

## MEASURING THE IMPACT OF POPULAR ORGANIZATION:

The Frente Democrático Campesino in Chihuahua, Mexico

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## *Introduction*

The research on social movements and popular organizing<sup>1</sup> in Latin America has not yet adequately addressed one very fundamental question: Why do social movements matter? The social movement literature has largely focused on explaining the causes of collective action rather than the impact of autonomous organizations on the political system. This focus stems from two underlying motivations. First, theories of revolution provide most of the theoretical framework for understanding popular movements; and revolutionary theory takes the importance of the outcome, a revolution, as a given. Secondly, collective action is a persistent anomaly in the rational choice research paradigm. Paradigmatic theory-building thus leads many researchers in the direction of explaining causes rather than outcomes of protest movements. Recently, however, scholars have become aware of the need to investigate the impact of social movements on the broader political system.<sup>2</sup> This paper offers a theoretical model for understanding the impact of social movements on the political system, and then provides statistical evidence of one social movement's impact on electoral competition in rural municipalities.

The objective of this paper is first, to put forth an explanation of how popular organizations can impact the political system and second, to provide a clear demonstration of this process. I will argue that when organizations of civil society confront political openings from above with an appropriate response, important changes can be made in the political system. While this study focuses on one popular movement in one state of Mexico, it establishes a basis for understanding the potential effects of the rise of strong opposition challenges to the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI). This study will test the hypothesis that popular organizations do impact the political system in a meaningful and measurable way.

The empirical evidence to support this hypothesis comes from an examination of local level politics in the rural districts of the state of Chihuahua. The data is the result of field research carried out in the summer of 1995. An analysis of electoral results throughout the state is linked with a study of the strategies of the most powerful rural social movement in the state, the Frente Democrático Campesino (Democratic Peasant Front, FDC). The accomplishments of the FDC exemplify how social movements at the grassroots can challenge authoritarianism at the local level given the appropriate political environment. The strategies employed by the FDC are evidence of the changing relationship between society and the Mexican state. These strategies also demonstrate how politically savvy leaders at the grassroots can take advantage of openings in the state to push for greater political pluralism.

Chihuahua is of particular interest for the study of Mexican political liberalization because the state is a bastion of support for the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN), the leading opposition party whose growing electoral power is transforming the face of Mexican politics. Chihuahua is also an important case for the study of rural democratization because rural politics in the northern states has been largely ignored by scholars. The North provides important comparative opportunities to the large body of literature on rural politics in southern Mexico. Chihuahua combines a relatively

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "social movement," "popular organization," and "autonomous organization" are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig, *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).

competitive political environment with a significant indigenous population and a large region of traditional farming. Furthermore, rural democratization is relevant to the study of broader political democratization because the victory of the PRI has historically depended on rural votes. Previous work on political liberalization has focused on the national level. Here instead I focus on state-level politics to facilitate the analysis of autonomous organizing and mobilizing within the context of diminishing electoral dominance of the PRI.

Because of the unique success it has had, the FDC is of particular interest among grassroots peasant movements in Mexico. Peasant organizations have been present in Chihuahua with varying degrees of strength since before the 1910 revolution. In fact Chihuahua, along with Guerrero, witnessed some of the most militant peasant organizing in the 1960s (Barry 1995, p. 154). Many organizations similar to the FDC are currently at work all over Mexico. Yet the FDC has been able to make important advances that other organizations have not been able to make. The success of the FDC can be attributed both to its flexible and pragmatic strategies, and also to a uniquely competitive political environment in Chihuahua. Jonathan Fox (1994a p. 253) notes that, "In Chihuahua the federal government made significantly more concessions to a mass movement for higher corn prices than it did for other similarly militant mass movements in states that did not face electoral competition (such as Nayarit and Chiapas)." The FDC has taken advantage of political competition in order to usher in changes in the way interests are represented and how the state responds to these interests.

The Frente Democrático Campesino (FDC) is an organization designed to defend the rights of peasants. It began in the winter of 1985-1986 as a large mobilization of peasants demanding an increase in the guaranteed prices for corn and beans. This movement was known as the Movimiento Democrático Campesino (Democratic Peasant Movement, MDC). In 1988 the movement officially became the Frente Democrático Campesino. Since its foundation, the FDC has continued to lead protests for higher guaranteed prices, to demonstrate against the corruption of the Rural Credit Bank (Banrural) and the National Agency for Agricultural and Livestock Insurance (ANAGSA), and to organize for increased PRONASOL funding. The FDC is now also developing alternative economic strategies to improve the living standard of its members. Such projects have included the establishment of cooperatives to produce cheese, sausages, and cattle for export (FDC 1993).

### *Previous Research Efforts*

The most important theoretical approaches to the study of social movements are the identity approach, the political process models, rational choice, and structural theories. All of these different approaches share a primary emphasis on explaining the causes of social movements and a general neglect of their impact. Even though the main theoretical interest is to explain the why and how of social movements, each of these approaches either implicitly or explicitly provides some conception of the potential consequences of autonomous organizing. However, very few studies have provided empirical evidence of the role of social movements in changing politics. In a recent review essay of work on social movements, Paul Haber (1996) points to the weakness of the social movement literature in not addressing the impacts of these movements.

