

## **Chapter 3**

### **Reversal of Democracy or Decline in Quality? A Preliminary Analysis of Mexico's Democracy at the National and Subnational Levels<sup>1</sup>**

**Yuriko Takahashi**

Faculty of Political Science and Economics  
Waseda University

#### **Abstract:**

There has been an emerging concern that democracies have stagnated, weakened, or even reverted to authoritarianism. What has happened to new democracies in Latin America since the “third-wave” of democratization? Is the recent unfavorable performance of democracies a sign of democratic reversal or decline in quality? Particularly, this concern has arisen in regards to Mexico's democracy, which is faced with widespread corruption and violent crimes. This paper evaluates the recent trajectory of Mexico's democracy at the national and subnational levels. Using the Freedom House Index and the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP) dataset, it shows that (1) democracy declined in Mexico between 2006 and 2015 at the national level, and (2) the quality of democracy significantly varies across the seventeen Mexican states. Overall, Mexico has not experienced the reversal of democracy but the decline in the quality of democracy.

#### **Keywords:**

Democracy, Mexico, Democratic Reversal, the Quality of Democracy, Subnational Level, the 2014 Political-Electoral Reform, Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE)

## Introduction

Nearly forty years have passed since the “third wave” of democratization swept across Latin America (Huntington 1991). Since the late 1970s, many countries in Latin America have shifted from authoritarian to democratic regimes. Although brutally repressive rule was replaced by popularly elected governments in the region, it is claimed that conditions assuring free and competitive elections have not fully materialized. Specifically, freedom of expression has been restricted, political rights of certain societal groups have been infringed, and the rule of law has been insufficiently enforced in many parts of the region (O’Donnell 1998). Mexico is not an exception. In Mexico particularly, the corruption of public officials and political intervention of organized crime are rampant, stemming from weak enforcement of the rule of law. Combating corruption and assuring public security are perceived as high priority issues among Mexican citizens (Romero, Parás, and Zechmeister 2015).

The failure of these new democracies to fully materialize has drawn scholarly attention. A debate has revolved around as to whether these phenomena should be understood as the reversal of democracy and a reversion to authoritarianism (Diamond 2008), as decline in the quality of democracy (Diamond 2015), or as a simple myth not based in reality (Levitsky and Way 2015). As is discussed in more detail later, all three arguments overlook subnational variations in the state of democracy. In particular, larger Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, have a remarkable regional variation in their economic and political landscapes. As Edward Gibson succinctly argues, subnational authoritarianism coexists with democracies at the national level (Gibson 2005, 2012). Thus, before presenting an overall evaluation of the current state of democracy in Latin America, further effort should be made to identify and carefully describe any subnational variation.

What is the state of democracy in Mexico? What do the terms “reversal of democracy” and “quality of democracy” mean? What is the nature of the subnational variation in the state of democracy across Mexico? How can this variation be measured? By addressing these questions, this study attempts to provide a preliminary analysis of Mexican democracy. Specifically, by using Freedom House scores and an expert survey of perceptions of electoral integrity in Mexico (Norris et al. 2015), it evaluates temporal change in the quality of democracy at the national level, and cross-sectional variation at the subnational level according to five procedural dimensions of democracy, which were proposed by Levine and Molina (2011). The descriptive statistics demonstrate that (1) democracy declined in Mexico between 2006 and 2015 at the national level, and (2) the

quality of democracy significantly varies across the seventeen Mexican states.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. The first section presents the recent arguments concerning democratic reversal or decline of democracy in Latin America, and then claims that Mexico is experiencing the problem of a decline in the quality of democracy, not a reversal of democracy. The second section discusses the quality of democracy and presents distinctive perspectives on conceptualization and operationalization. The third section compares the seventeen Mexican states in regard to five dimensions of the quality of democracy. The fourth section briefly explains the Political-Electoral Reform of 2014 and discusses its implications for the quality of democracy in Mexico. The final section concludes with suggestions for further research.

## **I. Debates on Democracy in Latin America: Democratic Reversal or Decline**

Before evaluating the state of democracy, this section presents the recent debates on democracy in Latin America. There has been a growing concern over the stagnation of democratization and weakening of existing democracies in the region. This section first presents distinctive claims of the current state of democracy in Latin America, and then evaluates the Mexican democracy from a comparative perspective.

### **1. The State of Democracy in Latin America**

There seems to exist a scholarly consensus that Latin America has entered to a period of "democratic recession" (Levitsky and Way 2015, 45, emphasis in original) since the "third wave" of democratization swept across the world in the 1970s (Huntington 1991). At the turn of the century, optimism started to fade, and the progress and persistence of democracy began to be doubted. With the end of the optimism surrounding democracy, a debate has emerged concerning whether democracy is faced with a reversal and a reversion to authoritarianism (Diamond 2008), if the quality of democracy is in decline (Diamond 2015), or if this pessimism is a simple myth (Levitsky and Way 2015). In particular, the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of the *Journal of Democracy* published in 2015 addressed the question of "Is Democracy in Decline?" epitomizing the changing perceptions of democracy (Plattner 2015, 6).

Which of these three claims is more relevant to democracy in Latin America? First, the advocates of democratic reversal claim that emerging democracies have failed to effectively solve problems of governance, including corruption, crime, inequality, low economic growth, lack of freedom, and a weak rule of law (Diamond 2008, 37).

Consequently, people have lost confidence in their democratically elected governments and have supported the revival of authoritarian leaders (Diamond 2008, 37). According to Larry Diamond, the recent reversals of democracy in Nigeria, Russia, and Venezuela have followed this pattern (Diamond 2008, 36).

