibility was to hold together the broad (and, because of this, tentatively fractious) political elite. He\textsuperscript{12} did this, first, by distributing spoils to as many groups (known as “camarillas”) of the authoritarian elite as possible, and second and more important, by keeping all presidential hopefuls (the leaders of these “camarillas”, usually cabinet members) awaiting until the very last moment—frequently, less than a year before a presidential election—to make his decision about who would be his successor. Given that everyone could receive a spoil or could belong to the “camarilla” of the future most powerful man in the country, every single member of the authoritarian ruling coalition had incentives to cooperate with the current president, the “despot” of the regime\cite{Schlefer:2008}. It was the president and not the ruling party (the PRI), therefore, the main actor in creating centripetal pulls that kept the elite united for many decades. Former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (2000, 766) made this point clear:

\begin{quote}
[The] Institutional Revolutionary Party gave the president a dual responsibility: on the one hand, the party asked the president to give opportunities [for career development] to those […] that had the possibility to become [party] candidates; on the other hand, the president had to ensure that the nomination [of the presidential candidate] did not produce internal divisions in the party and, at the same time, make sure that no group [within the authoritarian ruling coalition] exerted pressure on any particular candidate. This way of doing thing gave [the regime] enormous stability. Thanks to [the delegation of nomination powers to the president], the presidential succession […] always happened without unrests or revolts.
\end{quote}

Alas, there was a problem with the delegation of despotic powers to the president: most persons in charge of the top-echelons of the bureaucracy, including the president (see below),

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{12}During the XXth Century Mexico’s Executive office was always in charge of a male politician.}
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were alien to the ruling party and the “hold-up problem” within the authoritarian ruling coalition was always present.

In this authoritarian setting, the political party –the PRI– had two main objectives, both related to the management of the infrastructural power of the regime. First, the party was the only truly national organization capable of mobilizing votes and administer electoral related matters. These tasks were important as elections at the local level were very competitive\textsuperscript{13} and happened regularly, or because winning by large margins in presidential or congressional elections allowed the authoritarians to show “an image of invincibility” that “discouraged [elite] splits” (Magaloni 2006, 15). Local Prié̱stas usually performed these electoral activities through the party’s state and municipal committees and through the party’s sectors. Committees were in charge of providing information about popular potential local candidates (an activity known as “auscultación”, literally meaning the “auscultation of society’s pulses” in towns and cities), encouraged citizens to affiliate to the party and register into the electoral rolls, helped the party’s candidates with campaigning\textsuperscript{14} and –perhaps the most important activities (at least until the 1980s)–, took charge of polling stations during Election Day, made sure that voters turned out to vote and, if necessary, stole elections or committed other types of electoral fraud (like altering voter rolls). These activities were often recorded in the newsletter of the main challenger organization to the PRI (the Partido Acción Nacional, PAN):

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\item[13] Historian Benjamin Smith (2012) shows, for example, that elections in the state of Oaxaca in the 1950s and early 1960s were very competitive: “[A] new aggressive PAN [i.e. the main opposition party at the time] had permanent committees in most communities [in Oaxaca’s Mixteca Baja region] by the early 1950s. [Given this,] over the next decade these organizations faced off against PRI minorities in a series of fiercely contested elections. In 1952 there were electoral conflicts in twelve of Huajuapan’s twenty-seven municipalities. Four years later, there were sixteen. Between 1952 and 1961 the party also ran four campaigns for federal deputy. In most competitions, PRI slates clearly confronted PAN groups. Members of both parties voted and claimed electoral majorities” (ibid., 278; emphases added). The aftermath of many of these electoral confrontations was local violence and the creation of “unauthorized” PAN municipal governments which –against the PRI’s “authorized” governments– were frequently more effective in collecting taxes or providing local services.
\item[14] According to Langston and Morgenstern (2009, 177), the PRI’s committees were much more effective in fulfilling this particular task if the governor of the state in which the municipal committees were located was effective in funneling funds to these party structures. Note, however, that these authors examine the party between the 1970s and 1990s. Their finding might not apply to previous decades.
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[During Election Day in Mexico City], in multiple polling stations—like polling stations 6 and 12—PRI thugs took the ballot boxes when the election was taking place. [the thugs then] took the [stolen] boxes to the houses of PRI members; there the boxes were filled with votes for the PRI. Afterwards, [the thugs] returned the ballot boxes to the polling station… (Acción Nacional 1949, 9)

[In the city of Guadalajara], members of the PRI local committee provided help to members of the CROC [i.e. a workers’ organization] in order to create armed squads. The squads’ main purpose is to disperse any meeting or reunion of PAN members [during the presidential election of 1958]. (Acción Nacional 1958, 6)

[In the municipality of] Jalacingo, [in the state of] Veracruz, PRI activists and the local police placed PRI propaganda inside polling stations. In addition, these persons destroyed all the propaganda of the PAN. (Acción Nacional 1970, 22)

In addition to these vote-getting activities, the party was also the main instrument for social mediation. It provided the locus for the political control of important social organizations such as labor unions, the teacher’s union, or peasant organizations. The administration of these groups through the party offered the mechanisms for political control and, paradoxically, representation (the PRI had a “quota system” that assigned a specific percentage of party candidacies to each of the three party sectors; the sectors’ politicians distributed handouts to the members of their organization, etc.). It is important to stress that the federal bureaucracy never directly interacted with the different social sectors, its participation was more subtle and was related to deciding how much money and other resources to allocate at the local level. Thus, the distribution of private goods and services reached the sectors’ members essentially through the PRI and its particular politicians. This was confirmed by Grindle (1977, 179), who noticed that “at the local level [...] governors, deputies, senators, municipal presidents and village leaders serve[d] the party by mobilizing and delivering the support of their followers and [were] rewarded for their efforts with a variety of government controlled goods and services, which [were] frequently channeled through the bureaucracy.” In sum, the perception of the PRI as an efficient mediator provided legitimacy and political support for the decisions taken by the state’s bureaucracy. The PRI was the philanthropic ogre15 of the state’s bureaucracy, helping it to control and,