The identity approach to the study of social movements is exemplified by the work on new social movements by Ernesto Laclau, David Slater, and Tilman Evers. These

authors argue that social movements will democratize democracy and eventually bring about a radical democracy. Laclau (1985, p. 39) contends, "Social movements call both liberalism and populism into question and point to a new experience of democracy." Evers (1985, p. 19) states, "Weak and fragmented as they are, the new social movements thus hold a key position for any emancipatory project in Latin America, they are it". While theoretically rich, the accounts of Laclau, Slater, and Evers lack empirical evidence. These writers defend the shortage of evidence with their contention that transformation is taking place at the individual level of identity with long term results, but no measurable impact in the short term.

More recent work within the identity approach is less optimistic about the role of social movements (for example, Escobar and Alvarez 1992). The political realities of the past decade have dimmed the once exuberant hopes for the role of social movements in the construction of a radical democratic utopia. As democratization has stopped short of the radical democracy envisioned by Laclau, social movements have ebbed and flowed and their general aversion to politics and intense concern with autonomy has left them with little capacity to change macro-level political realities. Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez emphasize the way social movements develop collective identities in order to change day to day realities and slowly transform political culture and authoritarian social relations. We are left to wonder what the connection is between these micro-level changes and macro-level political phenomena. Scott Mainwaring and Eduardo Viola (1984) warn, "the relationship between democratizing social life and creating a more democratic political order is unclear."

The political process models also argue that the main impact of social movements is in slowly changing political culture. Sidney Tarrow (1994) argues that while social movements can have enormously important outcomes, the structure of opportunity is ephemeral and shifting, and often opportunities are lost. Tarrow (1994, p. 186) states, "The effects of social movement cycles are indirect and to a large extent unpredictable...What remains after the enthusiasm of the cycle is a residue of reform." Tarrow finds three kinds of effects important: political socialization of the participants, reforms to political institutions, and changes in political culture. He further argues that the most significant impact of social movement cycles is to change political culture. He gives the example of the ways that attitudes about women have changed in the United States as a result of the women's movement.

Both the rational choice and structural schools of thought almost entirely disregard the question of the import of social movements. Susan Eckstein's work *Power and Popular Protest* is a good example of the structural work on social movements. The case studies in the book address the causes of popular movements, but barely address the question of consequences. Similarly the rational choice works such as Mancur Olson's classic *The Logic of Collective Action* focus on explaining the anomaly of collective action.

The one exception to the general neglect of the consequences of social movements is the work by Judith Hellman (1992) and Joe Foweraker (1990). Foweraker focuses entirely on the impact of popular movements on the political system. Both he and Hellman emphasize the dialectical relationship between social movements and the state or parties. For them autonomy does not necessarily mean no relationship with the state. Rather, it means making linkages with the political system that change the political system itself. Hellman points to the way social movements transformed the Italian Communist

Party, and sees a role for the PRD in articulating the demands of Mexican social movements. Orlando Fals Borda (1992) addresses the relationship between the micro-level changes and macro-level processes. Borda argues that growing organizational strength from the increasing duration and expansion of social movements is resulting in a shift from micro to macro-level transformation. Social movements are beginning to demand structural change. They are filling the void created by weakened political parties and are presenting a significant political alternative. He believes that the civic, pacific nature, the commitment to decentralization, and the pluralistic tolerance of the new social movements will lead to the creation of a new type of democracy that is both direct and participatory. The new social movements, he optimistically claims, are “recreating politics.”

The work on democratization also provides some clues about the potential of social movements. Rueshemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) identify civil society as the key link between capitalist development and emerging democracy. According to their argument, civil society creates a basis for the political organization of subordinate classes and counter-balances the power of the state. Robert Putnam (1993) also stresses the importance of civic associations for the development of social capital and good governance. The process oriented models of the transition to democracy argue that social movements helped to bring about the initial liberalization of authoritarian regimes, but then once political parties were legalized, the social movements demobilized (O’Donnell et al. 1986). This points to a fundamental tension between social movements and political parties as vehicles of interest representation. Philip Oxhorn (1995) identifies this tension in his analysis of shantytown dwellers in Santiago, Chile. In contrast, Judith Hellman (1992) argues that popular organizations must form relationships with parties in order to change the political system.

In sum, the literature on social movements provides a theoretical rationale and some empirical evidence of how social movements can change micro-level attitudes. As yet, however, there has not been sufficient explanation of how the micro-level changes effect macro-level politics. This paper will address the question of how micro-changes can impact macro-level politics. I will look specifically at the example of voting behavior to determine whether the change in political culture that theoretically takes place from popular organizing ever translates into significantly different voting behavior.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework for this study builds on Peter Evans work on state-society synergy (Evans 1996) and Jonathan Fox’s interactive theory of state-society relations (Fox 1992a). Peter Evans’ notion of state-society synergy is the positive outcome of development efforts undertaken jointly by governments and organized civil society. Fox’s interactive approach, what he calls the “sandwich strategy,” explains the enactment of effective anti-poverty policies in Oaxaca, Mexico when grassroots pressure was met by reformers inside the state. Reform, therefore, cannot be explained solely in terms of either the state or society, but must be understood as a dynamic between the two. I will use this framework of state-society relations to explain the impact of social movement strategies on elections in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

