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WORKING PAPERS ON POLITICAL SCIENCE

*Floating in the Valley: Information and Partisan Support in
Mexico City after Election Day*

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the relationship between information levels and changes in opinion and political preference. The paper relies on public opinion data gathered systematically in Mexico City from 1996 to 1999. This context is characterized by abrupt changes in aggregate public opinion and party support, thereby offering an interesting case to test current hypotheses from the public opinion literature. The main argument focuses on patterns of news media exposure, showing that higher levels of exposure are associated with smaller changes in aggregate opinion, if we hold selective attention constant. However, higher levels of selective media consumption show higher levels of opinion change, especially if media consumption is about the object of opinion. The paper also evaluates the role of class and issues, in order to assess the possible long-term political implications of short term opinion changes.

Theoretical Propositions

Media effects on public opinion have been broadly studied, yet many questions remain unanswered. Since the classic studies on media effects (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954), the question of how political communication affects attitudes, opinions and preferences has been a central topic of attention in the public opinion literature. The literature gives us some general conclusions about political communication and public opinion. Here are some of them: First, the idea that the media only has minimal effects is a myth (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1996). Second, individuals are greatly differentiated in their levels of information and sophistication, but that average levels of information are rather low (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Price and Zaller 1993). Third, individuals do not need to be fully informed in order to reach a conclusion or make an opinion (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991; Iyengar 1990). Fourth, television shapes to a great extent what individuals think is important and what standards they use when evaluating political objects (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Fifth, even though most individuals generally have low levels of information,

they tend to have more information on areas and topics that are more interesting to them, thereby defining specialized or issue publics (Converse 1964, Iyengar 1990). Sixth, some individuals, given their characteristics, are more likely to be affected by political communication (Zaller 1992; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1996; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). Seventh, individuals not only use information shortcuts to reach conclusions, but they also differentiate among the information sources where they take information from (Lupia and McCubbins 1997). Finally, even though most of the literature that focuses on individual opinions has found a great deal of opinion instability, aggregate public opinion is much more stable and changes can be understood, explained, and even predicted (Page and Shapiro 1992). In that basis, we can set standards to determine when changes in public opinion are taking place.

In this paper I focus on the relationship between the patterns of news media exposure, popularity and political support in Mexico City. The theoretical propositions draw on previous research on public opinion in Mexico and are as follows:

Individuals differ significantly in their habits of news consumption and therefore in the levels of information and the type of information that they are exposed to. Both the levels of news media exposure and selective attention to different sources of information make a difference on opinion change and stability. The higher the level of news media exposure in general, the lesser the significance of opinion changes. However, the higher the intensity of selective attention to information about the object of opinion, the higher the magnitude of opinion change. These two propositions make it clear that opinion change and information levels are not directly related. On the contrary, the data shown here suggest that, if we consider general information: the more information, the lesser the magnitude of opinion changes. However, if we consider specialized information about the issue at stake: the more information, the higher the magnitude of opinion changes.

The Data

This paper relies on public opinion data gathered systematically by the Center for Public Opinion Studies (CEOP) through a quarterly “Mexico City Opinion Thermometer.” The first Opinion Thermometer was conducted in December 1997. Samples are representative of Mexico City’s adult population and include 1,600 interviews each time the poll is taken. Sampling is based on multi-staged selection procedures that take electoral sections as the basic sampling units. Personal, in-home interviews are administered during the first weekend in December, March, June, and September.

Measures of popularity are based on opinion “thermometers” that are shown to respondents using cards during the interview. The thermometer consists of a seven-point scale that goes from positive 3 to negative 3. Respondents are asked to place their opinions about leaders, parties and institutions on the scale, with positive 3 meaning that the respondent has a very favorable opinion, negative 3 meaning that the respondent has a very unfavorable opinion, and 0 meaning that the respondent’s opinion is neither favorable nor unfavorable.

The paper also shows survey data gathered by newspaper *Reforma*’s Department of Survey Research during 1996 and 1997, previous to the mayoral elections in July 1997. The average sample size of the 15 *Reforma* polls shown here is 850 respondents. Sampling procedures were similar to the Opinion Thermometer, except that socioeconomic areas were used as sampling frame instead of electoral sections. These were monthly polls conducted since July 1996 until April 1997, and then two polls conducted in May, three in June 1997, and an exit poll.

Opinion Change in Mexico City

The context

Mexico City has almost 6 million registered voters, who represent 11 percent of the national electorate. Although Mexico City's electoral weight in Presidential and Congressional elections is very significant, the City Mayor had never been elected before July 1997. The City Mayor used to be a presidential appointee, like any other member of the President's cabinet. However, electoral reforms in the mid-1990s opened the city government to electoral competition. This context provides a good opportunity to study public opinion and political support in a newly competitive environment of executive local elections. Fortunately, the new democratically elected government inspired several media pollsters to keep a continuous track of public attitudes and evaluations about government performance, thereby offering interesting trends of public opinion data.

The trends shown by opinion polls indicate, as I will show below, that there were important changes in opinion and preference in a relatively short period of time. Support for the left-of-center PRD (Party of Democratic Revolution) increased significantly from about 20 percent in mid-1996 to almost 50 percent by mid-1997, when its candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, won the mayoral election. Nonetheless, support for the PRD decreased dramatically as the Mayor's popularity started to descend during his administration, from a high 71 percent approval rating on inauguration weekend to about 29 percent in the latest poll, taken on July 1999.