15The term “philanthropic ogre” comes from the title of Octavio Paz’s essay quoted in the epigraph of
if necessary, punish the labor and peasant masses as well as facilitating the disbursement of important economic goods. Despite the effectiveness of the delegation of responsibilities to the presidency in keeping elite unity, it is important to emphasize one more time that the president and his bureaucratic cronies were autonomous from the PRI and therefore not accountable to party politicians. In the 1980s and 1990s this autonomy would strain the elite discipline. The state’s bureaucracy, whose main duty was to administer the despotic power of the regime, made decisions that negatively affected the PRI’s capacity to control the sectors and garner sufficient votes among the population.

Contrary to predictions made by Langston (2006, 61) and Magaloni (2006, 15), who argue that authoritarians will exit a dominant party during periods of increased electoral competitiveness if citizens show dissatisfaction with the party, most Priístas did not leave the party during the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, they responded to the challenges of this era by diminishing the capacity of Mexico’s presidents to control the PRI. There are several reasons why Priístas –especially at the local level– were not willing to exit their party organization. First, the PRI had proven to be a reliable electoral machine. Compared to the PAN and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) –which were organizationally weak at least until the electoral reform of 1996– the PRI was the only party organization with offices and militants in every municipality of the country and with sufficient resources to attract votes using patronage and clientelistic strategies. Exiting the PRI would have meant losing these precious organizational resources. Second, it was risky for Priístas to abandon their party. It would have been difficult, if not impossible for them to be accepted within an opposition party and even if they were, unlikely that they would have been nominated as candidates this section.

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16 The PAN rarely accepted disaffected Priístas in the 1980s and 1990s. Affiliation to the PAN was extremely difficult because one had to be sponsored by an active member and had to take a course on party doctrine. Usually admission of new members to the PAN took a period of six months. These requirements were designed to “filter” party loyalists from “opportunists” (Mizrahi 1997, 106). The PRD accepted Priístas for a brief period after Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas exit from the PRI in 1987. By 1990-1991, the PRD was a consolidated organization and its leader, Cárdenas, made every effort to avoid “pernicious” links with Priístas, which could have affected the PRD’s image as a party totally opposed to the Salinas government and the dominant party (cf. Bruhn 1996). The PRD accepted Priístas again until the late 1990s (e.g. Ricardo Monreal in the state of Zacatecas or Leonel Cota in the state of Baja California Sur; both joined the PRD
by that party. It is also unlikely that disgruntled Priístas would have been able to create their own political party, as this would have involved extreme cost in time and money, and defectors would have had to overcome formal entry barriers that were controlled, until 1994, by the state’s bureaucracy (for example, rules requiring a “minimum” of affiliates in order to register a new party).

Next, with data for the period between 1946-2000, I will show that party politicians did not staff Mexico’s federal bureaucracy. This gave the bureaucrats autonomy vis-à-vis the PRI. I will also elucidate how, given this autonomy, the bureaucracy (specifically Mexico’s presidents) was able to control the party organization. Finally, I will show that Priístas at the local level were not extremely dependent of the federal bureaucracy, which allowed them to reform the party in the 1990s.

2.1 The Imperial Presidency

The PRI was created in 1929 (as the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, PNR) by the initiative of the then president Plutarco Elías Calles. With the creation of the party Calles wanted to neutralize the power of local caciques and to solve the problem of leadership succession, which, after the assassination of the elected president and former general during the Revolution, Álvaro Obregón —the only military man left with enough power to bind together the loose “Revolutionary Family”—, hindered the pacification of the country and the central government’s capacity to implement different economic and social programs (Garrido 1982, 63-102). The fact that it was Calles and not politicians outside the state bureaucracy the one with the inventiveness of aggregating the interests of a dispered elite into a single political party would be a first signal that Mexican presidents would dominate the ruling party and not the other way around.

In 1938, by the initiative of the president Lázaro Cárdenas, the PRI was reformed to be the institution in charge of controlling different social organizations, previously outside the regime’s structure of dominance and, therefore, putting the stability of the authoritarian
government at risk. The PRI as a corporatist body of social groups included: 1) peasants’
organizations organized around the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC), 2) several
labor unions represented by the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), and 3)
disparate elements of the so called “popular sector”, which included the teacher’s union,
the union of government’s employees, members of women’s groups, etc.\textsuperscript{17}). Through
the administration of these organizations, the PRI was capable of enforcing obedience to
governmental decisions and limiting the influence of diverse social groups on policymaking\textsuperscript{18}.
The fact that after 1938 the main responsibility of the PRI was the control of these social
groups shows that the party and its politicians would be in charge of administering the
regime’s infrastructural power. Party politicians, thus, would be very different to the elite
in charge of the bureaucracy: Priístas were much more in direct contact with the sectors’
leaders and members and, above all, they were in charge of mobilizing votes during elections.
After 1938, therefore, there was an important “division of labor” within the elite: while the
bureaucrats were in charge of national decision making, party politicians were in charge of
controlling the masses and generating legitimacy. This was a notable feature of Mexico’s
authoritarian regime and it was going to last until the 1990s, when the bureaucracy breached
the contract that it has established with party politicians to keep the regime stable and alive.