Second, there is an argument that around 2006, democracy ceased expanding and entered a phase of recession (Diamond 2015, 144). More specifically, Larry Diamond explains the recession has stemmed from the "accelerating rate of democratic breakdown," a decline in the quality of democracy in several "large and strategically important emerging-market countries," such as Russia, the strengthening of authoritarianism in those emerging countries, poor democratic performance, and decreased interest in promoting democracy abroad by advanced democracies (Diamond 2015, 144).

Third, there is an argument that the recession of democracy is a myth (Levitsky and Way 2015). Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way compare the average democracy scores measured by four indices (Freedom House, Polity IV, Economic Intelligence Unit, and Bertelsmann Index) and demonstrate that the claim of democratic recession is not supported by the evidence. More specifically, the mean democracy scores published by Freedom House and Polity IV increased between 2000 and 2013, which suggests that the world is more democratic in 2013 than it was in 2000 (Levitsky and Way 2015, 46). They argue that the misperception that democracy is in recession is attributable to the fact that an unrealistic and excessive optimism concerning the fate of democracy prevailed in the early post-Cold War period, when a widespread transition to democracy occurred (Levitsky and Way 2015, 45).

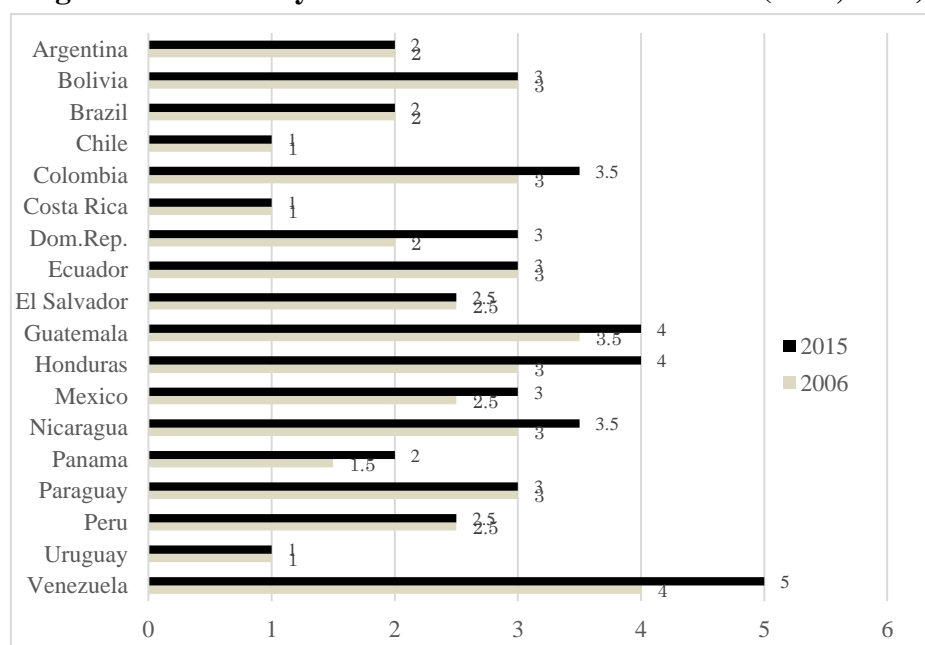
While these arguments analyze global trends in democracy, these three patterns – democratic reversal, recession or decline, and stability – seem to coexist in Latin America. Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán argue that it is not reasonable to claim that "democracy is *broadly* eroding in Latin America" (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2015, 114, emphasis in original). Accordingly, there is a mixed record of democratization in the region: democratic breakdown and reversal have been observed in Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela; democracy has declined in Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, and Paraguay; and democracy has been stable in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2015, 116-121). This last group of stable democracies can be further classified into two groups: "stable democracies with shortcomings" (Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama,

and Peru) and "high-quality democracies" (Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay) (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2015, 121-122).

This classification seems to be relevant to the understanding of the state of democracy in Latin America. However, this study was completed in 2013. An updated analysis using the scores in 2015 provides a slightly different picture.

Figure 1 compares the changes of the degree of democracy in eighteen Latin American countries between 2006 and 2015 employing Freedom House scores.<sup>2</sup> The upper bar represents the score for 2015, whereas the lower bar represents the score for 2006 for each country. The values are calculated as an average of the "Political Rights" and "Civil Liberties" scores, which are measured on a scale from one to seven. Lower scores indicate higher degrees of freedom. According to Freedom House, countries with an average value below 2.5 are considered "Free."

**Figure 1. Democracy in 18 Latin American Countries (2006, 2015)**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Freedom House scores.

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>

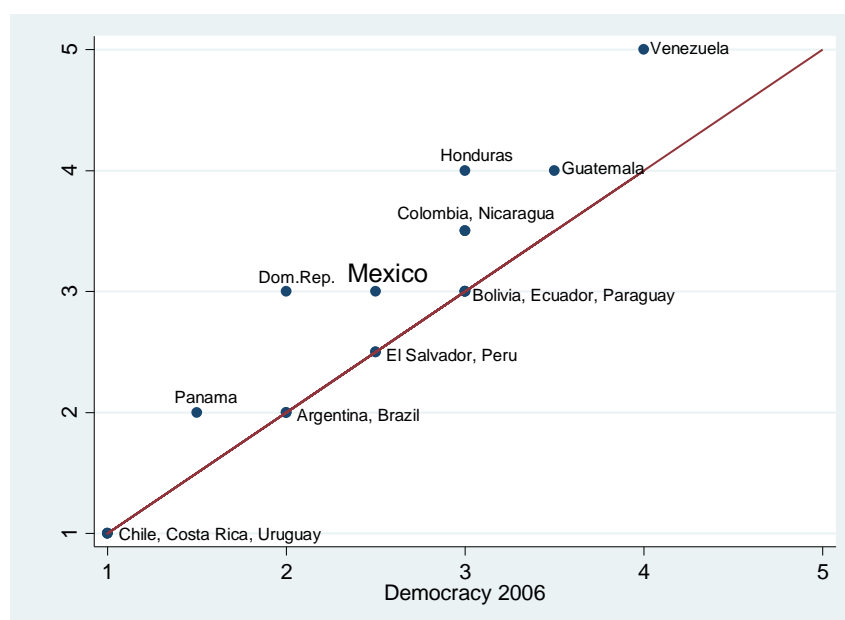
(Accessed on February 9, 2017).