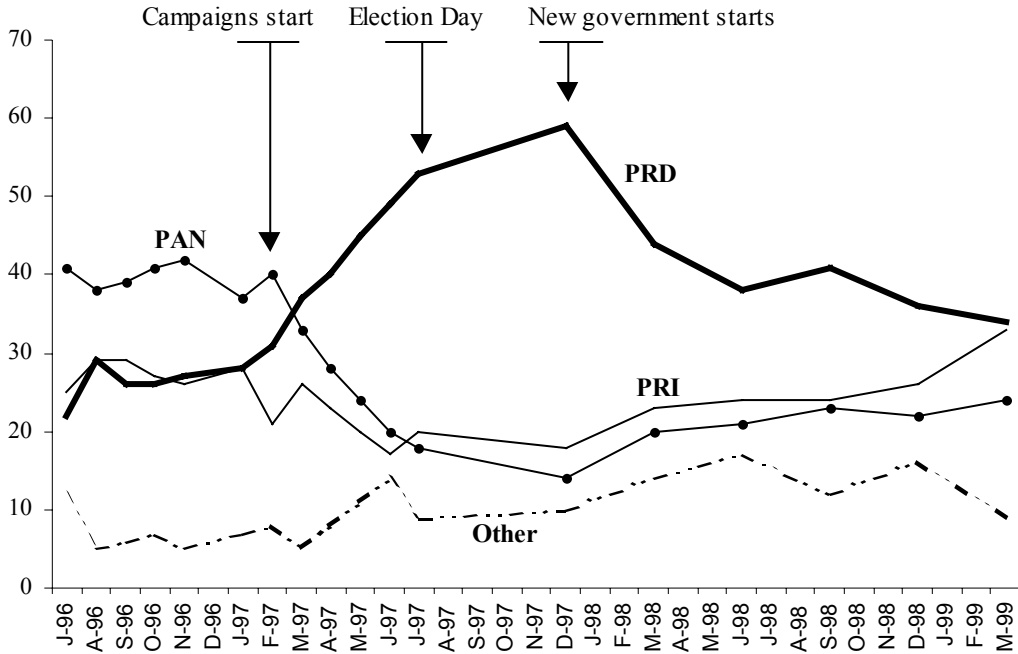
Research based on panel data indicates that there was a great deal of volatility in Mexico City during the 1997 campaign (Lawson, 1999). However, the causes of such volatility are still unclear. In addition to individual-level changes in political preferences, there is also evidence of significant changes in aggregate public opinion and aggregate levels of party support. The current Mayor, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, won the majority of votes in Mexico City in 1988, when he was running for president as a candidate from a leftist coalition. Although he won in Mexico City with 49 percent of the vote, he lost the presidential election to PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)

candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari. In his second attempt for the Mexican Presidency, in 1994, Cárdenas fell to third place in Mexico City, obtaining then 21 percent of vote as a candidate from the young PRD, a party he founded in 1989 in association with a number of center-left and left parties. This time Cárdenas lost the presidential election to PRI candidate Ernesto Zedillo, who obtained the majority of votes in Mexico City, followed by PAN candidate Diego Fernández de Cevallos. Finally, after two bids for the Presidency, Cárdenas won the mayoral race in 1997 as a PRD candidate, and became the first elected Mayor of Mexico City.

Party Preferences in Mexico City: 1996-1999

Figure 1 shows the trends in political preferences in Mexico City from July 1996 to March 1999. The period that goes from July 1996 to February 1997 precedes the political campaigns and is characterized by a relative stability of party preferences. According to pre-election polls conducted by *Reforma*, the National Action Party (PAN) was the strongest party during that period, with about forty percent of the preference, without considering the proportion of “undecided” voters. The PRI and the PRD exchanged second and third places within margin-of-error differences. In fact, the polls showed the PRD in third place in July 1996.

**Figure 1. Party Preferences in Mexico City, 1996-1999
(Percent)**



Source: Reforma preelection polls, Reforma exit poll, and CEOP’s Mexico City Opinion Thermometer.

Once candidates were appointed and formal campaigns started in February 1997, polling trends registered important shifts in preferences, with a growing support for the PRD, which became the first preference in April 1997. In contrast, the PAN—led by what was considered by media observers as a “terrible campaign” and a very unpopular candidate, according to opinion polls—fell from first to third place by Election Day. The PRI also fell slightly, but support for that party was much more stable than the other parties. As the PRI had governed Mexico City without interruption, this clearly shows the abandonment of one opposition party in favor of another.

Both PRD and PAN are the strongest opposition parties in a country where the PRI has held national office for seven decades. It is very clear that part of the Mexico City electorate changed preferences from PAN to PRD during the 1997 campaigns, but there was little exchange between those parties and the PRI. In other words, there were significant changes in party choice, but such changes did not seem to cross from one side to the other in a government-*versus*-opposition line of conflict. PAN deserters stayed on the opposition side. Moreover, the PRD candidate is likely to have gotten some votes from PRI identifiers.

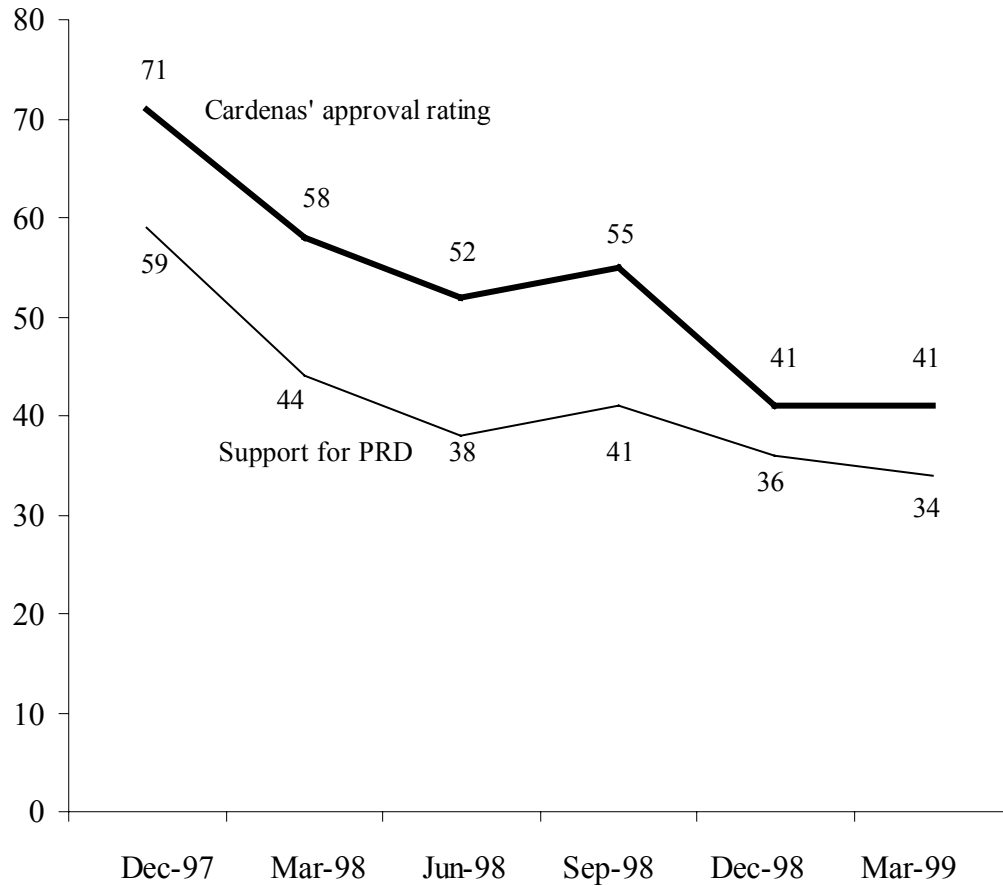
On July 6 1997, the PRD candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, won the election with a comfortable margin over his competitors. The newly elected Mayor, son of a beloved former President, rose in popularity during four months until his Inauguration, on December 1997. The quarterly Opinion Thermometer polls registered the highest peak in PRD support that month. Since then, however, the PRD would only lose ground as the newly elected mayor lost popularity.