In this paper, I will argue that the impact of social movements must be understood in terms of their relationship with the state. We can best understand the link between the micro-level outcomes noted by Escobar and Alvarez (1992) and macro-level changes

which are the true concern of political scientists through an analysis of organizations' interactions with the state. Societal actors' conceptions of their autonomy are essentially their understanding of how they relate to the state. For this reason, to understand the transformation from micro to macro-level outcomes requires an examination of the strategies and autonomy of an organization. Those movements that maintain a strict sense of autonomy will have very little impact on macro-level outcomes. Those organizations that can sustain a working relationship with the government through a flexible or pragmatic sense of autonomy can take advantage of openings in the state by cooperating with state reformers to influence macro-level political processes.

The impact of social movements can best be understood through their interaction with elite reformers. Reform takes place when pressure from below reinforces an opening from above.<sup>3</sup> This basic idea is used here to explain how the interaction between social movements and the state has created space for more competitive elections in the rural districts of the state of Chihuahua. While the precise mechanisms of the process outlined here are specific to Mexico and Chihuahua, the general framework of how social movements impact political processes through interactions with the state may be extended into many different contexts.

### *Openings From Above*

There are three sets of national policies that have had a major recent impact on state-society relations in Chihuahua. These policies are the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), ejido reform, and electoral reform. These openings from above along with many other neoliberal reforms that have been implemented to modernize the Mexican countryside, the various attempts at electoral reform, and most importantly, de la Madrid's temporary decision in 1983 to accept all opposition victories at the local level, have allowed for the liberalization of electoral politics in rural Chihuahua.

The National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) is a poverty alleviation program enacted by former Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. PRONASOL encouraged local organizations to apply directly to the federal government for assistance and often bypassed local elites and traditional clientelist forms of assistance distribution. For the purposes of this analysis, the Solidarity program represents an opening from above. Some authors have characterized PRONASOL as an attempt to rebuild the corporatist links of the PRI and maintain the stability of the PRI's authoritarianism (Dresser 1994). However, my argument follows a logic similar to that articulated by Paul Haber. Haber argues, "It is theoretically possible for PRONASOL to enhance President Salinas's legitimacy while contributing to democratization via alternative routes" (Haber 1994, p. 278). Attempts at co-optation from above can result in state-society synergy if the grassroots employs appropriate strategies. Haber emphasizes the long-term versus short-term outcomes of PRONASOL. My analysis, along with that of Fox, suggests that impacts also differ in terms of local politics and national politics. While PRONASOL may have strengthened corporatist links to the president, it may have simultaneously weakened the power of local caciques.

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<sup>3</sup>Fox uses this framework to explain the implementation of a redistributive food policy in *The Politics of Food in Mexico* and also to explain the shift from clientelism to citizenship in "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico" in *World Politics* 46 (January 1994).

In some cases the political opening afforded by PRONASOL has been used by popular organizations primarily to gain material benefits for their constituencies.<sup>4</sup> In other cases, autonomous organizations have also used PRONASOL money to increase their membership and organizational capacity and therefore increase their potential long-run capacity to challenge authoritarian practices. As Haber points out, even those groups which have traded political acquiescence for PRONASOL funds may still use the money to strengthen their own organization and thus increase organization among the poor. In many instances, PRONASOL funds were distributed by independent organizations that bypassed traditional forms of cacique dominated distribution. Although some political liberalization took place even when popular organizations were primarily concerned with material benefits, when social movements concerned with democratic transformation were able to capture the political resources made available through PRONASOL, even deeper processes of political liberalization began to take hold.

The second set of policies of importance for understanding the openings from above and the breakdown of authoritarian corporate structures are the changes to Article 27 of the Constitution. Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution established state ownership of communally farmed lands known as *ejidos*. The 1991 changes to Article 27 called for the privatization of the ejidos by giving title to those with usufruct rights to the land.<sup>5</sup> As the PROCEDE<sup>6</sup> saying goes, “*El título en mano es mejor que la palabra volando*” (A title in hand is better than a flying word). Without title to their land, the ejidatarios had much less opportunity for autonomous organizing. Paula Sabloff’s anthropological study of ejido communities and caciquismo describes how the political structure of ejido communities encourages the autocratic rule of caciques.<sup>7</sup> The ejidal leadership are often political bosses for the PRI and the Confederación Nacional Campesino (National Peasant Confederation, CNC).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, most ejidos vote together, making punishment for votes against the PRI very easy. With no title to the land, rebellious ejidatarios had no security in their right to use the land. As the titling has progressed, the opportunities for ejidatarios to organize autonomously and vote their conscience have increased. In short, the ejido reform has broken the power of PRI’s ejidal leaders to control elections and threaten ejidatarios by denying usufruct rights to their land.