2.1.1 The Federal Bureaucracy and the Sources of its Control over the Party

The top echelons of Mexico’s authoritarian government were staffed by persons disconnected
from the PRI and, therefore, unidentified with the party objectives. In the 1980s and
1990s this detachment provided the bureaucrats with enough autonomy to govern and make
decisions that, otherwise, in a “fused” authoritarian regime, would have been negotiated
with party politicians prone to favor untenable economic and social policies (e.g. continue
\textsuperscript{17}The “popular sector” was created until 1943, during the administration of the then president Manuel
Ávila Camacho.
\textsuperscript{18}The CNC, the CTM and the “popular sector” of the PRI could be described as “administered mass
organizations” (Kasza 1995, 8-11). Their tasks in Mexico’s authoritarian regime were to subordinate
its members –peasants, workers and middle-class professionals with a job in the state apparatus– to the
authoritarian elite. The PRI was the regime’s external agency that defined the structure, mission and
leaders of these organizations.
a strategy of Import Substitution Industrialization, based on state-owned enterprises, that would have created severe macroeconomic disequilibria after the debt crisis that started in 1982). In order to demonstrate why the bureaucrats were not party politicians, next I examine the career patterns of the federal administration’s office holders for the period between 1946 and 1997\textsuperscript{19}.

During Mexico’s 71 year-old authoritarian regime, there were three main areas of career development for those willing to enter politics: the state’s administrative structure, that is, the federal bureaucracy; electoral posts –either at the local or federal levels– and party service. Between 1946 and 2000, 62.5\% of a total of 240 presidential cabinet members had pure administrative careers. That is, almost two thirds of the top echelons of the federal bureaucracy never had contact with the PRI or a popular representation post. The remaining 37.5\% held “hybrid careers” -either an administrative office combined with an electoral post and/or a leadership position in the PRI’s organizational structure. However, of an average of twenty-four years in service, these bureaucrats spent less than two years in the party and/or three years holding an electoral post\textsuperscript{20}. Figure 1 presents the data (arranged by presidential cabinet, each dot representing the percentage of cabinet members with a particular career pattern). The Figure shows that, with the exception of the L´ opez Portillo cabinet, all other cabinets were formed with more than 50\% of its personnel having experience only in the bureaucracy. The Figure also shows that party experience was not a requisite to become part of the elite in charge of the regime’s despotic power: on average, less than 13\% of the cabinets had personnel with previous experience in the party.

[FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE]

The career patterns of Mexico’s presidents confirm that party politicians did not staff the bureaucratic structure of the country (cf. Casar 1997, passim.). Between 1946 and 2000,

\textsuperscript{19}The analysis in this section is based on Casar (1997), Camp (2011), and Hernández Rodríguez (1987).
\textsuperscript{20}The proportion of functionaries that occupy posts in lower levels of the state’s bureaucratic structure have similar career patterns. For example, out of 283 public servants registered between 1982 and 1992, only eighteen (6.3\%) held a party post and only for brief periods of time (an average of two years), and only forty-two (14.8\%) held an electoral position (cf. Casar 1997, passim.)
Mexico had nine presidents elected under the PRI banner. The analysis of their political careers show that all of them had long careers in the federal administration –more than twenty years on average– and held a ministry before becoming presidents. There is a particular break in the 1970s. The four presidents before this decade –Alemán, Ruíz Cortínez, López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz– hold one or even more electoral posts before becoming presidents, either as governors or as senators. Starting with Echeverría, none of the five presidents ruling between 1970 and 2000 hold an electoral post. Thus, electoral posts –which, of course, depended on obtaining the PRI nomination– were disregarded as an important step to become president of the country. Lastly, it is noteworthy that presidents did not have clear links to the PRI. Of the nine presidents in Figure 1, only López Mateos held a top party post, the General Secretariat of the PRI (but only for a few months). Neither Mexico’s presidents nor most of the men in the bureaucracy, in sum, were in any sense party men. However, the presidents controlled the party. How were they able to control an organization that they did not belong to and how were they able to impose their decisions, such as the selection of all party candidates, from governors to municipal mayors?

I argue that, until the mid-1990s, Mexico’s presidents and their bureaucratic cronies had three resources that allowed them to control the PRI: 1) they controlled all the posts of the enormous federal administration. This meant that they had decision-making power over personnel selection –if a person wanted to continue a career in politics she had to occupy any given position in the federal bureaucracy, as I explain below–; 2) they controlled the party structure via their use and abuse of the PRI’s official statutes and other –informal– techniques, these allowed the bureaucrats to manipulate positions within the party and candidacies –as Slater (2003, 89) has argued, this is known as “rigging,” i.e. “the strategic modification of institutional rules and procedures to forestall competition for leadership positions.”–; 3) they controlled, through the government’s budget, the financial resources of the party.

The no-reelection principle in Mexican politics –the maxim of Mexico’s revolutionary
forces against the Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship—was the iron law of the authoritarian regime. This principle altered the career options of the authoritarians, realigning their preferences and their loyalty from the party to the president. The continuous rotation of posts made the development of “internal” careers in the federal and local legislatures or in elective posts at the local level impossible (cf. Nacif 1997). Since the presidents had a complete control over the naming of all members of the federal administration, they had the capacity to determine the political futures of governors, senators and federal deputies once their terms in the elective post ended.

The president controlled the PRI through the creation and interpretation of the formal rules of the party organization (for a thorough analysis of the PRI’s candidate selection rules cf. Langston 2001, 490-495). With the exception of the years between 1945 and 1950, in which party primaries were common, the PRI chose its candidates through party conventions. The composition of these conventions –i.e. which party sectors or which states or municipalities would send more delegates to the meetings– as well as the way in which those attending the convention would vote to choose the candidate(s) was determined, in the case of national level elections, by the party’s National Executive Committee (CEN) or, in the case of local level elections, by the party’s state committees. For each convention, these party structures adjusted the rules of candidate selection (known as Convocatorias) to ensure that the “right” candidate(s) got chosen. Given that the CEN and the state committees were staffed by personnel appointed, directly or indirectly, by the president the “right” candidate(s) always happened to be the president’s candidate(s).