In sum, the PRD obtained a net gain of about 37 percent points in 17 months—from the first *Reforma* Poll conducted in July 1996 (22%) to Inauguration Day in December 1997 (59%). Then, the PRD registered a net loss in support of about 30 points in 15 months, from CEOP's first quarterly poll on Inauguration-Day weekend (59%) to its latest poll conducted in June 1999 (29%). Meanwhile, PRI, PAN, and other parties—especially the Green Ecologists—recovered some lost ground.

Popularity and Party Support

The decline in support for the PRD is closely related to Mayor Cárdenas's decreasing levels of popularity. Figure 2 shows Cárdenas's popularity ratings and the levels of support for his party from December 1997 to March 1999. The figure shows a clear deterioration in popularity and support. In every case, however, the Mayor's approval ratings remained higher than support for his party.

Figure 2. Mayor Cárdenas's Popularity and PRD Support in Mexico City, 1997-1999. (Percent).



Source: CEOP's Mexico City Opinion Thermometer.

During this period, the two most important falls in Cárdenas's popularity were observed in the first quarter and the fourth quarter. The first quarter registered a decline of 13 points in the Mayor's popularity, which suggests that the public was expecting quick and noticeable changes in the City. If there were any changes, they were not noticeable, however. Cárdenas's first 100 days in office were rather discrete, without major policy shifts or critical events. In fact, the Cárdenas administration was relatively slow in developing and presenting a government plan.

The fourth quarter registered a decline of 14 points, which was clearly associated with an increasing number of individuals who perceived a serious deterioration in the city's public safety. Media coverage of city affairs not only emphasized crime as the main public problem—something that the polls confirmed as the public's main concern—but also the government's inability to cope with it. Moreover, there were continuous news stories about crime, including those of policemen committing robberies and rapes. Unfortunately, at this point I do not have reliable content analysis about media coverage that would allow me to establish agenda setting hypotheses, but polling data clearly show that priming effects based on public safety issues may have been a strong factor that accounts for a decline in popularity, and, consequently, party support. In other words, the issue of public safety was a catalyst for greater distrust and public discontent.

Public safety has been a central issue in Mexico City in recent times, and the public has become much more critical about the government's inability to deal with it. In December 1997—when Mayor Cárdenas took office—30 percent of respondents said the Mayor “is able to solve the security problem completely”; 50 percent said he “is able to solve it partially”, and only 17 percent said he “is not able to solve it at all”. The percent of respondents who said the Mayor “is not able to solve the problem” had risen to 35 percent in March 1998, to 40 percent in September, 52 percent in December, 55 percent in March 1999, and it reached a high of 58 percent in June 1999. These data reveal an increasingly skeptical public in regards to the Mayor's ability to handle the city's main concern: public safety.

According to polling data, crime was widely perceived as a very serious problem and poll reports on assaults and robberies—which are probably more reliable than official statistics—were quite high. For example, polls indicate that many people simply do not report crimes and robberies to authorities. Perceptions about increasing crime not only did derive from direct experiences with crime, but also from very intense media coverage on the issue and its emphasis on both Mayor Cárdenas failures and police incompetence. The city government did not launch any advertisement campaign that would show the public some of its achievements; in other words, to use Zaller's

(1991) expression, there were no self-promotional efforts by the incumbent. Now that the current Mayor is seeking the Presidency for the third time, TV and radio ads have filled significant proportions of prime time TV and radio. Government ads were virtually absent during the first year and a half of Cárdenas's administration. This means that the public was only exposed to media coverage about crime, which was not slow in blaming the PRD government for it. As I mentioned earlier, I do not have at this time a finished and reliable content analysis to illustrate this in a more systematic way. Thus, I will analyze one side of the problem by focusing on public opinion data only.

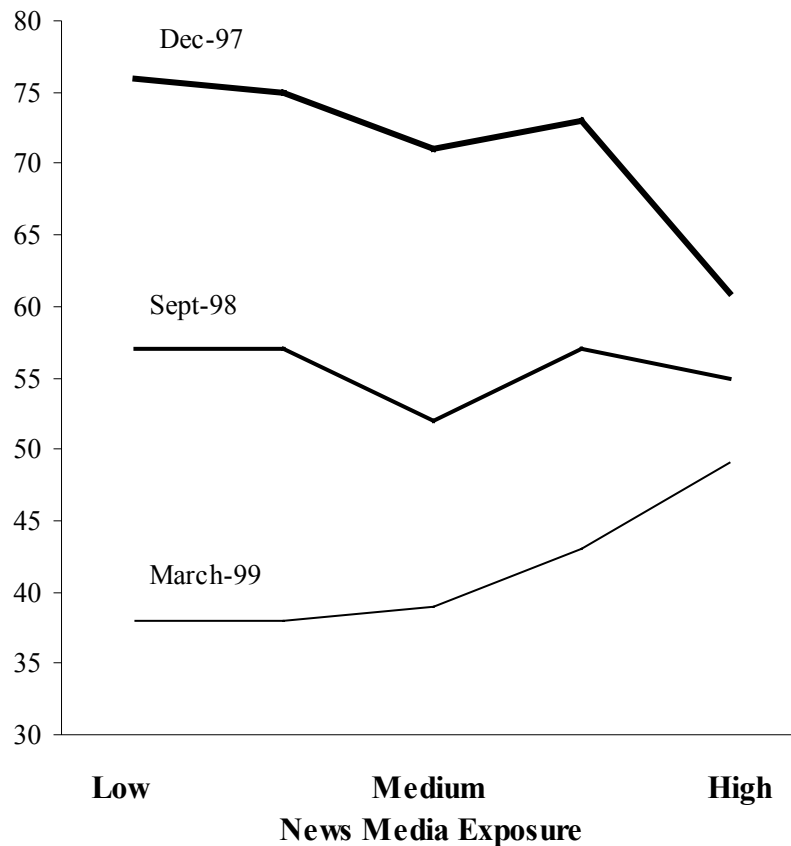
Popularity and the News Media

Changes in popularity over time reflect the influence of news media exposure. Figure 3 shows the relationship between the level of exposure to news media and the level of approval for Mayor Cárdenas in three points in time. In July 1997, there was a negative relationship between news exposure and approval: the higher the level of exposure to news media, the lower the level of Cárdenas approval. By September 1998, the overall approval rating decreased, but there was no clear relationship between levels of news media exposure and popularity. Finally, by March 1999, the overall approval ratings also decreased, but in this case there was a positive relationship between these two variables, that is, the higher the level of exposure to news media, the higher the approval rating for Mayor Cárdenas. In other words, the relationship between news media exposure and popularity changed.