The long series of electoral reforms at the federal level have also been important political openings that have very slowly opened the way for more competitive elections. López Portillo’s 1977 reform, known for “opening the left,” was perhaps the most important. López Portillo enacted the electoral reform in an attempt to establish legitimacy after his unopposed presidential candidacy. The Electoral Law of 1977 legalized the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) and allowed opposition parties to qualify for participation with only 1.5 percent of the national vote, rather than the previous 2.5 percent. This reform also established public financing for campaigns and increased the Federal Chamber of Deputies by 100 seats reserved for opposition parties. Finally, this

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<sup>4</sup>The Comité de Defensa Popular (CDP), a urban popular movement in Durango and Chihuahua, may be a good example of this. See Paul Haber 1994.

<sup>5</sup> The changes to Article 27 were announced by President Salinas on November 7, 1991.

<sup>6</sup>PROCEDE is the program for certification of ejido rights and titling of urban plots.

<sup>7</sup>See Paula Sabloff 1981. Michael J. Ballard (1996) also makes a similar argument.

<sup>8</sup> The CNC is an arm of the corporate structure of the Mexican government that represents the peasants.

reform also included an anti-fraud provision that allowed all official parties to have representatives at polling places (Cornelius 1987).

In 1983 a municipal reform was passed that instituted proportional representation in all city councils. The 1986 reform increased the Federal Chamber of Deputies by 100 more seats to be elected by proportional representation. The reforms of 1989 established the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and created the Federal Electoral Tribunal (Núñez Jiménez 1993). The 1993 electoral reform opened the Senate to include minority party representation, eliminated self-approval of elections (whereby the presumably elected congressman approves his own election), instituted campaign spending limits and independent verification of voter lists, and permitted international election observers (Livas 1994).

More important than the often cosmetic changes to the electoral code was de la Madrid's temporary decision to allow all municipal opposition victors to take office in 1983. The PAN's first major victory in Chihuahua took place in 1983 when the party gained seven municipalities. The Partido Socialista Unificado de Mexico (Unified Socialist Party, PSUM) and the Partido Socialista de Trabajadores (Socialist Workers' Party, PST) also each won a municipality in these elections (Cornelius 1987, p. 22). This brief political opening by de la Madrid provided the opposition in Chihuahua a base from which to apply real pressure for political reform.

The state electoral reform of 1994 in Chihuahua, undertaken by the PAN dominated state government, has also been very important in reducing fraud in local elections. This reform put the elections under the control of a multiparty commission rather than under the control of the state government. Most people interviewed for this study, including supporters of the PRI and the PAN, and other opposition leaders agree that the 1995 state elections were the first clean elections in Chihuahua's history. These reforms have created legal mechanisms through which social movements can press for change.<sup>9</sup>

### *Pressure from Below*

The Frente Democrático Campesino (FDC) in Chihuahua represents a flexible and pragmatic sense of autonomy. Through openings in the state, the FDC was able to initiate a beneficial relationship with the government but also maintain its autonomy. It is largely through a strategy of flexible and pragmatic autonomy that includes sustained interaction with the state (particularly reformers within the state) that local level reform is taking place. The strategies of the FDC have been more successful than those of similar organizations in other parts of the country because of the relatively competitive political environment in Chihuahua.

The FDC provides an ideal demonstration of how the strategies of social movements can take advantage of openings within the state not only to reap more material benefits for their members, but also to challenge authoritarian practices in local government. The strategies of the FDC are marked by their relationship with opposition parties and their linkages to other groups, their electoral strategy, and their use of

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<sup>9</sup> These reforms are not solely openings from above since the pressure for earlier reforms presumably took place through the same dialectic interplay that I am attempting to explain for this later period. But, for ease in explication, I will consider them exogenous.



PRONASOL and PROCAMPO<sup>10</sup> resources. The FDC differs from some popular movements whose primary goal is to reap material benefits for their members. The stated goal of the FDC is to democratize the countryside. Demanding dignity for peasants and a more equitable distribution of resources is of central importance.<sup>11</sup> The FDC combines struggle for socioeconomic needs with struggle for political rights.

The FDC has taken advantage of the competitive environment in Chihuahua and has also benefited from linkages with powerful political actors, especially the PAN. The first important linkage between the FDC and the PAN took place during the electoral struggles of 1986. The MDC (as the FDC was formerly known), the PAN, the PSUM, the Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores (Mexican Workers Party, PMT), along with various other social movements, formed the Movimiento Democrático Electoral (Democratic Electoral Movement, MDE). The Comité de Defensa Popular (Popular Defense Committee, CDP) – an urban social movement in Chihuahua – was conspicuously absent from this struggle against electoral fraud (Quintana Silveyra 1991, pp.92-94). Unlike the CDP, which took a strong stand against the PAN leadership at the municipal level and then later at the state level,<sup>12</sup> the FDC has been able to maintain a working relationship with the PAN and also work for concessions from the PRI. In addition to its collaboration with the PAN, the FDC also maintains a strong connection with the Partido de la Revolución Democrático (Party of the Democratic Revolution, PRD).

The FDC has also made contacts with international NGOs. Because of its proximity to the border and the similar problems faced by agricultural workers on both sides of the border, the FDC has been able to make linkages with farm worker movements in the United States. The FDC is the only non-U.S. member of the Rural Coalition, an alliance of organizations working to promote just and sustainable rural community development. The FDC also maintains strong ties with the Catholic Church. The Canadian Catholic Committee for Development and Peace, the French Catholic Committee Against Hunger and for Development, and a German Catholic Organization called Misereor all support the FDC financially.