Besides Convocatorias, the bureaucrats –through the CEN or the PRI’s state committees–, had other, less formal and more blunt, methods of candidate or party leader selection. They could intimidate members of workers or peasants organizations to make sure the party’s sectors sent “adequate” delegates to the party conventions. They could also “nominate”

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21The average duration of an elective post was four years, this fact made electoral posts almost irrelevant for ambitious authoritarians wanting to have a prolonged career in politics.

22The states’ governors had the informal prerogative of appointing the PRI’s state committees personnel. The governors, in turn, were appointed by the president.
bogus delegates from non-existing ejidos or other organizations affiliated to the party (e.g. peasant leagues) or, in extreme cases, “the police could always physically bar stubborn dissident [delegates] from the convention hall” (Gillingham 2014, 153). If everything else failed, the “Colegio Electoral” (the electoral college\textsuperscript{23}) could always deny a seat in Congress to an elected candidate. This technique sometimes had dramatic results, as when Jorge Meixueiro, the PRI candidate that had won the election in the second district of the state of Oaxaca, was not allowed to take office and, as a result, on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, committed suicide. According to historian Benjamin T. Smith (2009, 266), the electoral college denied a seat in Congress to Meixueiro because “although [president] Ávila Camacho initially let Meixueiro stand as the official [i.e. PRI] candidate, he was reluctant to allow the governor [of Oaxaca] exclusive control of yet another area of the state. Days before the election he switched government support to Leopoldo Gatica Neri [...]”

The president’s control over the state’s budget allowed him to divert, legally (for example, with the electoral reform of 1977 all parties had access to subsidized postal services) and illegally, monetary resources to the PRI sectors and the PRI state and municipal committees, thereby creating an enormous dependence of the party organization to the presidential decisions (cf. Rodríguez and Ward 1994, 167). An extremely high percentage of the state’s income was in the hands of the federal bureaucracy (specifically, in the Secretary of the Treasury): by the early 1950s this bureaucracy controlled 78.5% of the budget, by the mid-1960s it controlled 83.8% of the total governmental income and by the late 1970s it controlled an exorbitant 90.7% of the state’s budget (data from Almada 1982, 79). The federal government was, thus, the only source capable of maintaining the high levels of financial squandering that the PRI needed in order to buy votes and reward loyal voters with private goods –these resources allowed the dominant party to fulfill the task of obtaining high percentages of votes in every election because voters had no real incentive to vote for opposition parties that would had excluded them from the PRI’s spoil system (cf. Greene

\textsuperscript{23}Congress became an electoral college during the month of August of an election year. The main duty of the electoral college was to certify congressional and presidential elections.
2007). The state’s bureaucracy not only transferred pecuniary resources to the party, it also lowered the costs of services and products for the party’s militants and allowed the different social organizations within the PRI to obtain economic benefits through their participation in state-owned enterprises (for example, the oil workers union was allowed to subcontract 50% of all oil drilling contracts and to collect a 2% commission for “social works” from all outside contractors, cf. Story 1986, 89).

2.1.2 The autonomy of the hegemonic party: local Priístas and governors

Despite the enormous control that the bureaucracy exerted over the dominant party and its politicians, the latter had some important niches of autonomy, specifically at the local level: it was impossible for the federal bureaucracy to attend the numerous demands coming from the localities. Bureaucrats delegated many responsibilities to the states’ governors and, through them, to the local PRI apparatus. The governors were in charge of keeping political and social stability in each of the country’s thirty-one states. To fulfill these duties, the president gave the governors a free hand to negotiate local policies with important social groups (e.g. businessmen, the Church, workers) and to select politicians for almost all local posts (the sole exception was, perhaps, each governor’s successor). This autonomy gave the governors extensive control over the states’ governmental apparatuses, local legislatures, the states’ municipalities and the PRI’s state committees (Hernández Rodríguez 2003, 797).

Furthermore, unlike the federal government, at the state level there was no real differentiation between those politicians concerned with party affairs and those in charge of the local bureaucratic structure. Local politicians who did not want to continue their careers in the federal administration had to rely on the directive organs of the local PRI (which were controlled by personnel appointed by the governors) to find placements in different local institutions, from deputyships in local congresses to administrative posts in states’ universities. Furthermore, if the local politician finished her term in an elective local post or if she decided to quit a job in the local bureaucracy—a common practice every time a new governor came in and replaced the local bureaucratic apparatus with his own allies—, she
was able to work for the PRI in its municipal party committees. The main distinctiveness of those local politicians with careers only at the local level was, in fact, their loyalty to the party organization and a particular despise of the federal bureaucrats.