How can such a shift occur? The data in Figure 3 suggests that higher levels of exposure to news media produce moderate changes in public opinion, while lower levels of exposure are associated with more significant opinion changes. This relationship has been demonstrated using Mexican data at the national level (Moreno, 1999). It may not be, of course, media exposure what causes opinion changes alone, but the sociological features of those who follow the news with more intensity in comparison with those who do not follow the news as much. In any case, greater opinion changes take place among individuals who are relatively less informed—if one

may argue that greater media exposure implies more information. Figure 3 shows that this has been the case in Mexico City. Although the average approval level decreased from one point in time to the next, it decreased much more among individuals with less exposure to news media—television, radio, newspapers, and personal conversations—than among individuals who are generally more exposed to the news media.

Figure 3. Cárdenas's Approval Ratings by Levels of News Media Exposure, December 1997, September 1998, March 1999. (Percent).



Source: CEOP Mexico City Opinion Thermometer (December-97 to March-99; average n= 1,587).

The index of news media exposure was constructed with variables that measure how much respondents follow the news on television, radio, newspapers, and talking with people (Cronbach's alpha .54)

This conclusion is only partially true, however. As Figure 3 indicates, higher levels of news media exposure produce less significant changes in opinion than do lower levels of news media exposure. That is, the most significant changes in opinion seem to take place among those who are relatively less exposed to news media. However, when we go from general exposure to news media—which includes television, newspapers, radio and personal conversations—to specialized exposure—such as what TV shows or newspaper sections respondents watch or read the most—we have a somewhat different story. Opinion changes are more significant among specialized publics.

Table 1 shows Mayor Cárdenas's approval ratings by specialized or selectively attentive TV watchers and newspaper readers. The upper part of the table shows the levels of approval by the types of programs that respondents watch the most on TV. Respondents who watch soap operas (mostly women) are the ones that show the greatest decline in approval from December 1997 to March 1999 (minus 35%). They are followed by respondents who watch mostly news (minus 33%) and then by respondents who watch sports (minus 28%), who are mostly men. The three different publics—soap opera, news, and sports viewers—express a strong decline in approval ratings, but the difference between the highest and the lowest net loss—from the first point in time to the last—is only 7 points.

TABLE 1.							
Mayor Cardenas's Approval Ratings by Specialized Television and Newspaper Consumers .							
(Percent)							
	<i>Dic</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Dic</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Net loss</i>
	<i>97</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>Dec-97 to Mar-99</i>
What type of programs do you watch the most on television?							
Soap Operas	74	60	47	58	36	39	-35
News	70	57	55	54	40	37	-33
Sports	70	51	58	60	41	42	-28
When you read a newspaper, How often do you read the following sections? (% "always")							
Mexico City news	73	60	53	56	46	40	-33
International news	74	54	54	56	49	43	-31
National news	71	57	53	55	46	42	-29
Sports	69	57	56	56	42	41	-28
Editorials (political)	72	56	53	56	52	45	-27
Financial news	69	47	50	53	44	45	-24
Shows and entertainment	65	52	48	53	43	43	-22
Social life	63	54	53	59	43	47	-16

Source: CEOP Mexico City Quarterly Opinion Thermometer (Average n=1,587).

By contrast, the bottom part of Table 1 shows that specialized attention of newspaper readers seems to produce more significant differences than TV watchers. The sharpest decline in the Mayor's popularity is observed among those who read the metropolitan section or city news regularly. The next biggest decline in popularity is observed among those who follow international and national news. The less significant decline in popularity is observed among readers of soft news, such as those who usually read the paper sections about entertainment, shows, and social life—weddings, family reunions, and so on. In other words, respondents who follow non-political news show much less significant changes in opinion than those who follow political news. The exceptions are those who read political editorials, who express moderate levels of opinion change. This is understandable given the fact that some editorials can be harshly negative towards political leaders, but some others may as well be favorable.

In sum, higher levels of news exposure are more likely to register moderate changes in aggregate opinion, while lower levels of news media exposure are associated with greater changes of opinion. However, the more specialized the attention in regards to the object of opinion, the greater the changes in opinion.

Social Class and Political Support

As it was shown in Figure 2, the decline in popularity is closely associated with a decline in party support. A relevant question is to what extent the social bases of the electoral coalition built by Cárdenas in 1997 eroded. The data show that, from December 1997 to March 1999, individuals from different social strata abandoned the PRD in favor of the other two major parties.

Figure 4. Average Party Support of Social Classes in Mexico City, December 1997-March 1999.

(x and y axes are party thermometer differentials).