In addition to the important linkages made by the FDC, the group has taken a pragmatic stance on PRONASOL. The decision to accept Solidarity money has caused splits between many popular organizations and the PRD. Most PRD aligned organizations refused PRONASOL money because they feared co-optation. PRD allied social movements that did accept Solidarity money often broke with the PRD.<sup>13</sup> The FDC, in contrast, has embraced the resources of PRONASOL and put the money to good use in the communities serviced by the FDC, while still remaining loosely affiliated with the PRD. The FDC encourages members to apply for solidarity money and helps construct solidarity committees and projects that are likely to receive funding. The FDC has also received money directly from PRONASOL to distribute to its members. The FDC has led repeated protests to increase PRONASOL grants. After the 1987 March for Campesino

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<sup>10</sup> PROCAMPO (the Program of Direct Support Payments to the Countryside) is a system of agricultural subsidies initiated by the Salinas regime to substitute direct farmer subsidies for guaranteed commodity prices. See Barry 1995, pp. 106-108.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with author, Chihuahua City, June 1995.

<sup>12</sup>For more on the CDP-PAN conflict, see Victor M. Quintana Silveyra, "La Protesta Social en Chihuahua en los Ochentas" in *Movimientos Populares en Chihuahua*, Rubén Lau and Victor M. Quintana Silveyra, eds., (Juárez: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1991), pp. 82-83.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the CDP in Durango. See Haber, 1994.

Dignity, the government agreed to increase PRONASOL subsidies to corn and bean producers by 8 trillion old pesos (equivalent to about US\$ 2.6 billion). In 1992, FDC affiliates received one fourth of all PRONASOL money distributed in the state of Chihuahua (FDC 1993). In 1994 they received 332 million pesos (about US\$110,000) in loans from PRONASOL for their revolving fund for productive projects (FDC 1995b, p. 22).<sup>14</sup>

The FDC has used the money of the PRI to strengthen its own organizational ability and serve its members. While the FDC gladly takes PRONASOL money, it also actively denounces the politically manipulative nature of the PRI's clientelistic programs. The report from the Second Congress of the FDC makes the proposal that "We should forget completely the paternalism of the government and that which arrives through it (PROCAMPO and PRONASOL) considering it as extra earnings. That is, try to resolve our own problems because the government is not responding to our situation." (FDC 1995b, p. 23) The experience of the FDC with PRONASOL stands in sharp contrast with that of the CDP. While the CDP accepted PRONASOL money in exchange for tacit approval of the Salinas administration, the FDC has been able to receive PRONASOL money without stifling its vocal criticism of the PRI or important policies of the Salinas administration such as NAFTA and ejido reform.

The electoral strategy of the FDC also follows the flexible and pragmatic approach that characterizes their use of PRONASOL funds. The FDC pledges allegiance to no single party. The official policy of the FDC states, "The FDC should not ally itself with any political party in order to maintain its pluralism and independence." (FDC 1995b, p. 33). While members are encouraged to seek political office, they must resign any position held in the FDC before entering an election. By remaining autonomous from all parties, the FDC is in a position to bargain with all parties and put the needs of the members before the interests of a party. Thus, they have positioned themselves to become a conduit for Solidarity and PROCAMPO funds, which allows them to use money from the state to deliver goods to their constituents; thereby strengthening the FDC at the expense of the PRI. It was through openings in the state, such as Salinas's PRONASOL program that bypassed local elites, that the FDC was able to gain control over these resources and further strengthen its organization.

Most of the leadership of the FDC supports the PRD, yet they have chosen not to join with the PRD peasant organization. If they were strongly aligned with the PRD, they would not be well positioned to cash in on PRONASOL money, and the movement's interests would come second to the electoral interests of the party. Victor Quintana, a former leader of the FDC who continues to be a very important figure in the organization, was elected as a Federal Deputy for the PRD in the 1994 elections. Still, the FDC vehemently affirms its autonomy from the PRD. The leadership imposes no political ideology on the members. Party activists have run for local offices with many different parties including the PRI and the PAN. The choice of which party to run with is usually a very pragmatic decision. Often if the PRI leaders think an FDC member is the only candidate capable of winning an election, the PRI will support the campaign in order to keep the municipality formally under the PRI's control. The PAN will often do the same. If the PRI and PAN already have candidates, an FDC member may pick another party. For example, in the 1995 municipal elections, an FDC member ran for municipal president

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with author, Chihuahua City, July 1995.

of General Trias (now known as Santa Isabel) with the Green Ecologist Party (PVE). This FDC member chose to run with the PVE not because of any ideological affinity with the party, but because the party had no presence in the area so he could run the campaign as he pleased without being burdened by the party's reputation.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of the state level electoral reform, electoral competition in Chihuahua has liberalized substantially. Members of the FDC running for office with opposition parties have powerful allies in the PAN who also demand fair elections and respect for the vote. Social movements in Chihuahua are well poised to make gains through electoral participation. The left saw the electoral success of the PAN and realized that there was something to be gained from electoral participation. The PAN has played an important role in opening up electoral competition in Chihuahua because the party demanded respect for the vote. Now social movements can maneuver in the competitive environment created by the PRI-PAN conflict. The success of the PAN has inspired social movements to join electoral competition in order to defeat both the PRI and the PAN.