According to this figure, the group countries experiencing democratic reversal (Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela) is associated with low levels of democracy and stability between 2006 and 2016. As for the group of countries in democratic decline (Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, and Paraguay), their democratic levels are lower than that of other Latin American countries. In particular, the levels of

democracy in Colombia and Guatemala declined by 0.5 point between 2006 and 2015. Among the group of democratically stabile countries, "stable democracies with shortcomings" (Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Peru) deserve special attention. These countries are typically associated with moderate levels of democracy. Furthermore, while Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and Peru have retained a stable score between 2006 and 2015, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Panama had levels of democracy that declined by 0.5-1 point during this period.

Figure 2 presents a scatter plot comparing the degree of democracy using the same data presented in Figure 1. It demonstrates that ten out of eighteen countries in Latin American (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay) can be correlated by a 45-degree line, suggesting that they had the same scores for the years 2006 and 2015 and thus, the degree of democracy did not change during this period. On the other hand, eight out of eighteen countries (Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Venezuela) have scores above the 45-degree line, which means that democracy in these countries weakened during this period.

**Figure 2. Comparison of Democracy between 2006 and 2015**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Freedom House scores.

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>

(Accessed on February 9, 2017).

Taken together, these findings suggest that between 2006 and 2015, democracy declined in more countries than were suggested by Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2015), regardless of their level of democracy.

## **2. The Decline in Democracy in Mexico**

The above analysis shows that Mexico can be included in a group of "democratic stability," however the recent decline in democracy is noteworthy. The trajectory of democratization in Mexico suggests that it would be reasonable to claim that the country has experienced a decline in democracy over the past decade.

Mexico made the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime in 2000 when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*: PRI) lost the presidential election and conceded power to the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*: PAN). Democratization in Mexico took the form of a gradual transition from a single-party dominant system, which ruled the country for seventy-one years, to a multiparty system. Since the 1970s, the PRI has gradually provided a space for political participation and party competition by implementing political and electoral reform toward free and fair elections.

After the historical shift in power in 2000, the first PAN government implemented a series of democratic reforms, such as introducing the freedom of information law in 2002<sup>3</sup> strengthening the function of oversight agencies, and regulating social policies to prevent discretionary allocation of social spending for vote-buying purposes. Despite these efforts, however, the second PAN administration, which began in 2006, lost popular confidence because of widespread corruption among public officials, electoral irregularities in local elections, and rising security concerns stemming from weak rule of law and criminal violence. Since then, there has been a growing concern over the decline of democracy in Mexico.

In this regard, Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán note the following: "We are not convinced that democracy has declined sharply enough in Mexico since 2002 to make it a case of national-level erosion -- although there is no question that democracy has been hollowed out in many parts of the country that are riddled with violence and corruption" (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2015, 116). The next section presents debates on the quality of democracy. After discussing different ways of conceptualizing and measuring the quality of democracy, the need to analyze the quality of democracy on the subnational level will be highlighted.

## **II. The Quality of Democracy: Concepts and Measurements**

### **1. Conceptualizing the Quality of Democracy**

Since the "third wave" of democratization swept across the world, attention has been shifted to exploring the conditions that foster the endurance and a higher quality of emerging democracies.<sup>4</sup> Without high-quality democracy, citizens will not be satisfied with newly elected governments, support for the new governments will decrease, and there will be a greater probability of authoritarian alternatives taking control. Thus, to avoid the threat of a reversion to authoritarianism and to legitimize democratic governments, improving the quality of democracy has become a high-priority issue for emerging countries. Accordingly, it is assumed that a high-quality democracy contributes to enduring democracies.

A question which follows is how the "quality of democracy" is defined. A debate has revolved around which dimensions of democracy should be used to assess its quality. Previous works agree on the procedural definition of democracy, referring to the influential work on polyarchy by Robert A. Dahl. Dahl defines polyarchy as a political order with broad citizenship and the rights of citizenship to oppose the government, which is as assured by the following seven institutions: "elected officials," "free and fair institutions," "inclusive suffrage," "right to run for office," "freedom of expression," "alternative information," and "associational autonomy" (Dahl 1989, 220-221). Despite the agreement on the definition of democracy, previous works diverge in regard to the definition of "quality."<sup>5</sup>

Diamond and Morlino (2005) and Morlino et al. (2016) define a "quality democracy" as "one that provides its citizens a high degree of freedom, political equality, and popular control over public policies and policy makers through the legitimate and lawful functioning of stable institutions" (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xi). This suggests that the meaning of quality is captured in terms of procedure, content (substance), and result. Following this understanding, they identify eight dimensions to assess the quality of democracy: five procedural dimensions (the rule of law, participation, competition, vertical accountability, and horizontal accountability), two substantive dimensions (freedom and equality), and one result dimension (responsiveness) (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xii-xxxi).