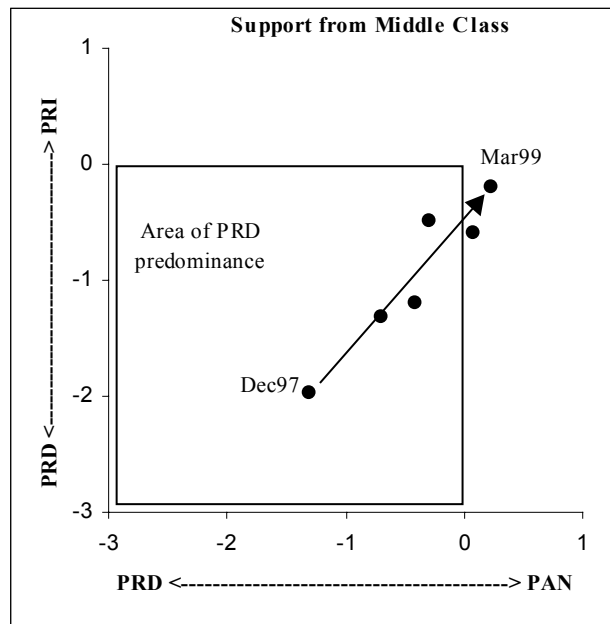
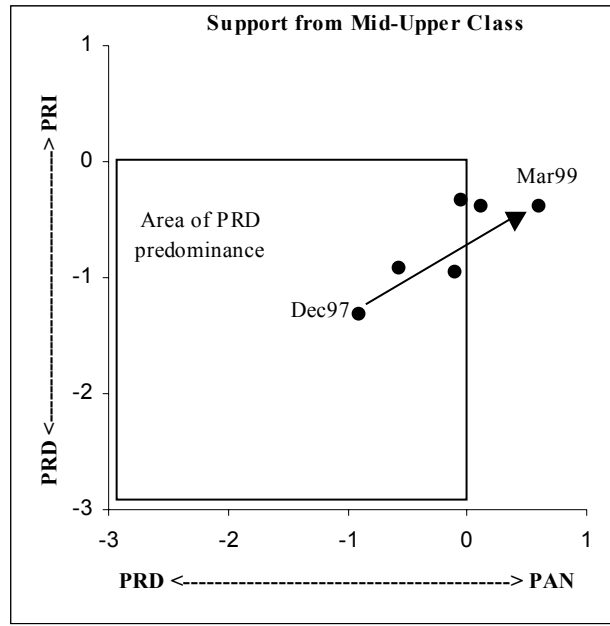
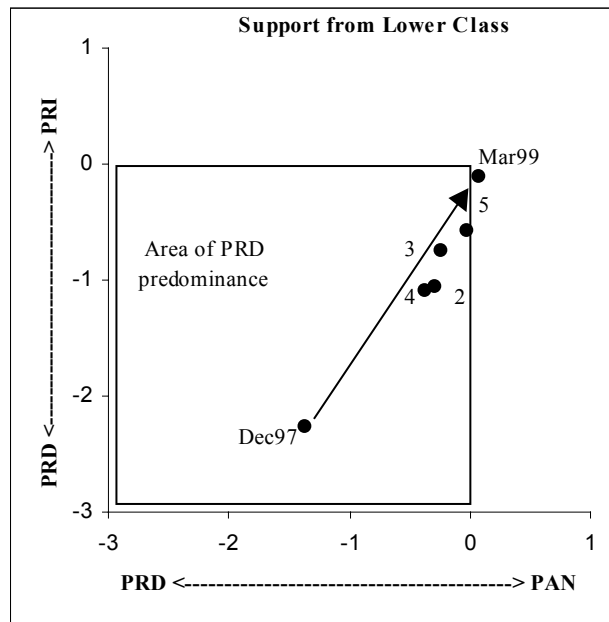
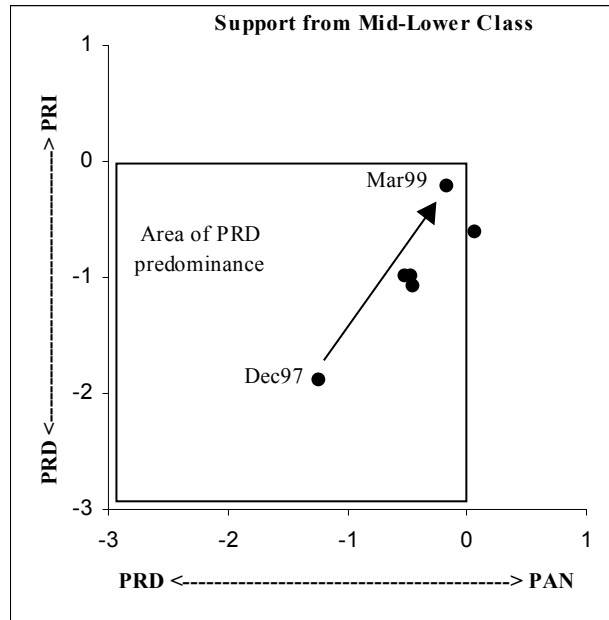


Figure 5. Average Party Support of Social Classes in Mexico City, December 1997-March 1999.
 (x and y axes are party thermometer differentials).



Figures 4 and 5 show evidence of how political support from different social classes has changed over time. The analysis considers a class variable based on four socioeconomic categories. Each category represents a social group based on income and occupation. The first category, called *middle-upper class*, represents the highest income levels in the sample, as well as managerial, professional and upper-level white-collar occupations. The second category, called *middle class*, represents middle income levels as well as professional and white-collar occupations. The third category, called *mid-lower class*, includes those respondents with middle to low income levels, lower-level white-collar jobs, skilled manual and some semi-skilled manual jobs. Finally, the fourth category, called *lower class*, includes the lowest income levels in the sample, as well as manual occupations—some of which are skilled manual workers, but most of them semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers. This latter category also includes a few agricultural workers in the sample, who live in the Mexico City outskirts, but within the Federal District's jurisdiction.

The x and y axes in Figures 4 and 5 are party thermometer differentials, which were constructed by subtracting the PRD thermometer from the PAN thermometer in the case of the x axis, and the PRD thermometer from the PRI thermometer—in the case of the y axis. Dots represent the average position for the social category indicated on top in each of the six surveys taken from December 1997 to March 1999. Negative numbers in the axes indicate a stronger support for the PRD in relation to the other parties. As it can be observed, every social group shows significant movements away from the PRD, with middle classes increasingly supporting the PAN, and working classes supporting both the PRI and the PAN but remaining in the area of PRD predominance. In other words, the PRD suffered a loss of support among all classes in favor of both the PAN and the PRI, but the relatively smaller upper middle class—which was the least supportive of PRD from the beginning—shifted predominantly in favor of PAN. Traditionally, the middle class has supported the PAN, but middle and upper classes were likely to vote for the PRD in 1997 as the best option to defeat the PRI. Although it has been argued that strategic voting did not take place in the 1997

Mexico City race (Lawson 1999), upper-class behavior seems to indicate the opposite. Upper classes may have voted PRD if they perceived little chances for the PAN to win.

However, the major change in the 15-month period of city government took place among the lower classes, which show the most significant movement away from the PRD. Although their support is not overwhelming for either the PAN or the PRI, they were the strongest PRD supporters from the beginning.

In sum, the PRD has lost support from every single social group among the Mexico City electorate, and they have especially lost the upper middle classes to the PAN. As it was shown in Figure 1, however, the most painful losses may have been among the classes that started to support the PRI again, as this is the party that has grown the most and almost matching the support drawn by the PRD.

A Multivariate Assessment of Popularity and Political Support:

The Role of Issues, News Media Exposure, and Class

The analysis has focused on the relationship between media use, class and political support separately. This section evaluates the significance of such variables by developing a multivariate model of political support over time. The analysis includes perceptions about important government issues in Mexico City, such as public safety, corruption, and jobs, as well as two important issues that have been part of Cárdenas's political agenda, that is, participation and freedom of expression.