The FDC has been successful on many fronts. They have installed their activists in elected government positions, most notably Victor Quintana, who was elected a Federal Deputy in the 1994 elections. They have gained control over government money for agricultural producers in subsidies and PRONASOL grants. After the 1986 protests the government raised the guaranteed price of corn and beans by 30 percent in Chihuahua. They have managed to oust a number of corrupt officials from the Banrural and ANAGSA. They increased the amount of land qualified for PROCAMPO subsidies from 100,000 hectares to 160,000 hectares. The FDC now has over 5000 members state wide. While all these material successes are certainly of huge importance, an abundance of evidence already exists in the literature demonstrating that popular movements can effectively pressure the state for material concessions. The question of whether social movements impact broader political processes such as democratization still remains unanswered.

### *Measuring the Impact*

Because of its concern with abstract concepts such as identity, citizenship, clientelism and political culture, the literature on social movements has not lent itself to systematic empirical analysis. The lack of systematic empirical evidence has made it very difficult to compare across cases or nations. Therefore, the research has been characterized by somewhat disjointed case studies rather than theoretical models to explain the role of social movements. This study attempts to overcome this weakness by focusing on electoral patterns instead of the more abstract potential consequences of popular movements.

To assess the impact of autonomous organizing on electoral patterns, this section uses a simple regression model to analyze the difference in electoral outcomes from one municipality to another in the state of Chihuahua with respect to both openings from above and pressure from below. The objective of this analysis is to identify the variables that are significant in determining electoral outcomes, and specifically to determine the relevance of autonomous organizing. The unit of analysis is the municipality. A cross-sectional geographic approach comparing municipalities is used because there simply is not enough accurate data available for a time series analysis.

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<sup>15</sup>Interview with author, Chihuahua City, June, 1995.

The dependent variable is the percentage of the vote won by the PRI in each municipality for the 1991 and 1994 Federal Senate elections. Historically the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the ruling party in Mexico since 1929, has dominated elections. Through fraud, clientelist coercion, and general hegemonic influence over the political discourse, the PRI has historically managed to win 80 to 90 percent of the vote, often winning 99 percent of the vote in rural districts. In the context of this electoral history, it is reasonable to measure electoral competition as a decline in the percentage of the vote officially won by the PRI.<sup>16</sup> A decline in the PRI vote indicates that either fraud has been reduced or there has been sufficient liberalization within the government to allow an opposition party to launch a credible campaign. The underlying assumption of this argument is that in a competitive political environment, opposition parties are able to register a significant percent of the vote. The use of this measurement follows the basic logic of Jorge Dominguez and James McCann's (1995) two step model of voting behavior. According to this model, the voter first decides to vote against the PRI, then votes strategically in order to maximize the chance that a party other than the PRI wins. For this reason, voting behavior does not follow the typical pattern of ideological affinity; the strength of the PAN in Chihuahua may not necessarily reflect a right wing tendency of the electorate as much as it reflects the strategic voting of those who are against the PRI.<sup>17</sup>

The independent variables utilized in the analysis are the percentage of the population of each municipality living on an ejido, the per capita federal and state participation in the municipal budget, the percentage of the population with running water, the percentage of the population living in a town with a population greater than 5000, a dummy for the presence of the FDC, and dummies for four of the five regions in the state. These variables are used to measure corporatist control, economic well-being, urbanization and autonomous organizing. The regional dummies are included to control for all other factors that differentiate the major regions.

The literature suggests that corporatist control is important in determining election results. Therefore, the theoretical expectation is that the level of corporatist control will have a positive relationship with the vote for the PRI. Two separate measures are used to tap different aspects of corporatism. The first measure of corporatism is intended to represent the level of financial dependency a municipality has on the state and national government. The per capita state and federal participation in total local government income is used as a measure of financial dependence (INEGI 1992, p. 293).<sup>18</sup> The second is meant to tap the organizational capacity of the PRI. For this variable, the percent of the population of each municipality that lives on an ejido is used (INEGI 1990, p. 5). The percent of the population living on an ejido demonstrates the level of state control in a given area because ejidos are traditionally controlled by the PRI's party machinery.<sup>19</sup> As I

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<sup>16</sup>Null votes are not counted when determining the vote percentages, therefore the proportion of the vote for the PRI equals one minus the vote for the opposition.

<sup>17</sup> The data for the election results were provided by the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) in Chihuahua City.

<sup>18</sup> A more appropriate variable might be the per capita public investment. Unfortunately, the government only reported the public investment for twenty-five of the sixty-seven municipalities. However, the state and federal participation statistic correlates .98 with the available data on public investment. Thus, the substitution of the participation of federal and state money for public investment seems to be justified.

<sup>19</sup>It may seem as if the membership in corporatist organizations such as the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) and the CNC would be preferable,

have argued above, the reforms to Article 27 have weakened the PRI's control over the countryside.