On the other hand, Levine and Molina's definition of the quality of democracy is more restrictive than that of Diamond and Morlino, in that their definition is confined to the procedural dimension (Levine and Molina 2011). Strictly following the procedural definition of democracy or polyarchy by Dahl, they highlight the need to



distinguish "between the process by which decisions are made in a democratic regime, which represents the quality of democracy, and the results of these decisions in terms of the well-being of the population" (Levine and Molina 2011, 16). Based on this distinction, they suggest that the quality of democracy should be specified "in terms of the *degree* to which its rankings vary from minimally acceptable to best possible conditions," and provide five empirical dimensions for assessment (electoral decision, participation, responsiveness, accountability, and sovereignty) (Levine and Molina 2011, 7-8, emphasis added).

As Levine and Molina suggest, if policy performances are included in evaluating the quality of democracy, the conceptual distinction between democratic governance and quality may be blurred (Levine and Molina 2011, 15-16). For this reason, this study draws on the definition and conceptualization of democracy and quality suggested by Levine and Molina.

## **2. Measuring the Quality of Democracy<sup>6</sup>**

Levine and Molina construct scores for the quality of democracy, which range from 0 to 100, based on the aforementioned five dimensions: *electoral decision*, *participation*, *accountability*, *responsiveness*, and *sovereignty*. How they utilized the five dimensions to construct an individual score is briefly presented below.

First, *electoral decision* is measured by three elements: (1) the quality of electoral institutions, (2) the degree to which "multiple sources of information" are available and accessible to the public, and (3) the level of political equality operationalized by cognitive resource distribution among citizens. Second, *participation* is calculated as an average of the following components: (1) voter turnout, (2) voting opportunities, (3) the frequency of participation in political organizations, and (4) "representativity by party and gender." Third, *accountability* is a composite index of horizontal accountability, which is measured by the Corruption Perception Index constructed by Transparency International, vertical accountability,<sup>7</sup> and societal accountability, which is defined by the frequency of participation in community activities. Fourth, *responsiveness* is measured by survey data on the "efficacy of the vote." Finally, *sovereignty* measures how much autonomy governments enjoy in terms of economic policy formation and control of the military (Levine and Molina 2011, 21-31).

### 3. The Quality of Democracy at the Subnational Level

As discussed thus far, the conceptualization and measurement of the quality of democracy in previous works can be applied to compare the indices at the national level. As mentioned earlier, however, previous studies have overlooked subnational variation in the quality of democracy despite that fact that larger countries in Latin America, such as Brazil and Mexico, have a remarkable regional variation in their economic and political landscapes.

As Edward Gibson succinctly argues, subnational authoritarianism coexists with democracies at the national level (Gibson 2005, 2012). In particular, Mexico began to decentralize fiscal, administrative, and political authorities from the central to subnational governments (state and municipal governments) in the 1990s in tandem with democratization. Thus, it would be reasonable to suppose that there is subnational variation in the quality of democracy, which is measured by the five dimensions discussed above. In order to explore this understudied issue, the next section examines how the quality of democracy differs across the Mexican states.

### III. The Quality of Democracy in Mexico: A Subnational Analysis

In order to compare the five dimensions of the quality between Mexican states, availability of data is problematic and limited. As the data to create scores according to the procedure presented by Levine and Molina (2011), this study alternatively uses a new dataset titled "The Expert Survey of Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, Mexico Subnational Study 2015" (EIP-Mexico hereafter), which was constructed by Pippa Norris et al. with local collaborators (Norris et al. 2015).<sup>8</sup> Each of the dimensions of the quality of democracy identified by Levine and Molina is matched with a similar index included in the dataset by Norris et al. as follows.

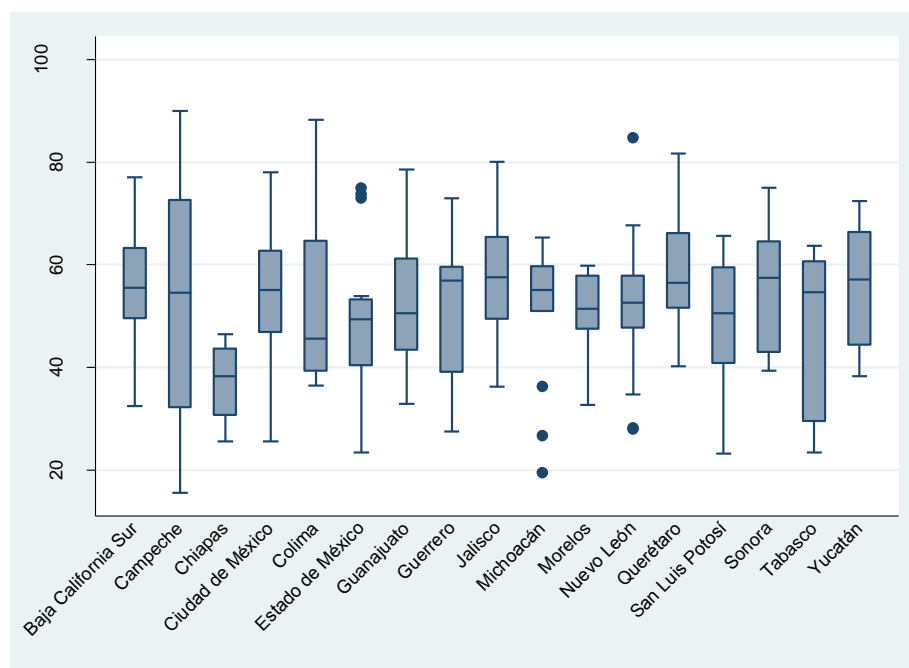
#### 1. Electoral Decision

To create the score of *electoral decision*, Levine and Molina include "the quality of electoral institutions" as one of three aspects. The role of electoral institutions is critical to assure free and fair elections by monitoring and overseeing the electoral process and voting (Levine and Molina 2011, 9). The variable *Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) Index* (individual level imputed) is used in place of *electoral decision*. The PEI index refers to "the overall summary evaluation of expert perceptions that an election meets international standards and global norms," which is measured at the level of