The analysis is shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4. These tables display lineal regression estimates of Cárdenas's popularity, the PAN-PRD differential thermometer, and the PRI-PRD differential thermometer respectively. The column on the left side of the tables shows a pooled analysis using data from all six surveys. The other columns display regression estimates for each survey. A comparison of the columns gives us a sense of how relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable change over time.

Popularity

Table 2 focuses on Cárdenas's popularity. The data indicate that Cárdenas was indeed hurt by perceptions that the number of robberies and assaults increased in Mexico City during his administration. The relationship between perceptions about crime and the Mayor's popularity is negative and strong during the 15-month period. Corruption, however, was only inversely related to popularity at the time of Cárdenas's inauguration, indicating that the Mayor was not attributed with increasing levels of corruption, but the previous PRI Mayor was. Perceptions about increasing citizen participation and greater freedom of expression in the City were favorable to the Mayor at different points, but it seems evident that the overwhelming importance of crime overshadows the pro-democratic features of the Cárdenas government.

Table 2. Regression Estimates of Cardenas Approval Ratings														
	Pooled		Dic-97		Mar-98		Jun-98		Sep-98		Dic-98		Mar-99	
	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig
Issues														
Crime	-0.19	***	-0.28	***	-0.15	**	-0.12		-0.16	*	-0.14		-0.27	***
Police	0.06	**	0.06		0.07		0.11		0.06		0.02		0.06	
Corruption	-0.09	***	-0.16	**	-0.10		-0.06		-0.04		-0.11		-0.04	
Jobs	0.05	*	0.04		0.11	*	0.04		0.01		0.10		0.05	
Environment	0.00		-0.04		0.01		-0.01		-0.02		0.00		-0.01	
Participation	0.08	**	0.03		0.10		0.02		0.14	*	0.06		0.05	
Freedom of expression	0.03		0.14	**	0.14	*	0.01		0.02		-0.04		-0.03	
Follows news														
News on TV	-0.06	**	-0.14	***	-0.07		-0.07		0.03		-0.12	*	-0.04	
News on Radio	-0.01		-0.02		-0.04		0.09		0.04		-0.03		-0.03	
Newspapers	-0.05	*	-0.07		0.02		-0.10		-0.11	*	-0.08		0.08	
News people	-0.02		-0.01		-0.04		-0.06		-0.05		0.04		0.05	
TV habits and program														
Hours TV	0.01		0.03	*	-0.01		0.02		-0.01		0.01		-0.02	
News	0.05		0.14	*	0.03		0.09		0.07		0.15		-0.07	
Sports	-0.04		-0.04		-0.10		0.02		0.07		0.04		-0.22	
Soap Opera	-0.01		-0.03		0.00		-0.11		0.16		-0.07		-0.06	
Entertainment	0.06		0.00		-0.06		0.09		-0.03		0.15		0.13	
Newspaper section														
Mexico City	0.02		0.06		0.13		0.02		0.00		0.00		-0.17	
National	0.07	*	0.01		0.02		0.05		-0.01		0.17		0.25	**
International	-0.01		0.04		0.01		0.02		0.11		0.12		-0.15	*
Political editorials	0.01		0.02		-0.16	*	-0.01		0.06		0.11		0.01	
Finances	-0.02		0.02		-0.05		0.00		-0.04		-0.09		0.06	
Social life	-0.01		-0.10		0.08		-0.05		0.10		-0.06		-0.04	
Sports pages	0.03		0.06		0.03		0.04		0.09		-0.03		-0.02	
Entertainment	-0.05	*	-0.05		-0.08		-0.03		-0.09		-0.06		-0.07	
Newspaper														
Esto	-0.02		-0.09		-0.17		0.01		0.10		0.17		0.03	
Excelsior	0.02		0.20		-0.25		-0.01		-0.06		-0.03		0.23	
La Jornada	0.05		0.01		-0.05		0.13		0.21		0.13		-0.11	
Novedades	0.04		0.22		-0.07		-0.14		-0.14		0.27		0.17	
Ovaciones	-0.06		0.22		-0.20		0.12		0.01		-0.20		-0.10	
Reforma	-0.12	*	0.11		-0.20		-0.11		-0.28		-0.43	*	-0.05	
Universal	0.05		0.15		0.16		0.13		-0.01		0.00		-0.26	*
Socioeconomic level														
(Constant)	0.81	***	1.22	***	0.52		0.64		0.23		0.69		0.88	
Multiple R	0.31		0.53		0.37		0.26		0.27		0.33		0.32	
Adjusted R-squared	0.09		0.24		0.09		0.02		0.02		0.03		0.04	

The measures of media use reveal several interesting facts. The first has to do with television habits and exposure. The more the respondent follows the news on TV the less they approve of the Mayor, showing a particularly strong relationship both in December 1997 and December 1998. The second has to do with newspaper reading habits. Newspaper readers also show a lesser level of support for Cárdenas, especially in September 1998. Also, readers of independent, center-right newspaper *Reforma* were especially critical of the center-left Mayor Cárdenas, especially in December 1998. This relationship between *Reforma* readers and rejection of the PRD is also shown in Tables 3 and 4, while readers of leftist newspaper *La Jornada* show much higher levels of support for the center-left PRD. These patterns indicate that some newspapers have relatively strong ideological audiences—as in the case of *La Jornada*—or that they may strongly influence their readers with negative coverage of the Mayor. It seems that the first point may be relatively accurate, while evidence to prove the second is beyond this paper's limits.

Finally, estimates for the influence of class on popularity indicate that the Mayor suffered a significant loss among lower income classes, as indicated earlier. This is a relevant political finding given that that social segment is a “natural” supporter of Cárdenas and his party, the PRD.

Party Support

Tables 3 and 4 show lineal regression estimates for the PAN-PRD and the PRI-PRD thermometer differentials respectively. The results are similar to the ones shown in Table 2 where the dependent variable is the Mayor's popularity. However, there are some additional aspects that can be observed when we assess the model with party support as the dependent variable. For example, both the PAN and the PRI benefit from perceptions about crime. This is an interesting finding, given that one may not expect the PRI to benefit from such perceptions. The PRI previously governed Mexico City and was not able to reduce crime rates. However, both PRI and PAN gain in party thermometer differentials vis-a-vis the PRD. Also both parties gain from perceptions on

corruption in relation with the PRD, who may have a different image to that of his leader, given that he did not suffer from such perceptions.

Recognition of a greater freedom of expression was associated with support for PRD in relation to both PAN and PRI. This is understandable in the case of the PRI, given the fact that it has governed Mexico for seven decades and still has a relatively broad image of being predominantly authoritarian. In the case of the PAN, the issue of freedom of expression may be associated with its relatively conservative positions on social and cultural issues. In that sense, both Cárdenas and his party do well in regards to this issue.