As the only available data on per capita income by municipality is incomplete and unreliable, economic well-being is measured by the percentage of the population living in a building with indoor running water. A large portion of the state's population relies on income earned in dollars either from working across the border or from remittances sent from relatives in the United States. Therefore, income measured in pesos can vary significantly with unstable currencies. The percentage of the population with indoor plumbing more accurately captures the average long-term standard of living in the municipality.<sup>20</sup> The measure for urbanization is the percentage of the population in each municipality that lives in a city with a population of more than 5000.

To capture the impact of popular organizations upon the democratization process, the analysis also includes a dummy variable for whether the FDC has significant presence in the municipality. The data for this variable come from FDC membership records (FDC 1995b). The dummy variable is coded 1 for every municipality in which FDC members live and are active. The dummy variable is coded 0 for all other municipalities. Not only is the FDC the only popular movement with an electoral strategy that has state wide presence, but the CDP and other workers movements and urban movements are only active in the large cities. Because this study is based on aggregate data of geographic areas rather than individual level data, Chihuahua City and Ciudad Juárez (which are large urban areas that have a significantly higher presence of autonomous organizing than most of the municipalities) will have only a small impact on the model. Each municipality carries the same weight regardless of its population.

There are a few organizations such as the Commission in Solidarity and Defense of Human Rights (COSYDDHAC), Gawichi Raramuri, and Raramuri Jiwerika which promote indigenous culture and human rights; but none of them actively promotes an electoral strategy, and their democratizing impact is presumably in arenas other than electoral competition. Regional peasant associations such as the Union for the Progress of the Peasants of the Laguna (UPCALA) and the Alianza Campesina del Noroeste (The Northwest Peasant Alliance) are included in the dummy variable because they are also considered members of the FDC.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to these indicators, dummy variables for four of the five main regions of the state are included. The economic base and resources vary greatly from one region to another, as well as the ethnicity and history of the peoples who live there. Including the

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but these organizations claim every worker or peasant as members, whether they have any connection to the organization or not. Such a measurement, therefore, is meaningless.

<sup>20</sup> Javier Delgadillo Macías and Felipe Torres Torres conducted a study of social well-being in the state of Chihuahua in demonstration of their proposed methodology for measuring social well-being. (Javier Delgadillo Macías and Felipe Torres Torres, "Connotación del Bienestar Social en México. Una Propuesta Metodología para su Medición Regional," *Problemas del Desarrollo*, 21(82): 101-126. ) They assigned a number of one to five for each municipality based on the type of employment, income, standard of living, nutrition, health care, and education. Delgadillo and Torres' measurement correlates .83 with the statistic of running water in the house used in this regression. This correlation is much better than those of more standard measures of income such as per capita electricity consumption. The running water statistic is preferable to Delgadillo's and Torres' measure because it has much greater variance.

<sup>21</sup> Ideally, a measurement for the amount of PRONASOL money allotted to each municipality would also be included. Unfortunately, according to the director of SEDESOL in Chihuahua, that information is strictly confidential.

dummy variables for the regions controls for all of these unmeasurable regional differences and demonstrates whether any particular region has significantly different voting behavior from the others. The regional divisions used are those defined by the Subsecretaría de Cultura (1988). The regions include the border region, the fruit and timber producing region, the central region, the ranching region, and the mining region.

The model used for the regression is:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Percent vote for the PRI} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Percent of the population living on ejidos}) \\ & + \beta_2 (\text{Per capita federal and state participation in local budget}) \\ & + \beta_3 (\text{Economic well-being}) + \beta_4 (\text{Urbanization}) + \beta_5 (\text{FDC presence}) \\ & + \beta_6 (\text{Mining Region}) + \beta_7 (\text{Border Region}) + \beta_8 (\text{Central Region}) + \\ & \beta_9 (\text{Fruit and Wood Producing Region})^{22} \end{aligned}$$

[Table 1]

See Table 1 for regression results. Both regressions show very high levels of overall significance with F-tests significant with 99.999 percent confidence. The adjusted R-squared values show that the model explains 64 percent of the variance for the 1991 elections and 58 percent of the variance for the 1994 elections. All of the signs are as expected. However, for the 1991 elections, only the coefficients for the ejido variable, urbanization, the fruit and wood region, and FDC presence are significant. For the 1994 elections, the fruit and wood region remains significant as does the FDC dummy, but the ejido variable is no longer significant. The mining region and border region both flip signs and become significant.

The most relevant result is that the presence of the autonomous peasant organization, the FDC, has a significant negative impact on the vote for the PRI in both years. This evidence supports the general proposition of this paper that autonomous organizations can increase the competitiveness of elections. The lower vote for the PRI in districts with an FDC presence points to both increased opposition activities as well as a lower capacity for the PRI to carry out fraud where there is a politically active population.

Also of interest is the significant ejido variable in the 1991 elections that not only loses significance but also decreases in magnitude from 47.83 to 13.12. In 1991 the ejido variable is significant at the .01 level. In 1994 it is not even significant with ninety percent confidence. In November of 1991 (after the elections of that year) President Salinas announced the changes to Article 27 of the Constitution. These changes granted title to land that had previously been owned by the state to the ejidatarios who worked the land. In 1991, municipalities with a high percent of ejidatarios were much more likely to vote for the PRI. After the ejido reform had been under way for two years, municipalities with a high concentration of population living on an ejido no longer voted differently from other municipalities. This change supports the hypothesis of this paper that ejido reform was an important opening from above that weakened the corporatist ties of the PRI to ejidatarios.