individuals (Norris et al. 2015, 15).<sup>9</sup> Data on the other two aspects – availability of “multiple sources of information” and political equality do not exist on the subnational level. The data were collected for the 17 Mexican states.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 3 presents a box plot that compares the score for the PEI index of the 17 Mexican states, with values ranging from 1 to 100. A higher score indicates a greater degree of *electoral decision*. A bar in boxes represents a median value for each state. Figure 3 shows that the median and variance of the PEI score significantly vary between 17 states in Mexico. In particular, the scores for Campeche and Chiapas are in remarkable contrast. For the state of Campeche, the median is 54.5, and the variance is 501.5. Chiapas has 38.3 for the median, and the variance is 78.8. These findings suggest that the quality of democracy in terms of *electoral decision* is higher in Campeche than in Chiapas, whereas the perception of this dimension of quality diverges to a greater extent within Campeche than within Chiapas.

**Figure 3. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in 17 States of Mexico (2015)**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Norris et al. (2015).

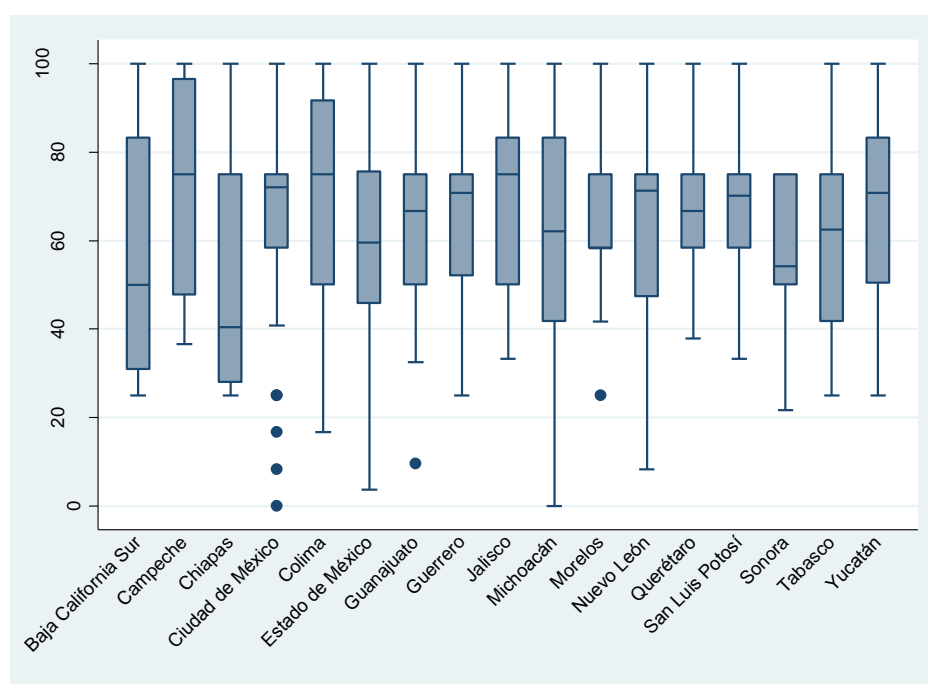
## 2. Participation

For the score of *participation*, Levine and Molina use the data measuring voter turnout, voting opportunities, the frequency of participation in political organizations, and “representativity by party and gender.” This analysis focuses on voting opportunities,

for which data was collected for the PEI-Mexico. Prior to the 2014 Political-Electoral Reform, local elections were organized and administered by local electoral institutions, which suggests that voting opportunities might have been significantly constrained by the performance of local electoral institutions. The variable, *Voter Registration Index* (0-100), is used in place of *participation*. This variable is an additive scale using three variables of inaccuracy in voter registration.<sup>11</sup> The assumption underlying this operationalization is that if voter registration is accurate, the quality of democracy in terms of participation is higher.

Figure 4 shows a box plot with the scores for the *Voter Registration Index* for 17 Mexican states, with values ranging from 1 to 100. A higher score indicates a greater degree of *participation*. Likewise, a bar in boxes represents the median value for each state. Figure 4 demonstrates that the medians and variances of the *Voter Registration* scores significantly vary between the 17 states. Furthermore, while the maximum score for all states is 100, the minimum score varies significantly. This implies that in some states, a portion of population does not trust the performance of local electoral institutions, and thus does not participate in the elections. In summary, the quality of democracy with regard to *participation* is a middle to high level, despite inter-state differences.