Some of the issues that were not significant in explaining the Mayor's popularity but are in fact significant in explaining party support are perceptions about police and the environment. Perceptions about a deteriorated environment were especially negative toward the PRD in the first survey, but I found no association between such perceptions and party support thereafter. Negative opinions about the police were also especially hurting to the PRD at the beginning of Cárdenas's term, but they became significant again in March 1999, in favor of the PRI. The media have been especially eager in covering police stories and how policemen are sometimes criminals.

In regards to television habits and use, the more the respondent watches TV, the more favorable he or she is toward the PRD. The fact that a respondent is a more frequent television viewer does not mean he or she follows the news. Individuals who follow the news on TV were often very critical towards Cárdenas, but, as observed in Tables 3 and 4, not towards the PRD. A young electorate in Mexico City has been usually supportive of the PRD, and this may help explain why many PRD supporters are very frequent television watchers.

Table 3. Regression Estimates of PAN-PRD Thermometer Differential														
	Pooled		Dic-98		Mar-98		Jun-98		Sep-98		Dic-98		Mar-99	
PAN-PRD	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig
Issues														
Crime	0.33	***	0.30	*	0.41	**	0.15		-0.10		0.35		0.55	**
Police	-0.10		-0.38	**	-0.11		-0.14		0.01		0.05		-0.10	
Corruption	0.27	***	0.61	***	0.10		-0.02		0.31		0.58	**	0.08	
Jobs	-0.01		0.00		0.03		0.12		0.08		-0.23		-0.01	
Environment	-0.25	***	-0.38	**	-0.20		-0.24		-0.15		-0.21		-0.26	
Participation	0.02		-0.07		-0.01		0.14		-0.03		0.21		-0.03	
Freedom of expression	-0.11		-0.42	**	-0.51	**	0.11		0.24		0.01		0.04	
Follows news														
News on TV	0.16	**	0.16		0.04		0.22		0.20		0.19		0.28	
News on Radio	0.03		0.16		0.01		-0.08		-0.07		0.12		0.02	
Newspapers	-0.04		-0.14		-0.11		-0.03		0.18		-0.15		-0.07	
News people	0.01		0.04		-0.02		0.16		-0.01		-0.11		-0.06	
TV habits and program														
Hours TV	-0.07	**	-0.17	**	-0.04		-0.15	**	-0.08		0.04		0.06	
News	0.09		0.15		0.20		0.09		-0.08		-0.23		0.24	
Sports	0.02		0.08		0.69	*	-0.02		-0.69	*	0.01		0.06	
Soap Opera	-0.10		-0.23		0.16		0.03		-0.46		0.22		-0.38	
Entertainment	0.02		0.01		0.21		0.01		0.02		-0.07		0.70	
Newspaper section														
Mexico City	0.04		-0.05		0.44	*	0.15		-0.03		0.07		0.20	
National	-0.09		-0.09		-0.25		-0.17		-0.18		0.02		-0.11	
International	0.06		0.20		0.10		-0.11		-0.43	*	-0.04		0.28	
Political editorials	-0.16	*	-0.20		0.12		-0.02		-0.15		-0.36		-0.32	
Finances	0.14	*	0.14		0.04		0.04		0.43	*	0.25		0.00	
Social life	0.07		0.03		-0.15		0.01		-0.13		0.22		0.45	**
Sports pages	0.08		-0.06		-0.08		0.00		0.14		0.01		0.36	*
Entertainment	-0.02		0.15		-0.02		-0.05		0.28		-0.20		-0.18	
Newspaper														
Esto	-0.39	*	-0.12		0.20		-0.17		-0.24		-0.84		-1.37	**
Excelsior	0.22		-0.24		0.48		0.43		0.21		-0.08		0.24	
La Jornada	-0.54	***	-0.69	*	-0.61	*	-0.52		-0.55		-0.38		-0.72	*
Novedades	0.08		-0.43		0.17		0.97	*	0.18		0.20		-0.37	
Ovaciones	0.15		-0.68	*	0.59		0.20		-0.23		0.96	*	-0.32	
Reforma	0.30	*	-0.14		0.01		0.49		0.52		1.00	*	0.67	
Universal	-0.23	*	-0.13		-0.80	**	-0.22		-0.13		0.50		-0.30	
Socioeconomic level														
(Constant)	-1.55	***	0.05		-0.23		-0.98		-1.49		-2.76	*	-3.56	**
Multiple R	0.30		0.47		0.34		0.26		0.27		0.35		0.38	
Adjusted R-squared	0.08		0.18		0.07		0.01		0.01		0.05		0.08	

Table 4. Regression Estimates of PRI-PRD Thermometer Differential														
	Pooled		Dic-98		Mar-98		Jun-98		Sep-98		Dic-98		Mar-99	
	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig	b	sig
Issues														
Crime	0.45	***	0.47	*	0.59	***	0.14		0.06		0.17		0.75	**
Police	-0.23	**	-0.58	**	-0.13		-0.24		-0.07		0.08		-0.35	*
Corruption	0.23	**	0.76	***	0.06		-0.22		0.53	*	0.23		0.06	
Jobs	0.13	*	0.34		0.07		0.12		0.21		0.02		0.08	
Environment	-0.17	*	-0.37	*	-0.12		0.05		0.11		-0.21		-0.16	
Participation	-0.24	**	-0.26		-0.29		-0.12		-0.25		-0.30		-0.19	
Freedom of expression	-0.07		-0.56	**	-0.40	*	0.11		0.30		-0.08		0.07	
Follows news														
News on TV	0.15	*	0.34	*	0.07		0.11		0.04		0.17		0.36	*
News on Radio	0.03		0.12		-0.11		0.02		-0.11		0.07		0.10	
Newspapers	0.12	*	0.01		0.03		0.11		0.35	*	0.11		-0.03	
News people	0.09		0.14		0.14		0.21		0.22		-0.16		-0.25	
TV habits and program														
Hours TV	-0.06	*	-0.12	*	-0.12	*	-0.10		-0.04		0.02		0.04	
News	0.06		-0.23		0.26		0.44		-0.32		0.13		0.03	
Sports	-0.02		-0.06		0.70	*	0.03		-0.62		-0.59		-0.02	
Soap Opera	0.19		-0.30		0.25		0.65	*	-0.04		0.16		0.39	
Entertainment	0.07		-0.16		0.25		0.64		-0.48		-0.39		0.80	
Newspaper section														
Mexico City	-0.07		0.02		-0.04		-0.08		-0.26		0.30		0.28	
National	-0.26	**	-0.25		-0.19		-0.34		-0.31		-0.33		-0.69	*
International	-0.08		-0.16		0.06		-0.12		-0.36		-0.34		0.16	
Political editorials	-0.08		-0.09		0.14		-0.18		0.04		-0.35		0.03	
Finances	0.11		0.06		0.33		0.14		0.09		0.06		-0.10	
Social life	0.02		0.23		-0.04		-0.20		-0.08		0.29		-0.14	
Sports pages	0.09		-0.11		-0.16		0.19		0.00		0.46	*	0.26	
Entertainment	0.11		0.22		0.10		0.00		0.33		0.00		0.14	
Newspaper														
Esto	-0.01		-0.01		0.45		-0.38		0.10		-0.32		0.21	
Excelsior	0.18		0.06		0.44		0.55		0.15		-0.94		0.52	
La Jornada	-0.82	***	-0.73	*	-0.84	*	-0.76		-1.49	**	-0.81	*	-0.39	
Novedades	0.25		-0.17		-0.06		0.49		0.99	*	0.27		0.04	
Ovaciones	0.16		-0.95	*	1.22	*	0.01		-0.10		1.14	*	-0.73	
Reforma	0.22		0.04		-0.13		0.10		0.36		1.12	*	0.15	
Universal	-0.03		0.40		-0.47		-0.39		0.53		0.10		-0.22	
Socioeconomic level														
(Constant)	-2.14	***	-1.95	*	-1.01		-0.70		-2.70	*	-2.07		-2.35	
Multiple R	0.30		0.49		0.34		0.30		0.32		0.38		0.32	
Adjusted R-squared	0.08		0.20		0.07		0.04		0.05		0.07		0.04	