The loss of significance of the urbanization coefficient also demonstrates that whereas in 1991 rural municipalities were more likely to vote PRI than urban areas, in 1994 there was no significant difference in votes for the PRI between urban municipalities

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<sup>22</sup>All appropriate diagnostics have been done and the data demonstrate no obvious problems.

and rural municipalities. These findings suggest that electoral competition is slowly making its way to rural areas as well as urban areas. The data also demonstrate that regional differences were more important in 1994 than in 1991.

While these results refer to two recent elections in a single Mexican state, they offer strong evidence in favor of the proposition that autonomous organizing can impact macro-level political processes such as elections. The variable for FDC presence is highly significant in both of the regressions, and it is one of only two variables that is significant in both elections. This suggests that popular movements that employ pragmatic and interactive strategies with state reformers can have a measurable impact on macro-level politics.

### *Conclusion*

The findings of this study demonstrate that social movements can have a measurable impact on broad political phenomena. The openings in the Mexican government of ejido reform, PRONASOL and electoral reform and the competitive political environment of Chihuahua, combined with the flexible and pragmatic strategies of the FDC, have led to important changes in electoral patterns in the rural municipalities of Chihuahua.

PRONASOL may revitalize the corporatism of the federal government by going straight to the people from the President. But it has also empowered new groups at the local level because it bypasses local elites. Local power bosses are losing power to solidarity committees. Thus, local clientelistic relationships are being destroyed even if federal corporatist bonds are strengthened. These trends have allowed for continuing support of the PRI at the federal level, but not at the local level. It remains to be seen whether federal corporatism is sustainable without the base of local caciques to deliver the vote. It may be that the PRI has sacrificed its future for survival in the short term. By disenfranchising local caciques, the PRI has lost a vital link in its corporatist structure. The foundation is falling apart, which in time may cause the entire corporatist building to crumble. This study has illuminated the role social movements have played in bringing meaningful electoral competition to Mexico.

The social movement literature has been marked by a paucity of empirical evidence regarding the impact of social movements. This paper has made use of Fox's interactive model of state-society relations to explain how social movements can have important consequences on macro-level politics. This study has also provided the example of the Frente Democrático Campesino in Chihuahua, Mexico to demonstrate how popular movements impact one facet of democratization – electoral competition.

**Table 1. Effects of Corporatism, Economic Well-being, Urbanization, FDC Presence and Regional Dummies on Municipal Electoral Outcomes: Ordinary Least Squares Estimates**

Independent Variables	Percentage Vote for the PRI 1991	Percentage Vote for the PRI 1994
Percent of population living on ejidos	47.83* (18.54)	13.12 (150.80)
Per capita federal and state participation	.034 (0.02)	.025 (0.02)
Percent of population with running water	-5.74 (8.57)	-8.71 (6.97)
Urbanization	-12.16** (4.39)	-5.80 (3.58)
FDC Presence	-7.29* (3.42)	-5.61* (2.79)
Mining Region	-1.19 (0.39)	8.62** (2.96)
Border Region	1.96 (3.21)	-6.11* (2.63)
Central Region	6.67 (3.64)	5.76 (2.97)
Fruit and Wood Region	10.42* (4.01)	6.65* (3.26)
Constant	66.41*** (6.03)	68.84*** (4.92)
Adjusted R-Squared	.64	.58
F-Ratio	14.22	10.93
N	67	67

*Note:* Unstandardized estimates; standard errors in parentheses.

\*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001



## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ANAGSA	Aseguradora Nacional de Agricultura y Ganadería/National Agency for Agriculture and Livestock Insurance
CDP	Comité de Defensa Popular/Committee for Popular Defense
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina/National Peasants' Confederation
COCEI	Coalición de Obreros, Campesinos y Estudiantes del Istmo/Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students of the Isthmus
COSYDDHAC	Comisión en Solidaridad y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, A.C./Commission in Solidarity and Defense of Human Rights
FDC	Frente Democrático Campesino/Democratic Peasant Front
IFE	Instituto Federal Electoral/Federal Electoral Institute
MDC	Movimiento Democrático Campesino/Democratic Peasant Movement
MDE	Movimiento Democrático Electoral/Democratic Electoral Movement
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional/National Action Party
PCM	Partido Comunista Mexicano/Mexican Communist Party
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática/Party of the Democratic Revolution
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional/Institutional Revolutionary Party
PROCEDE	Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Solares Urbanos/Program for the Certification of Ejidal Rights and Urban Plots
PRONASOL	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad/National Solidarity Program
PST	Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores/Socialist Workers' Party
PSUM	Partido Socialista Unificado de México/Unified Socialist Party of Mexico
PVE	Partido Verde Ecologista/Ecological Green Party
SEDESOL	Secretaría de Desarrollo Social/Secretary for Social Development
TLC/NAFTA	Tratado de Libre Comercio/North American Free Trade Agreement
UNORCA	Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas/National Union of Regional Peasant Organizations
UPCALA	Unión para el Progreso de los Campesinos de la Laguna/Union for the Progress of the Peasants of the Lagoon.

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