The particularities of local Prísta politicians explain why, in a context of greater electoral competitiveness in the 1990s, they would oppose the president’s meddling over on local party matters such as the selection of candidates for local elections. These politicians knew that the candidates selected by the president were unknown in the localities (from time to time bureaucrats from the federal administration) and, therefore, that they had no chance of winning against stronger and more appealing opposition candidates. For example, in 1989 the PRI lost for the first time a governorship (the one corresponding to the state of Baja California Norte). Local Prístas accused the federal bureaucrats of purposely selecting a weak candidate to concede the election to the Partido Acci´on Nacional (the longtime conservative challenger of the PRI). A local leader of one of the PRI’s sectors claimed that “it was all premeditated” and that the “center [had committed] a great stupidity, handing over power to the opposition...[What the president and his bureaucrats had done amounted to saying that] in the name of modernity, strategies and principles should change, and the Church should be handed over to Luther” (quoted in Bruhn 1996, 276) and many more were calling Luis Donaldo Colosio, the president of the PRI’s CEN, a “traitor” and were asking the federal bureaucrats to “stop helping us”, while the imposed candidate, Margarita Ortega, was accepting her loss against the PAN (Proceso 1989). After the elections, Bajacalifornian Prístas even threatened to create a new party to oppose the bureaucrats’ imposition of candidates on the local PRI. Besides opposing the bureaucrats’ decisions in local elections, these and many more party politicians from other states would also oppose the decisions of presidents Salinas and Zedillo regarding the negotiation of electoral reforms with the PAN and the PRD.
3 The PRI reforms

-“José, what is what I have to do to make sure that the party works well?”-
-“Mr. President, with all due respect, for the party to work well just leave it alone. In the PRI the telephone rings very often and it is always you calling, Mr. President. Just give the party the opportunity to walk by itself!”-

Conversation between Mexico’s president, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, and the PRI’s General Secretary, José Gómez Esparza.

In the 1980s, Mexico’s authoritarians faced two important challenges that negatively affected the relationship between the bureaucrats and the party politicians. First, the 1980s were a period of increasing levels of electoral competitiveness in Mexico. Votes for the PRI had been constantly diminishing since the end of the 1970s due to a variety of factors: the presence of stronger opposition parties, the 1977 electoral reform, and the willingness of the electorate to punish the party after a decade of bad economic performance. According to the official count, only half of the population had voted for the dominant party. Without a supermajority of seats in congress, the bureaucracy could not rely solely on the PRI to control institutional change to their advantage. Therefore, after 1988, they had to negotiate with the PAN (and less so with the PRD) for support of economic policies in return for electoral reforms that substantially benefited these opposition parties.

The economic crisis that started in 1982 was another challenge faced by Mexico’s authoritarians. The bureaucrats turned abruptly from a highly protectionist and interventionist model to a model that emphasized market rather than state coordination, free trade, and international competitiveness. The implementation of this economic model clashed with the interests of the PRI sectors (mainly the labor sector), debilitating the capacity of the party to deliver votes from those citizens belonging to any of these groups. For example, after several decades of constant growth, during De la Madrid’s rule (1982-1988) real manufacturing wages were reduced by almost 40% and the government reduced subsidies on the prices of several goods that were important components of workers’ and peasants’ consumption. With the economic reforms in place, the 1980s marked the beginning of a
decline in the effectiveness of the PRI’s capacity to administer a punishment regime (cf. Magaloni 2006). The president and his bureaucrats no longer wanted to win workers’ and peasants’ support with concessions that would protect them from the market. Rather, they wanted to impose “market discipline” on these groups by relinquishing budgetary resources to the PRI’s sectors and by nominating candidates for local elections that did not identify with the sectors’ policy preferences.

It is interesting to notice that the imposition of “market discipline” had already put enormous stress on the cohesiveness of the authoritarian coalition. In the mid-1980s a faction of the PRI, the “Corriente Democrática” (Democratic Current), led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (governor of the state of Michoacán from 1980 to 1986), left the dominant party after an unsuccessful attempt to reform the party statutes to allow for the selection of candidates—in particular, the presidential candidate—via party primaries\(^24\). Party primaries would have allowed local Prístas to challenge the bureaucrats’ decisions over the party, its strategies in municipal, state and national elections and, overall, the policies that got implemented during those years. Primaries, in sum, were a step towards “fusing” the infrastructural and despotic powers of the dominant party regime. According to Cárdenas, “[the goal of the Corriente Democrática] was to force party leaders to accept primaries to nominate PRI candidates for local elections, state governorships and the nation’s executive power. However, the bureaucrats were really scared that this move would had allowed other PRI ‘groups’ to come to power to challenge their policies […] Primaries did not put in danger the regime; rather, they would had reinforced the party at the local level”\(^25\).

Cárdenas, a disgruntled party man (he did not have the career pattern of the typical

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\(^{24}\) In the 1940s and early 1950s the PRI had used party primaries at the local level. This candidate selection strategy, however, had produced too much internal strife and elite divisiveness. The historian Paul Gillingham (2014, 154) provides numerous examples of the latter: “during Coatepec’s [a municipality in the state of Veracruz] 1949 municipal primary, Elías Forzan, ‘seeing himself lost’, had the ballot boxes stolen by a gang armed with knives and clubs. He then won. When primaries were close enough to end in […] open, delegitimizing fraud, the losers often seceded and ran against the party in the ensuing constitutional elections”.

\(^{25}\) Interview with the author. Mexico City, Mexico. March 2014.
bureaucrat\textsuperscript{26}, ended up creating one of Mexico’s main opposition parties, the leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática. Similarly, those politicians that remained within the PRI would decide that, to oppose president Salinas’ and president Zedillo’s economic and political decisions (which were severely impairing the capacity of the party to win votes in the 1990s), they would have to reform the party organization against the bureaucrats’ desires.