The regression estimates show, however, that those who follow the news on TV often are the ones who reject the PRD the most, especially in favor of the PRI, as the December 1997 and the March 1999 surveys indicate. This may be the result not only of TV contents, but also of audience characteristics.

Newspaper reading habits also confirm some of the findings from Table 2. The model of party support shown in Tables 3 and 4 indicates that following the news in the newspapers in general reduced political support for the PRD, mostly in favor of the PRI, as the estimates for September 1998 show. The newspaper that respondents read seems to make a difference in how the PRD is supported or rejected in relation with the other two parties. Again, this may not only be the result of contents, but also of audience characteristics. For example, as mentioned earlier, *La Jornada* readers are very loyal to both Cárdenas and the PRD, while *Novedades* and *Reforma* readers are more likely to support either PRI or PAN instead of PRD. *Ovaciones* readers—who are consumers of sports information in a paper owned by a TV network—express important opinion changes over time, supporting the PRD in December 1997, and then the PAN a year later or the PRI just three months after Cárdenas's inauguration. *El Universal* readers showed a strong support for the PRD vis-à-vis the PAN in March 1998.

Specialized interests among newspaper readers show that those who follow sports, either in a newspaper or television were especially critical of the PRD. This is a predominantly male public. Significant opinion changes among these respondents are also observed in Table 3, as they supported mostly the PAN in March 1998 and the PRD in September of that year. This seems to be one of the most volatile groups of respondents. In contrast, those who follow soap operas on television or the section of social information—weddings, social events, and so on—are more likely to support the PRI (in the case of TV soap operas) or the PAN (in the case of newspaper readers). This is an expected result. The PRI usually draws a significant support from lower income level housewives, who are likely to be frequent soap opera viewers, while the PAN is to some extent more popular among middle class women, who are also more likely to follow social events in the newspapers.

Finally, a finding shown in Table 2 for Cárdenas is confirmed in Table 4 for the PRD in relation with the PRI. Respondents who follow national news in the newspapers reported an increasing support for Cárdenas and his party in March 1999, when the Mexico City Mayor made it clear that he would run for President in year 2000. This is a very interesting finding given the national presence that the Mexico City Mayor—a two-time presidential candidate—has.

The data in Table 4 also confirms the decline in support for the PRD from the middle classes, a phenomenon that is particularly significant in favor of the PRI. As mentioned earlier, middle and upper classes withdrew their support for the PRD mostly in favor of the PAN, but the regression estimates in Table 4 show that the PRI has benefited significantly from this.

Concluding Remarks

Mexico City has been characterized by abrupt changes in opinion and preference and this paper has attempted to evaluate the role of media effects on such changes. The Mayor's popularity is closely linked with support for his party. Evidence shown in this paper indicates that habits and use of media information are related to changes in opinion, including approval ratings and political support. The most significant changes seem to take place among individuals who are relatively less informed—or less exposed to media information—in general. However, specialized information may be highly influential in public opinion, as those who follow city news in the newspapers were the ones who reported the most significant changes in opinion and support and those who do not follow political news reported the least significant changes. In other words, lower levels of general information are associated with more significant opinion changes, but so are higher levels of specialized news exposure. Television seems to have greater effects than newspapers, but the latter have a higher variance according to selective interests.

The paper shows how an increasing disaffection with public safety and the government's capability to deal with it may explain decreasing levels in popularity and support. Such a decline in support is bigger among those who follow city news often than among those who follow any other kind of news often.

The paper also shows important shifts in political support by social class. It suggests that the losses in support during the last months—especially among lower classes—may be crucial for the PRD's chances to keep the city in year 2000, if not for Cárdenas in his chances to look for the presidency for the third time.

The limitations of the main findings have to do with the nature of the context studied here. As argued throughout the paper, individuals differ significantly in their habits of news consumption and therefore in the levels of information and the type of information that they are exposed to. Different levels of news media exposure and selective attention to different sources of information produce different magnitudes of opinion change. As shown, on the one hand, relatively high levels of general news media exposure are associated with moderate changes in opinion, compared with lower levels of general news media exposure. On the other hand, high levels of selective attention to information about the object of opinion are associated with more abrupt changes in opinion. One should keep in mind that this is the case of increasing negative opinions about the Mexico City Mayor. The data do not offer a way to assess these relationships in the case that changes in opinion are positive. Also, as habits of media use are associated with audience characteristics, greater or smaller changes in opinion are not necessarily the product of news information, but of individual features.

Opinion data show that priming effects are potentially important in explaining opinion changes, but the paper does not offer content analysis data to test agenda setting and priming effects hypotheses. Even with this lack of information, detailed measures of media exposure and issue evaluations used in the surveys provide partial evidence of how individuals differ in their patterns of opinion change and stability, and how such changes are associated with partisan preferences.

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