Figure 4. Voter Registration in the 17 States of Mexico (2015)

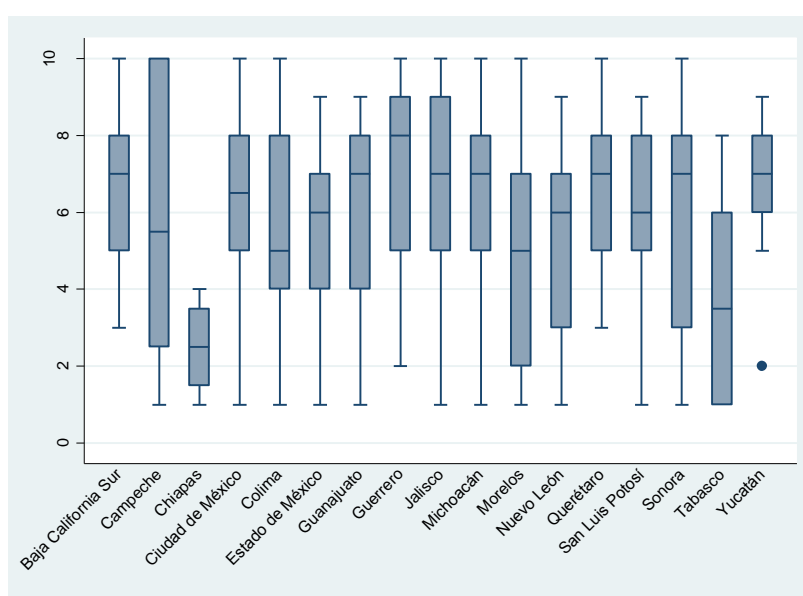


Source: Author's own elaboration based on Norris et al. (2015).

### 3. Accountability

As for *accountability*, Levine and Molina create a composite index of horizontal accountability, which is measured by the Corruption Perception Index constructed by Transparency International, vertical accountability, and societal accountability, which is measured by the frequency of participation in community activities. In place of this index, the variable *Confidence in the Local Election Authorities* is used, because election authorities are considered to be a mechanism of horizontal accountability.<sup>1 2</sup> Due to the lack of data, vertical and societal accountability are not included in the measurement of *accountability* in this analysis. This variable is measured on a point scale, ranging from 1 to 10. A higher score represents greater confidence in local election authorities.

**Figure 5. Confidence in Local Election Authorities in the 17 Mexican States (2015)**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Norris et al. (2015).

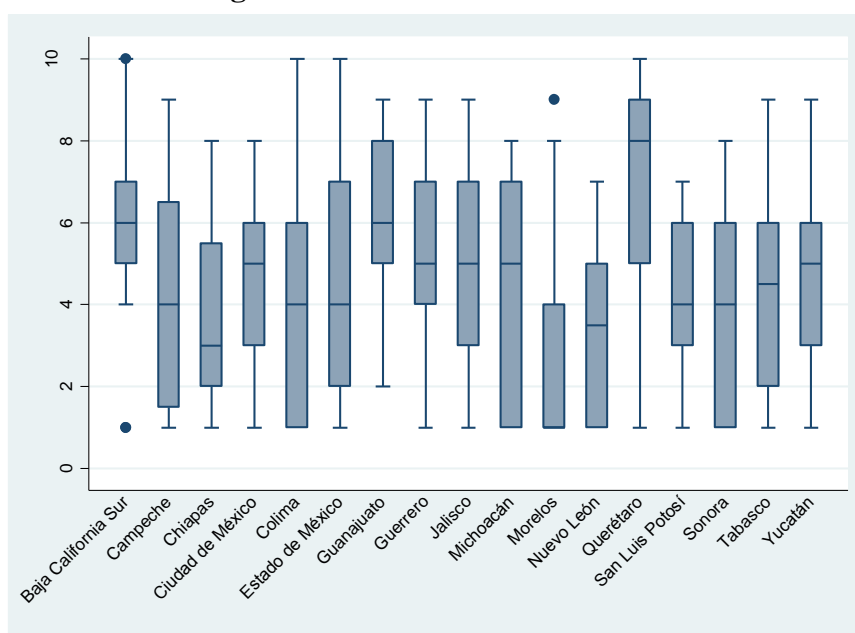
Figure 5 presents a box plot that compares the score for the *Confidence in the Local Election Authorities* index between the 17 Mexican states, with values ranging from 1 to 10. A horizontal bar in each box represents the median value for each state. Figure 5 shows that the medians and variances of the PEI scores significantly vary between the 17 states in Mexico. Similar to *electoral decision* and *participation*, the medians and variances of the Confidence in the Local Election Authorities scores significantly vary between the 17 states. Similar to *electoral decision*, the scores for

Campeche and Chiapas are in remarkable contrast in terms of their median and variance. For the state of Campeche, the median is 5.5, and the variance is 13.1 Chiapas has 1.5 for the median, and the variance is 2.7. In addition, the score for Tabasco is also striking, because the mean value is significantly lower than other states. Except for Campeche, Chiapas, and Tabasco, most of the states show a modest-level of confidence in local election authorities, and the perceptions are not polarized within those states.

#### 4. Responsiveness

For analysis on the subnational level, the variable *Confidence in the Gobernador (Governor)* is employed to create an index for *responsiveness*.<sup>1 3</sup> This variable is measured on a point scale, with values ranging from 1 to 10, for which 1 corresponds to no confidence, and 10 refers to a great deal of confidence. It is assumed that if a respondent has great confidence in the governor, he or she is perceived to be responsive to the respondent. As Figure 6 shows, there is also a variation in the quality of democracy in terms of *responsiveness* between Mexican states. Simultaneously, the median values of confidence are relatively low, except for Querétaro. Furthermore, the distribution of data is skewed toward lower scores. Taken together, the quality of democracy with regard to *responsiveness* remains at a low-mid level, although inter-state variation is clearly identified.