3.1 The XIV National Assembly

The PRI had been monotonically losing votes since the early 1960s\textsuperscript{27} (cf. Molinar Horcasitas 1991, 158-170). The elections of 1988, however, were a shock for the authoritarian ruling coalition: compared to 1982 (the previous presidential election year), when the PRI obtained 69.2\% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies, in 1988 –despite the alleged fraud on Election Day– this percentage had decreased by 20\%. For the president and his bureaucrats the main reason for the electoral losses of the dominant party were not to be found in the country’s poor economic performance during De la Madrid’s presidential term nor by the appeal of the PRI’s main challenger in the presidential election, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Rather, the bureaucrats blamed the three sectors of the PRI for their inability to mobilize the electorate in urban areas (cf. Hernández Rodríguez 1998, 80 and Langston 2001, 496) or their explicit support for opposition candidates (this was the case of the powerful leader of the oil workers union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, who explicitly supported Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas during the presidential election). With this in mind, the bureaucrats decided to reform the party, diluting the power of the sectors within the PRI and delegating most of the voter mobilization responsibilities of the party and the capacity to nominate its candidates to the PRI’s territorial structure (i.e. the party committees), in control of the governors. This move would turn out to be really important for the unraveling of the authoritarian winning

\textsuperscript{26}Cárdenas never had a post in the top echelons of the federal administration. He, instead, had a mixed “electoral and party” career: president of the “Technical Consulting Board” of the PRI’s peasant sector in the late 1960s, senator for the state of Michoacán in the late 1970s, and governor for that state in the early 1980s.

\textsuperscript{27}The only exception to this trend was the year of 1976, when the main opposition party, the PAN, decided to not compete in the presidential election and in various electoral districts for the congressional election. In that year the PRI officially got 85.4\% of the votes for the lower house of Congress.
coalition: party politicians would soon stop complying with presidential orders.

It is true that, with the exception of the peasant sector of the PRI which did not have candidates in urban areas, the other two sectors of the party had a poor performance in big and small cities alike (for a detailed analysis cf. Pacheco 1991b). However, behind the bureaucrats' blaming of the party sectors was the intention to weaken the politicians in these organizations who could have opposed the economic and political projects (e.g. the privatization of state companies, the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], etc.) of the newly elected president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. In fact, the president of the PRI at the time, Luis Donaldo Colosio, stated that it was necessary to reform the PRI, “[adjusting it] to the social and political changes [occurring in the country]. [What was] needed was a party of citizens [rather than sectors], with activists and social movements capable of formulating policies with autonomy from [and not dependent on] the State; a party that can accept the reforms to the Revolution [and a new] liberal-social party program” (quoted in Salinas de Gortari 2000, 774; emphasis added). Colosio’s suggestions breached the implicit pact between the bureaucrats –the despots– and party men: the neoliberal’s agrarian reform would limit the capacity of party brokers to mobilize the electorate in rural areas; many workers would lose their jobs with the privatization of state companies, etc. The sectors were annoyed and they expressed their anger in public: a) the workers’ sector argued that “they were going to build a barrier to oppose all those who [...] oppose the revolutionary exercise of power. [...] We are not going to let those persons that favor individualism to take the power of the State [...]”, b) while the peasant sector argued that “we want a country with a just income distribution [...]. We want a society that redistributes land once and for all” (both quoted in Proceso 1990). Their anger was to no avail, the PRI was soon to be reformed (but with unexpected consequences).

The PRI reforms would take place in the Summer of 1990, during the party’s XIV National Assembly

the sectors in the party was to issue a *Convocatoria* that biased the number of delegates that attended the Assembly sessions in favor of those coming from the territorial structure of the PRI (around 77% of the delegates attending the Assembly had been selected in local assemblies organized by the PRI’s municipal and state committees, cf. Langston 2001, 498, n. 30). The second step was to allure these delegates to amend the party statutes in order to take away the power of the sectors in the directive and collegiate organs of the party (e.g. from then on, at least half of the delegates attending any party assembly should come from the territorial structure of the PRI) as well as prohibiting the “collective affiliation” of members via unions (in control of the workers’ and popular sectors), ejidos (in control of the peasant sector) or the like. The bureaucrats offered the Assembly delegates, thus, the possibility to select party leaders and candidates via “the secret vote of the militant base” (Salinas de Gortari 2000, 772). As a result of this offer, the most important change to the party statutes came by: the creation of a new body, the Consejo Político Nacional (CPN) which at the end of the Assembly was vested with the authority to select the party’s presidential candidate and with the power to decide those cases in which the “the vote of the militant base” would not apply (in these cases the CPN would choose the procedures for selecting the party candidates). The CPN was important because it brought in the governors –persons who, up until then, had not had any formal role in the directive organs of the dominant party.

One important event occurred during the Assembly sessions that showed how the governors would become the principal forces resisting the bureaucrats meddling in party matters. After asserting control of the CPN, the governors and their local delegates *rebelled* against the president by proposing numerous party reforms that went well beyond from what Salinas de Gortari and his close ally, Colosio (the PRI’s president), had in mind. The “territorial structure” delegates –loyal to the governors– proposed to to eliminate from any future convention or assembly those delegates designated by the party’s CEN and, more important, the suggested that any future party leader or candidate (including those running
for the country’s executive office) should be a party militant for at least five years and ought to have experience in a party committee. With these modifications the governors and local Priístas were trying to “fuse”, within a sole organization under the control of party men –the PRI–, the despotic and infrastructural powers of a languid authoritarian regime.

Salinas de Gortari’s audacious economic and political reforms allowed him to maintain a hold over the party until the end of his tenure in office. Despite the important modifications to the party statutes during the XIV National Assembly, the bureaucrats, thus, circumvented most statutory changes and continued appointing party candidates and party leaders; a clear evidence of the latter was Salinas de Gortari’s “dedazo” of Colosio at the end of 1993 (for a detailed account of this “dedazo” cf. Salinas de Gortari 2000, ch. 25). Things changed as soon as the new president, Ernesto Zedillo²⁹, took office.