**Figure 6. Confidence in Governors**

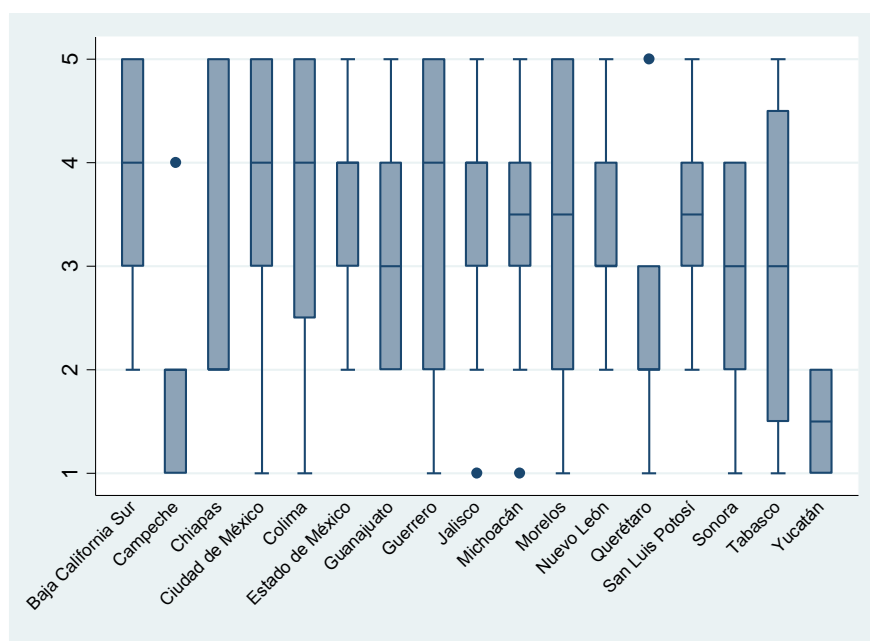


Source: Author's own elaboration based on Norris et al. (2015).

## 5. Sovereignty

According to Levine and Molina, *sovereignty* measures the degree of autonomy that governments have in terms of economic policy formation and control of the military (Levine and Molina 2011, 21-31). In the case of Mexico, rather than the military, organized crime has become a threat to sovereignty and is deeply involved in public authorities. Over the past decade, there has been a growing concern regarding the constraining effect of organized crime on government autonomy. This study uses the variables, *Influence of Organized Crime on Campaign Finance* and *Influence of Organized Crime on Candidate Selection*, to measure the degree of sovereignty.<sup>1 4</sup> Both variables are measured on a five-point scale. A higher value represents the greater influence of organized crime on campaign finance and candidate selection, which results in a low quality of democracy in terms of *sovereignty*.

**Figure 7. Influence of Organized Crime on Campaign Finance in the 17 Mexican States (2015)**

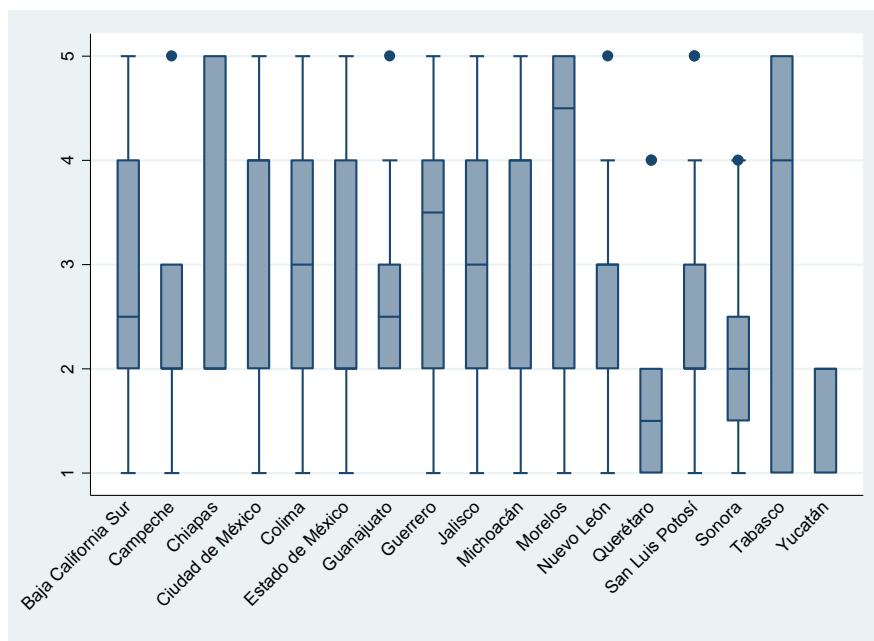


Source: Author's own elaboration based on Norris et al. (2015).

Figures 7 and 8 present striking results. First, judged from medium to high median values, most of the states, except for Campeche and Yucatán, perceive a discernible influence of organized crime on campaign finance. Second, to a lesser extent,

the influence of organized crime on candidate selection is perceived for many states, with exception of Querétaro, Sonora, and Yucatán. These findings suggest that the *sovereignty* dimension of the quality of democracy is relatively low and implies a distinct threat of organized crime to local governments.

**Figure 8. Influence of Organized Crime on Candidate Selection in the 17 Mexican States (2005)**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Norris et al. (2015).

As discussed thus far, the quality of democracy at the subnational level varies significantly across the 17 Mexican states in terms of five dimensions: *electoral decision*, *participation*, *accountability*, *responsiveness*, and *sovereignty*. In particular, the quality of democracy in terms of *responsiveness*, as measured by the *Confidence in Governor Index*, and *sovereignty*, as measured by the *Influence of Organized Crime on Campaign Finance Index*, is relatively low. Nevertheless, little evidence is found to support the claim that Mexico's democracy has collapsed or reverted to authoritarianism. At the same time, the evidence implies that a low-quality democracy is salient in the Mexican states, which is attributable to the problems of local-level elections and electoral institutions. The next section briefly describes the Political-Electoral Reform implemented in 2014, which aimed to deal with these problems and thus improve the quality of democracy in Mexico.



#### **IV. The 2014 Political-Electoral Reform**

As discussed earlier, after democratization in 2000, the Mexican government has experienced a problem of legitimacy, because citizens' trust in the government has constantly declined due to the weak government. As soon as President Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI) assumed office in December 2012, the major political parties, including PRI and PAN, agreed upon the "Pacto por México," which aimed to encourage inter-party cooperation and advance economic and political reforms. After active debates in the legislature, all of the political parties approved the Political-Electoral Reform (Reforma Política-Electoral) in 2014, which explicitly aimed to improve the quality of democracy. The reform included lifting the ban on the consecutive reelection of federal and local legislators and independent candidates, promoting gender parity among political parties, extending voting rights to Mexicans living abroad,<sup>15</sup> and the restructuring of the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*: IFE) into the National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral*: INE).<sup>16</sup>

In particular, the reform of the former IFE was needed to restore citizens' confidence in Mexico's electoral management body, which was discredited following a controversial presidential election in 2006, when the losing candidate, André Manuel López Obrador, fiercely contested the official election results. In addition, the Mexican government was pressured to provide greater protection to voters in local elections, in which fraud and irregularity had been reported (Gobierno de la República undated, 4; Méndez de Hoyos and Loza Otero 2013). The INE currently takes a responsibility for organizing not only federal and subnational elections, but also the elections of political party leaders.

It is still premature to observe the consequences of the 2014 Political-Electoral Reform. The federal elections in 2018 will be an invaluable opportunity to evaluate the contributions and limitations of the reform for electoral processes and the quality of democracy in Mexico, particularly at the subnational level.

#### **V. Conclusions**

This paper evaluates the quality of Mexico's democracy at the national and subnational levels. Following the concepts and measurement of the quality of democracy proposed by Levine and Molina (2011), it examines the quality of democracy at the subnational level in terms of five dimensions: *electoral decision*, *participation*, *accountability*, *responsiveness*, and *sovereignty*. Using the Freedom House Index and the Electoral

Integrity Project (EIP) dataset, it finds that democracy declined in Mexico between 2006 and 2015 at a national level, and that the quality of democracy significantly varies across the seventeen Mexican states. However, the evidence is not sufficient to conclude that Mexico's democracy has collapsed or reverted to authoritarianism. The Political-Electoral Reform, which was implemented in 2014, aimed to improve the quality of democracy in Mexico with a special focus on local elections. Examining the consequences of the reform for the quality of democracy particularly at the subnational level might be a meaningful research agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> How to calculate the scores draws on *Freedom in the World 2016*, which is available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>.

<sup>3</sup> The precise name of the law is the Federal Law of Transparency and Free Access to Public Information (*Ley Federal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública Gubernamental*, *LFTAIPG*).

<sup>4</sup> There is an abundant literature on democratic endurance (e.g., Boix and Stokes 2003, Cheibub 2007, and Przeworski et al. 2000).

<sup>5</sup> The different definitions of the quality of democracy are extensively discussed in Japanese in Kubo, Suechika, and Takahashi (2016).

<sup>6</sup> This subsection largely draws on Levine and Molina (2011, 21-37). Chapter 2 of this book explains in detail how Levine and Molina constructed the indices for the five dimensions of the quality of democracy with specific data sources.

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- <sup>7</sup> For the index of vertical accountability, Levine and Molina use "the length of the term of national officials or institutions subject to election," such as presidents, lower houses, and senates (Levine and Molina 2011, 28).
- <sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Pippa Norris, Ferran Martínez i Coma, Alessandro Nai, and Max Grömping for making the dataset public and available to interested researchers.
- <sup>9</sup> The variable name for this index is *PEIIndexi*.
- <sup>10</sup> The data draw on the responses of 292 experts regarding 17 elections conducted in 17 states. The codebook explains the structure of survey as follows: "The first Mexican data release covers 17 elections held on June 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 in 16 states and on July 19<sup>th</sup> in Chiapas. Nine contests were Gubernatorial. Those contests were in the states of: Baja California Sur, Campeche, Colima, Guerrero, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí and Sonora. The other seven contests we cover are for Local Congress and Municipalities. Those contests were in the state of: Chiapas, Distrito Federal, Estado de México, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos and Tabasco" (Norris et al. 2015, 12).
- <sup>11</sup> More specifically, the variable name for this index is *voteregi*, which is composed of three other variables: *reglisted2* asking respondents' perception of "[s]ome citizens were not listed in the register (Reversed coding)," *reginaccurate2* asking about "[t]he electoral register was inaccurate (Reversed coding)," and *ineligible2* asking the perception about "[s]ome ineligible electors were registered (Reversed coding)." The reversed coding is as follows: Strongly Disagree=5, Disagree=4, Agree=3, neither agree nor disagree=2, and Strongly Agree=1. This variable is standardized on a point scale with values from 0 to 100. For further details of the coding, see Norris et al. (2011, 20-21).
- <sup>12</sup> The variable name for this index is *localelcauth* in the dataset.
- <sup>13</sup> The variable name for this index is *gobernador* in the same dataset.
- <sup>14</sup> The variable name for these indices is *inflfinanciamiento* and *inflorgcrime* respectively. Both variables are coded as follows: Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neither Agree nor Disagree=3, Agree=4, and Strongly Agree=5.
- <sup>15</sup> The issue of voting rights abroad in Mexico in comparative perspective is extensively discussed in Emmerich, and Alarcón Olguín (2016). The content of reform is summarized in INE (2016).
- <sup>16</sup> The content and process of the 2014 Political-Electoral Reform is summarized in Gobierno de la República (undated) and Comisión de Gobernación, Cámara de Diputados (2014).

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