3.2 The XVII National Assembly

In February of 1995, a couple of months after taking office, the new elected president, Ernesto Zedillo, declared that his government would keep a “healthy distance” with the PRI (quoted in Reforma 1995). According to Zedillo, this “healthy distance” was necessary to “strengthen the country’s new democracy” (ibid.) and that, given this, it was necessary for the PRI to stop getting “any privileges outside the law” (e.g. not illegal financing and economic benefits to the party’s sectors or committees). However, Zedillo also asked the party to provide “reasonable support to the president of the Republic” (quoted in Hernández Rodríguez 1998, 88). Bothered by Zedillo’s contradictory statements, the governors and local Priístas would decide to end, once and for all, the president’s hold over the party. They would do this in during the sessions of the PRI’s XVII National Assembly³⁰.

It was obvious that Zedillo –as many other bureaucrats at the time– despised some groups within the PRI that were putting at risk his attempts to solve huge macroeconomic problems after the Peso Crisis of 1995 or who were unwilling –after social unrest that affected the

²⁹Zedillo replaced Colosio after the assassination of the latter in March of 1994.
stability of the respective localities—to cede power to the PAN or the PRD in contested local elections (e.g. PRI governors like Roberto Madrazo, Manuel Bartlett or Víctor Cervera Pacheco). Given this, Zedillo believed that, in order to achieve many of his desired reforms, cooperation with opposition parties was a good strategy to sidestep these PRI groups and their refusal to support some of his policies. In exchange for the PAN and the PRD support in Congress, Zedillo was willing to negotiate “an electoral reform that would end the privileged position of my party in electoral matters”\(^{31}\). Party politicians thought, therefore, that Zedillo and his cronies in the bureaucracy were betraying the PRI. The statement of a notable party leader—Fidel Velázquez Sánchez, the leader of the workers’ sector—confirm this:

> Even though our comrade won [an election in Mexico City] against [the PRD], Porfirio Muñoz Ledo [the PRD candidate] was elected without having a majority [of votes]. […] We do not want this kind of things to happen, if it happens again the labor [sector] will distance itself from the PRI and will stop cooperating with this organization. […] The labor movement commits itself [to give the PRI] eight million votes [in future elections], but only if the proposals of the CTM [the workers’ confederation] are taken into consideration in the PRI’s XVII National Assembly. (quoted in Reforma 1996a)

The PRI’s XVII National Assembly was held in September 1996. Surveys taken a few months earlier among the leaders of the party’s state committees and other core militant members showed that they identified three main problems that required a prompt solution during the Assembly sessions: 1) the interference of the national leaders (the bureaucrats) in the nomination of candidates, 2) economic policy, and 3) the tolerance shown by the president and his followers towards the opposition (Hernández Rodríguez 1998, 90). All of these three problems were related to the president’s capacity to control the party without being accountable to party men. The drafts of the new party statutes and the new Declaration of Principles were distributed—for discussion in district and state assemblies—two months before the National Assembly. The drafts showed that the governors and local party apparatuses were going to recover many decision making powers that the president had had in his hands since the creation of the dominant party in the late 1920s; for example:

\(^{31}\)Interview with the author. New Haven, CT. March 6, 2006.
1. The CPN and the party’s Commission of Honor and Justice (CHJ) were going to decide who could become a party candidate for any electoral post. The CHJ would be responsible of “validating the party work registered in [a prospective candidate’s] party ID card [. . .] and checking if [he or she] has paid all [his or her] party quotas” and the CPN would be responsible of “evaluating the [‘Revolutionary’] qualities [of the prospective candidates] and selecting up to five [of them]” (quoted in Reforma 1996d, emphases added)

2. Anyone wishing to become a presidential candidate would require to have at least five years as a party militant and should have experience in a directive organ of the PRI or an electoral post (cf. Reforma 1996b)

3. The concept of “social-liberalism” (added by Salinas de Gortari to the PRI’s documents as an ideological justification for his neoliberal project) was dropped from the Declaration of Principles (cf Reforma 1996c)

The proposed changes eliminated many members in the cabinet from becoming presidential hopefuls. For example Juan Ramón de la Fuente (Health Minister) or Julia Carabias (Water Resources and Fisheries Minister) were not party militants; Miguel Limón (Education Minister), Luis Téllez (Head of the Presidency’s Office), Carlos Ruiz Sacristán (Communications and Transportation Minister) were “dubious” PRI militants or did not have previous electoral experience. The president was losing the “dedazo” capacity that had previously provided incentives for authoritarian collective action. The authoritarian coalition was unraveling.

The governors made sure to issue a Convocatoria that favored the attendance of delegates loyal to them (Langston 2001, 506). These delegates voted in favor of keeping most of the changes contained in the drafts distributed to the local assemblies in July (e.g. dropping the concept of “social liberalism” from the Declaration of Principles). However, they proposed additional changes which were unexpected by president Zedillo and his collaborators within the party. First, the CPN—in control of the governors after the XIV National Assembly—became the most important party organ (replacing the National Assemblies), in charge of selecting the party’s main leaders (i.e. the president of the CEN and the general secretary) and the use of the party’s monies. Second, a new “Ethics Code” stated that any “PRI member” (including the president) that “surrenders a legitimate PRI win to another political [party]” (a practice known as “concertacesión”, used by Salinas de Gortari to obtain support
from opposition parties in Congress) would be expelled from the party (cf. Reforma 1996e).

Finally, although the July statutes’ draft stated that anyone wishing to become a party candidate could either have previous experience in a party post (e.g. a party committee) or an electoral post, the delegates changed the or for an and (cf. Reforma 1996f) and created an insurmountable obstacle for almost all the bureaucrats in the cabinet (recall, from Figure 1 that more than 70% of Zedillo’s cabinet members had pure bureaucratic careers). One thing to notice is that this reform proposal was the initiative of delegates from the state of Tabasco (Proceso 1996); this delegation was controlled by Roberto Madrazo, a hard-core party man, Tabasco’s governor at the time and, above all, annoyed with president Zedillo because of his intentions to make Madrazo relinquish the governorship after an alleged fraudulent election in 1994. The debate regarding this issue during the Assembly’s plenary session is notable because it shows that disgruntled party men wanted to end the dominance of the president over the party:

[The CEN’s president,] Santiago Oñate asked [senator Eduardo] Andrade to defend the idea that the or should stay [in the statutes] instead of the and. […] When it was Andrade’s turn [to speak in front of all the delegates] he followed Oñate’s instructions. He tried to defend the or but the Assembly jeered at him, hissed and did not let him talk. […] In his attempt to convince the Assembly he argued “we do not want to send the wrong message, [this] could be interpreted as if we were breaking up [relations] with the president”. [After saying this] the secretary [of the debate table] told him that his time was over. “Go away! Go away!” screamed all the assemblymen […] Andrade did not want to leave the auditorium but the secretary switched the sound off. (Loc. cit.)

After the XVII National Assembly local Priístas were able to get rid of the president’s hold on the national party. The governors were the real winners of these organizational changes (and continue to be). Since the Assembly, they have controlled the party organization in their respective states and, given that they administer both infrastructural and despotic powers at the local level, they had been able to impose important niches of authoritarian rule at the local level. As Edward Gibson has noticed (2013, 118-119; emphases added):
[The governors] lost their partisan ties to the center but gained new means for insulating themselves from national competitive trends. [...]. In the new decentered context of Mexican territorial politics, a dramatic redistribution of power occurred within the PRI: the party of the president became the party of the governors. A territorial power structure that had run vertically from presidents to subnational politicians was replaced by a horizontal power structure linking governors across state parties. The powers to decide national party policy and advance politicians’ careers flowed to this network of governors. [...]. [The PRI’s] influence on national policy became increasingly a product of gubernatorial collective action.

With their control of infrastructural and despotic powers, PRI politicians have been able to retake power in numerous localities or, more important, maintain their hold on power in many states since 1929. To end this section, the map in Figure 2 shows the states where the PRI has not lost an election in more than eight decades\(^{32}\).

[FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE]

4 Final Remarks

Mexico’s authoritarian regime had several characteristics that differentiated it from dominant party autocracies where the despotic and infrastructural powers are “fused” under a single organization. In Mexico—and in other autocracies listed in Table 1—, first and foremost, party politicians were not the ones making decisions within the regime. This fact is somewhat surprising because most scholars have classified Mexico’s politics during the Twentieth Century as dominated by a hegemonic party and a salient elite of party politicians. Of course the PRI was a very important organization that maintained political and social stability, mobilized votes and produced legitimacy for the authoritarians. But this organization was under the auspices and control of the bureaucrats. Therefore, Mexico’s authoritarian bureaucracy, staffed by politicians that were not fully identified with the PRI, must not be underestimated in the analysis of this country’s long-standing authoritarian regime.

The somewhat surprising character of Mexico’s authoritarian regime can be explained by taking into consideration the different roles that both the bureaucracy and the party played:

\(^{32}\)Data come from CNN México (ly 6). The article was written before the PRI lost the state of Tabasco against the PRD in 2012. The map already displays this information.
the former was in charge of managing the regime’s despotic power and the latter controlled the regime’s infrastructural power. This role differentiation did not affect regime’s duration because, since 1929, the Mexican authoritarian elite decided to delegate the most important decisions to the “Imperial President.” Alas, it affected the regime durability, that is, its ability to stand crises such as the Debt Crisis of the 1980s or the exist of disgruntled Pri´ıstas from the party in 1987. The “hold-up” problem was always latent and nothing assured that one day the president and his bureaucratic cronies will relinquish their deal with the rest of the authoritarian elite. Under economic and political contextual changes during the 1980s and 1990s, the bureaucrats and the party followed different paths that created problems among them. The bureaucrats, that is, the despots, had to implement different economic policies and negotiate with opposition parties. The PRI and its politicians, the holders of the regime’s infrastructural power, had to win votes under more competitive elections and maintain the control of its sectors. These divergent objectives prompted Pri´ıstas to reform the party in order to block the president’s ability to decide upon nominations and the party strategies in the federal legislature. They were successful, but they were successful too late given that the authoritarian regime was on the brink of disappearing.
Table 1: Single- and Dominant-Party Regimes and Government Type at Regime Inception. 1929-2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Life Span</th>
<th>In Power by 2000?</th>
<th>Government Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guinea Bissau</td>
<td>1960-66</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>1952-64</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>1979-90</td>
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<td>1960-74</td>
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<td>Chad</td>
<td>1960-75</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1975-93</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1957-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* The life span of those regimes in power after 2000 includes years in rule up until 2003.

a. Between 1959 and 1988, Chad’s constitution was revised six times. At independence, in 1960, the constitution established a parliamentary system of government. Revisions in 1962 strengthened the role of the executive.
b. From 1968 up until 1971, Sierra Leone’s system of government was parliamentary. In 1971 a new constitution changed the system of government to presidential.
c. Significant constitutional changes occurred in Zimbabwe in 1987. In particular, the post of prime minister was abolished in favor of an executive president.
e. Tanganyika’s 1961 constitution established a parliamentary system of government. A year later a new constitution changed the system of government to presidential. This system of government remained after Zanzibar and Tanganyika merged to form the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964.
Figure 1: Presidential Cabinets (1946-1997)

** Data for Ernesto Zedillo’s administration do not include the years 1998-2000.
Figure 2: States with PRI Dominance since 1929
References


